

## **Burundi: A Country In Search Of Its History**

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<b>Foreword: “Commemorating to assume the past and build the future (2012-2022)”</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>“From one commemoration to another: Burundi in search of its history”</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. An Uncertain History of Settlement</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. A Belated and Brutal Colonial Integration</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1. <i>A landlocked kingdom</i>	6
2.2. <i>The German settlement (1885-1916)</i>	8
<b>3. The Belgian Colonial Administration</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1. <i>Administrative reorganization</i>	11
3.2. <i>Church’s Control of Access to Dominant Positions</i>	12
<b>4. Disenchanted Independence (1959-1965)</b>	<b>14</b>
4.1. <i>The deleterious impact of Rwanda’s “Social Revolution” on Burundi</i>	15
4.2. <i>A powerless monarch in the face of political, clan and ethnic divisions</i>	16
<b>5. A Republican Dynasty at the Pace of Military Coups (1966-1993)</b>	<b>17</b>
5.1. <i>The First Republic of Captain Michel Micombero (1966-1976)</i>	17
5.2. <i>The Second Republic of Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Baptiste Bagaza (1976-1987)</i>	19
5.3. <i>The Third Republic of Major Pierre Buyoya (1987-1993)</i>	22
<b>6. Civil War in the Wake of Military Coups (1993-1996)</b>	<b>24</b>
6.1. <i>The bad losers</i>	24
6.2. <i>Two Powerless Presidents in the face of a “Creeping putsch” (1994-1996)</i>	25
6.3. <i>The Heavy Human Toll of the “Democratic Transition”</i>	26
<b>7. From Total War to the Return of Peace (1996-2005)</b>	<b>26</b>
7.1. <i>The Forced Opening of a Negotiation Process (1997-2002)</i>	27
7.2. <i>The formation of a National Unity Government (2002-2005)</i>	28
7.3. <i>The Return of Peace during the First Term of the CNDD-FDD (2005-2010)</i>	29

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<b>8. The Nkurunziza Era and the Consecration of the CNDD-FDD as the new Party-State (2010-2020)</b>	<b>30</b>
8.1 <i>Becoming "the first democracy in the world to receive a mandate by almost all voters" (2010-2015)</i>	30
8.2. <i>The earthquake of Pierre Nkurunziza's third term and the generational divide</i>	32
8.3. <i>Pierre Nkurunziza's last term – one too many (2015-2020)</i>	34
<b>9. Structural Constraints and Democratic Aspirations</b>	<b>37</b>
9.1. <i>The "people of the hills" facing their elites</i>	38
9.2 <i>Unavoidable Requirements</i>	40
<b>10. Overcoming “Divisions Inherited from the Past”</b>	<b>41</b>
10.1 <i>A buried debate recently revived</i>	42
10.2. <i>Commemorations that engage the future</i>	44
<b>Downloadable add-ons</b>	<b>45</b>
1. <i>Chronology</i>	45
2. <i>Main acronyms</i>	45
3. <i>Selected Bibliography</i>	45
4. <i>Main documentary sources</i>	45
<b>Thanks</b>	<b>45</b>



## **Foreword: “Commemorating to assume the past and build the future (2012-2022)”<sup>2</sup>**

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Burundi's independence in 2012, the "Conferences for Memory" project led by academics and various personalities organized in May-June a cycle of broadcasts on the history of Burundi.<sup>3</sup> The objective was a question of analyzing in a demanding, distanced and plural way the long-term dynamics that maintained it. Characterized by a series of painful events, positive and instructive traits for the future emerged. These teachings shed light on what Burundi was like at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and were placed at the heart of each conference.

Indeed, independence has gradually led to the establishment of authoritarian powers throughout the region, masking the instability of national political frameworks. The wear and tear of these cadres in the face of new democratic aspirations led in the 1990s to conflicts of extreme violence affecting all the riparian countries. Through these trials, Burundi then gradually cleared a way out of the crisis and rebuilt a shared political framework. These achievements were the result of an original negotiation process, both laborious and fruitful, which had to be extended and enriched in view of the issues still outstanding.

With this in mind, it was considered wise to return to the history of Burundi by inviting eminent actors, who had themselves contributed to write this history, to discuss these major issues during conferences broadcast in synergy on all media partners.<sup>4</sup> An exceptional panel was proposed characterized by the pluralism of the speakers, their stature and their spirit of dialogue. On each theme addressed<sup>5</sup>, it was not for these speakers to tell the story and take stock of their action, but to deliver their analyses on the long-term dynamics at work in Burundi.

Beyond the questions, four objectives underpinned this program:

- ° Promote an objective work of memory offering "materials" for analysis and not pre-constructed historiographies, the quality of which would be guaranteed in particular by the academic requirements of the promoters and the representativeness of the speakers. Propose through these testimonies ethical and methodological benchmarks on the conditions of a work of authentic truth;
- ° Assume the memory of the country's history, not only in a contrition approach, but in a long-term perspective;
- ° Propose benchmarks on initiatives that through crises have opened paths to dialogue, peace and democracy;
- ° Enhance the voice of actors and witnesses framed by professional rigor, cooperation with the media and pluralism.

These objectives were achieved beyond all expectations. As soon as the first debate on the integration of the Armed Forces ended, many requests poured in to ask that it be extended on many of the points raised. The totally new format, the richness and quality of the exchanges were acclaimed. A second debate was scheduled. Over the course of the conferences, as the trips within the country demonstrated shortly after, the word was freed everywhere and, on the hills, the peasants greeted by displaying their transistors. The desire to exchange was contagious even within the bodies of the State who wanted to take advantage of these openings to express themselves on delicate and/or hidden subjects. Panel discussions, focus groups, training sessions, publications, ... multiplied at the request of many institutions and organizations, particularly within NGOs, political parties, ... Among them, the armed forces were

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Iwacu* Magazine, n°4, mars 2012.

<sup>3</sup> The project was supported and developed in collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Human Security Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. In addition, these directorates supported several other programs in Burundi, including radio programs on transitional justice issues hosted by *La Benevolencija* Grands Lacs.

<sup>4</sup> RNTB (Radio and Television); Renaissance Group (Radio and Television); Radio Bonesha, Radio Isanganiro, Radio Rema FM, Radio RPA; the newspapers *Iwacu* and *Le Renouveau*.

<sup>5</sup> [An army that is the guardian of institutions; Pluralism throughout Burundian history; Churches and powers: ambivalent relationships; Diaspora Perspectives: Coming, Leaving and Returning; Building lasting peace.](#)



then the most proactive and motivated. Debates that had been unthinkable until then took place before, during and especially after the inaugural conferences of the Ministry of Defense on June 2012 as a prelude to the fiftieth anniversary ceremonies in the presence of the Head of State. It was then explicitly and, if possible, publicly to clarify "internal issues and overcome the divisions of the moment". Thus, anticipating the high probability of a sine die postponement of the official launch of the national TRC process ("at least after the 2015 elections"), some officers themselves organized for some time sessions of "internal" testimonies on significant events of "their" war.

Soon after, however, official voluntarism fell apart. For the CNDD-FDD party apparatus, these overtures proved incompatible with the strengthening of the population's political mobilization in view of the 2015 elections whose objective was to establish "the first real democracy acclaimed with 95% of the votes". Tensions and challenges in terms of internal and external security hardened. It was now a question of subjugating "civil society". But within it, reinforced by the strong audiences of its various components, the quality and independence of its programs, the Synergy of the media held firm.

It was in a context of growing tension that the cycle of "Media-Memory-History" broadcasts was organized in February-April 2015, after many exchanges with the parties, during which the four former presidents of the Republic still alive agreed to publicly debate their own political record. Again, the impact of these media events was exceptional and the whole country stopped to listen to them live. They were also broadcast in neighboring countries and picked up by the international media. Burundi's media then rose for some time among the most independent and dynamic on the continent.

But these co-productions were the last of the Media Synergy. On April 25, the announcement of President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to run for a third term triggered strong and numerous demonstrations. The components of the Media Synergy were banned from broadcasting. Then, on 14 May, the day after an attempted military coup, most of the private media were wiped out and the lasting glaciation of civil liberties was set in.

Over the years, in parallel with this investment, the drafting of a historical synthesis "distanced" had been undertaken. It was nourished by numerous exchanges with the many political, military, religious and other actors who accompanied the events and carried these speeches during these years, and well beyond for many of them. The formatting of these notes and archives accumulated and "co-debated" offers a retrospective. In addition, several analysis notes written while the surveys and exchanges carried out during numerous stays, particularly between 2009 and 2016, illustrate the historical presentation devoted to the last decade (cf. Analysis Notes).

Finally, it should be noted that it ended with a significant event since on May 25, 2020, General Évariste Ndayishimiye who, in 2011, had inaugurated and strongly marked the cycle of "Conferences for Memory", was elected President of the Republic. Like his predecessor in 2010, he then had two years to impose himself, define the objectives of his mandate and mark his mark on the two major ten-year commemorations of 2022: April 29, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "events of 1972" and July 1<sup>st</sup>, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of national independence.

But given the strong political and economic constraints currently imposed on the country, the deadline was certainly too short to be able to display its own balance sheet. The recent political and economic advances that the President can now mentioned for are not enough to mask the fragilities of the democratic framework and even more to remedy the structural impotence of the authorities in the face of the extreme misery that affects the majority of populations, especially rural ones.<sup>6</sup>

In this difficult context, the commemorations give the opportunity to debate on the legacy of the past, the current context, the immediate priorities and the perspectives.

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<sup>6</sup> Of particular note is Burundi's 40-places gain between 2021 and 2022 in [the Media freedom index](#).

## **“From one commemoration to another: Burundi in search of its history”**

### **1. An Uncertain History of Settlement**

Long before our Common Era, the human occupation of the temperate highlands of the Great Lakes region in Central Africa was attested by settlements of various origins: peoples first living from fishing, hunting, and then relying on agrarian systems combining, thanks to artisanal innovations, crops and livestock. Agricultural intensification and settlement went hand in hand.

During the second half of the last millennium, monarchical powers were consolidated. Based on clan and lineage structures, kingdoms were formed and strengthened, or disappeared. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the arrival first of explorers and then missionaries, the establishment of German colonization in 1890 and the Belgian administration after 1916, the history of these territories is based on tales and testimonials collected by explorers, missionaries, colonial administrators, and historians.

The colonial historiography is tainted by questionable interpretations based on an imaginary model seeking to explain the origin of settlement and social hierarchies of this region in the heart of Africa. Its basic assumption was the belief in a biological differentiation among ethnic communities. The farmers — the Hutus — were said to have settled in a space barely cleared by its first pygmoid occupants, the Twas, who were hunters and potters. The Hutus and the Twas were then confronted with the arrival of groups of “Hamitic” herders, who supposedly originated from the Horn of Africa, the Tutsis. The latter, cattle-owners, were believed to have gradually occupied the space and imposed their law on the entire central highlands of this part of Africa.

This historical imagination contributed to the belief that the divisions in terms of superiority and inferiority between the country's main ethnic groups were of a genetic nature. Thus, the elites promoted by the colonial authorities as part of their policy of indirect rule were almost exclusively of Tutsi origin and adhered to the ideology undergirding their supremacy. Though contested, these officially sanctioned ethnic identities still weigh on the collective memories and influence the behaviour of political actors. Most of all, they compromise the emergence of a pluralistic history.

### **2. A Belated and Brutal Colonial Integration**

The fiercely independent kingdom of Urundi, sheltered from the escarpments of the Congo-Nile Basins Divide, could boast of four centuries of dynastic successions attested by oral tradition. During the reign of Mwami Mwezi Gisabo (ca. 1850-1908), it was associated by colonization with the kingdom of Ruanda, with which it shared a common strain and a practically identical language. Together, the two countries constituted an extremely dynamic whole where a large population (of the order of a million inhabitants each at the beginning of the century) had relatively fertile land and could settle all over the more or less pacified territory.

In the absence of big cities, its population scattered across the hills, the pastoral aristocracy around which the royal powers were organized was based on complex social contracts that structured the positions, activities and daily life of the rural populace.

#### *2.1. A landlocked kingdom*

The entire social organization was based on agricultural work, which ensured the relative prosperity of the kingdom. Social life was punctuated by agricultural production and ritual feasts. The sovereign's powers were defined both symbolically — fertility, prosperity, cows... — and practically — land ownership, rights on soil and livestock products — within this framework. Individuals' political functions and social relations were derived from the technical division of agricultural labour (milker, cowherd, potters, hunters...). On these two planes, the symbolic profiles and roles of "the Hutu", "the Tutsi", and "the Twa", such as they crystallized over time, were constructed.

The various social, religious, political, and economic hierarchies were part of the same logic that conferred the whole system a strong unity. Between the dynastic aristocracy of the blood princes, the Baganwa, the leaders of the territories, and the peasant layers, various intermediate groups of auxiliaries of state power (substitutes, deputies in charge of organizing and controlling the chores and levies imposed on everyone all over the hills) build on each other; they used to leave the execution of orders to their “envoys” who were themselves “followers.” At each level, a patron-client network comprised contracts, obligations, privileges, and services where economic, social, and ritual planes intersected.

In addition to the powers of administration, military command, and justice, this aristocracy held the essential prerogative of control over the land, both for the settlement and the expulsion of peasants responsible for producing goods and performing various services. They transmitted the right of usufruct they held on plots of land to their offspring of the next generation. Within the peasantry, this mutually beneficial system reproduced itself at different levels: a patron-client relationship was established by either donating or lending cattle (*ubugabire* in Burundi), labour services, exchanges of food gifts, all of which contributed to close and evolving links between the various layers of the peasantry. According to their position in the system of dependency and protection, this functional solidarity of social groups gave rise to clearly delineated and recognized, yet relatively evolutive social divisions. The differentiations resulting from this system of reciprocal obligations and benefits overdetermined family and lineage ties which played only a minor role with regard to the social positions that were occupied and the various benefits that were thereof derived.

Thus, although socially and economically strongly supervised, the mononuclear family unit was nonetheless largely independent from kinship and lineage, especially at the level of its own farm and its place of residence where neighbourhood solidarity prevailed. Far from being static, the rural sectors showed considerable mobility, socially and geographically, as they interacted with members of the court by moving from one royal residence to another in the Muramvya region of Burundi, between the different residences of the princes and men of court, but also in the regions on the hills where local nobles resided.

Indeed, princes, chiefs, sub-chiefs, councillors, military men, and judges were always on the move between their place of duty and the royal court where they were solicited. Their privileges were made and broken, as territorial boundaries were redefined as a function of war episodes. The extreme fluidity that presided over the distribution of duties and entitlements, as well as the individualization of links of dependency, resulted in frequent changes of the political personnel and a continuous restructuring of social positions and obligations. Therefore, the realms of power relations affecting peasant-producers necessarily exceeded the limits of the hills of their residency and were impacted by the destinies and the solidity of the links that bound them to their protectors.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *Mwami* Mwezi Gisabo consolidated the structuring of the Urundi kingdom during his long reign (1852-1908) in the face of conflicts between his ambitious sons or relatives who sought to aggrandize their respective chiefdoms. It was the strong political-administrative cohesion of the two kingdoms of Ruanda and Urundi, protected as they were by the natural defences of the Congo-Nile River Basins Divide, that allowed them to maintain their territorial integrity over several centuries and to resist victoriously — unlike the kingdoms to the north and east — the attacks by Arabs and by slave raiders from Zanzibar. In 1884-1886, Mwezi Gisabo's troops defeated those of the invader Hassan Rumliza. Arab and Muslim influence was thus contained. Unlike the territories bordering the Atlantic Ocean, where trade flows developed as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century and partially reshaped the existing socio-political structures, Ruanda and Urundi did not come into contact with Europeans until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After brief initial contacts (1858, 1861), and then explorers' reconnaissance expeditions (1871, 1876), the region became known to Europeans. Thereupon, it took less than a decade for the two African countries and their peoples, described as hostile and mysterious, to find their political destiny sealed by international arrangements.



## 2.2. The German settlement (1885-1916)

At the 1884-85 Berlin Conference that set off the “Scramble for Africa”, the two kingdoms were neither mentioned nor demarcated. It was not until the late 1890s, after the first official contacts between German officers and royal authorities, that the phase of penetration and conquest began, interspersed as it was with negotiations between the Belgian, British and German colonial powers. Eventually, exploiting the weaknesses specific to each kingdom, the German military authorities, with the help of missionaries and traders, succeeded in splitting and controlling the decision-making centres of the two African nations. But, after the establishment of the first military posts in 1896 in the Imbo region, it took several more years and numerous military expeditions to subdue *Mwami* Mwezi Gisabo and turn Burundi into a German protectorate in 1903.

The Treaty of Kiganda imposed the sovereignty of Germany. The regions of Bukeye and Muramvya were handed over to princes allied with German forces. Mwezi Gisabo must also guarantee freedom of worship for the benefit of the missions. Until their departure in 1916, the Germans conducted a great number of operations to subjugate dissident princes.



[Wikimedia Commons](#)

Figure 2: Map of the German Protectorate of East Africa (1885-1916)

The increasing centralization of the kingdom, due to the overlapping of powers the *Mwami* and his relatives were able to exert, gradually removed the population from the chiefs' authority and established situations of subordination. During the German-Belgian negotiations of 1906-1910, which resulted in new borders between their respective areas of influence, the kingdoms lost Western parts to the Belgian



Congo and Eastern parts to Great Britain's Uganda. These regions were cut off from their traditional political centres.

The German interlude prompted three decisive upheavals in the region. The first was the establishment of urban centres, first and foremost Usumbura, which was established in 1897 as the administrative centre of a new district encompassing both Ruanda and Urundi. In 1906, when the district was divided into two, two other administrative centres were added: Kitega in the heart of Urundi became the kingdom's new capital in 1912 and, subsequently, Kigali became Ruanda's capital. The second major change was the opening of Ruanda and Urundi to the trade with the East, which was initiated by the installation of Zanzibari trade posts - exchanging slaves, palm oil and cattle for rock salt and pearls - on the kingdoms' periphery. Eventually, the presence of Arab, Indian, and Swahili traders was strengthened under German control, and several European firms settled down in Usumbura as well as Kigali.

The junction was thus established between trade flows oriented towards Mombasa and Dar-es-Salaam and trade flows to the West (Kivu, Bushi), where the Belgian authorities were particularly keen to import regional products. These new trade routes, which connected the region to Europe, mobilized several thousand porters on the caravan trails and enriched the areas of transaction. However, their impact did not extend far beyond traditional centres and, above all, affected only moderately the daily lives of the kingdoms' inhabitants. The trade was mainly undertaken by itinerant merchants and took place in small markets where complementary goods were bartered between neighbouring regions. The exceptional capacity for economic self-sustainability is noteworthy not only for the kingdoms as a whole, vis-à-vis the outside world, but also for their constituent regions and even for single hills and farms.

Finally, in parallel with the German military grip on Urundi-Ruanda, the [White Fathers](#) (mostly French at the time) established themselves by virtue of a quasi-military logic of tight spatial control and the erection of missionary outposts originating from their procuracies and missions in Dar-es-Salaam, Marienberg, and Uchirombo. These missions established themselves in East Africa in 1878 and, after several failures to do so in Imbo, eventually opened [their first missions in Urundi in Muyaga \(Buyogoma\) in 1898](#) and in 1899 in Mugeru (Kirimiro); after a successful intervention at Ruanda's royal court, they later followed suit in Save, near Nyanza and Zaza.



Figure 3: Muyaga, Burundi's oldest Catholic Church (1896)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Unless specifically stated, all photos illustrating this text come from the *Iwacu* Group's photo library.

Multiplying their settlements near the royal courts and in peasant communities all over the territory, the missionaries quickly became important interlocutors. They were intermediaries and adjudicators (to the best of their own interest) between local customary authorities and the German military, as well as active participants in the conflicts and political intrigues between the different branches of royalty — benevolent to leaders who might be converted, but proven agitators vis-à-vis their opponents. In 1912, the first Apostolic Vicariate of Kivu, in charge of both Ruanda and Urundi, was established in Kabgayi, in Rwanda's heartland.

This strategy of evangelization and overt political intervention was conducted in the wake of the German stranglehold on the territories as well as independently thereof. The White Fathers thus didn't encounter any problems during the First World War period and were able to strengthen their ties with the Belgian missionaries.

### 3. The Belgian Colonial Administration

In the context of the First World War the German colonial empire was dismantled. In 1916, requisitioning some 260,000 porters - half of whom died of hunger and fatigue - a vast Belgian and English military offensive ended the German protectorate over Urundi and Ruanda. They negotiated then the new borders among themselves. Belgium reclaimed the island of Idjwi, which it adjoined to the Congo, and the two kingdoms of Ruanda and Urundi within their restricted borders of 1912.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 4: The Ruanda-Urundi Territories [BNF]

All these territories became part of the Belgian colonial empire, an operation that allowed Brussels, notwithstanding international law, to fulfil its dream of unifying the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi, which *de facto* became a Congolese province!

### 3.1. Administrative reorganization

Between 1923 and 1933, multiple redistricting operations accompanied the dismissal of mainly Hutu chiefs and deputy chiefs. Burundi then comprised 9 territories, which were subdivided into dozens of chiefdoms and hundreds of sub-chiefdoms. Belgium's objective was to establish indirect rule, i.e. to "consolidate the authority of indigenous leaders, while ensuring that it is exercised within the limits of fairness and legality" (*Indigenous Policy*, p.12) vis-à-vis the subjugated population.

The authority of local chiefs derived from their function and thus from the skills they had acquired in state-run schools tasked with training a new generation of customary administrators. Legitimacy in the eyes of the population now sprang from that dual origin: it was colonial by acculturation and the learned acquisition of new values and administrative tasks; it was also customary by kinship ties and proximity to the "noble caste", which was itself purified to each branch's most submissive elements. Therefore, as a substitute for the rulers' historical legitimacy that was maintained but stripped of their ascendancy, such authority could only glorify and enforce the characteristics and virtues of the "royal race". The latter was defined by a caricatured vision — fixated and explicitly racial — of the two kingdoms' political and social divisions; and the two kingdoms, despite their different political antecedents, both in terms of the functioning and the distribution of powers, were submitted to the same hyper-centralized administrative organization.<sup>8</sup> This vision was particularly enforced in Burundi where the Bahutu present in the administration, and some Batutsi, were effaced from the customary political map in favour of the royal lineages and the Baganwa.

For the people, the desecration of power and the new social distance from those who rubbed shoulders with the "Whites" reduced the exercise of authority to practices that were perceived by them as purely arbitrary. The old obligations were henceforth imposed without any service provided in return. They were also further burdened by new responsibilities: the collection of taxes, the introduction of mandatory crops, the recruitment for portage, compulsory work "carried out in the interest of the population" as well as police tasks (fines, corporeal punishments, etc.). This authority now fell under the control of auxiliaries of the Belgian territorial administration and customary chiefs. Generally pre-selected by missionaries, these "evolved members" of the indigenous population — leviers of poll tax, police officers, guards, and various other auxiliaries — formed a new and twice over isolated social group. As far as the Europeans were concerned, this group was judged merely based on its ability to carry out the day-to-day supervision and management tasks that were imposed on the rural population. As far as the latter were concerned, the group was charged with monitoring and regulating all areas of their activities.<sup>9</sup>

Putting the peasants to work became the central task with a view to providing for the colonists and the "evolved" they had co-opted and, above all, to enhancing the territory. The interest of the colonizers in these structured kingdoms was due to the latter's exceptionally high population density for the African continent, which meant abundance of labour that could be mobilized for portage tasks, the construction of roads or railways to open up remote areas, or of buildings, the supply of military posts and urban centres, or for agricultural development schemes (marshes, terraces,...), the introduction of compulsory cash crops (namely coffee), the mining of minerals, the creation of farms geared towards agricultural exports and, as early as 1925, the recruitment for the Mining Union of the Congo (copper).

Collective life was henceforth limited to this framework of new territorial divisions and their administrative centres. It was limited to interventions related to the control of agricultural activities

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<sup>8</sup> On the racial characteristics of different populations, cf. J.-P. Harroy, *Rwanda. De la féodalité à la démocratie 1955-1962*, Hayez/Académie des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, Bruxelles/Paris, 1984, p. 24-32.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. A.A. Trouwborst, *La mobilité de l'individu en fonction de l'organisation politique des Barundi, Zaïre*, vol. XIII-8, 1959, p.787-800.



(taxation and development operations), or which prolonged them (exchange or processing) to "buy money" and pay the taxes that turned people into peasant-wage-earners-cum-traders-cum-miners-cum-artisans, all in search of cash.

In a country of dispersed dwellings, the peasantry manifested a deep mistrust of administrative and urban centres, which mainly regrouped foreigners, as these centres were believed to have been created only for military or commercial purposes. The administrative reorganization had deliberately blocked or "frozen" all internal mobility: spatial mobility for reasons of control, exploitation, and religious indoctrination; social mobility because of the consecration of grotesque customary divisions and the active segregation when it came to accessing the new subordinate social positions that were reserved for "evolved negroes".<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the requisitioning of labour triggered many departures to English-speaking territories and amplified the nefarious effects of periodic food shortages.

The human cost of infrastructure building in the two kingdoms, and of development in general, was regularly investigated by the international agencies in charge of the mandate conferred to Belgium. Later, the territories were placed under the authority of the United Nations and covered by reports of by the Special Committee on Forced Labour. Thus, in 1953, the Standing Commission for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples pointed out that "the regime of compulsory crops has lost, in the face of the necessities of war production, the educational character that is its sole justification. The numerous tasks (public and private) that are imposed (construction and maintenance of roads, guest houses, prisons), that are barely remunerate, if at all, as well as the compulsory plantations, are all repugnant to the native, who ends up seeing himself treated as a victim of arbitrary taxation and exacted labour, his actions being controlled and directed in a sense often detrimental to his normal existence and that of his family."<sup>11</sup>

### 3.2. Church's Control of Access to Dominant Positions

The school system established by Belgium, starting in 1926, was limited to summarily training the sons of chiefs and the necessary staff in the "official schools". But in 1928, due to lack of resources and personnel, the state entrusted the Catholic missions of the two "Vicariates of Ruanda and Urundi", which were endowed with public funding, with full responsibility for primary education, and the recruitment of pupils and teachers.<sup>12</sup>

The "rural schools" taught the rudimentary knowledge necessary to study the Bible and the acquisition of basic agrotechnical references. Only the "central schools" of the missions, reserved for the best students of the "rural schools," provided access to consolidated literacy. Three technical training courses were set up to form instructors who could relay agricultural and health instructions.

Secondary education, grouped in Astrida, Ruanda, did not begin until 1932 and topped off the Catholic church's control of the social reproduction of the "senior indigenous staff" recruited in line with criteria of racial and sexual discrimination: *"Encouraging the mututsi movement towards the mission is the future of religion. These young people are future leaders: it is important to attach them to us. [...] Developing the Tutsi school [...] will be the way to keep this youth with us if the government carries out its plans of establishing secular school in all chiefdoms"*, said Bishop Léon-Paul Classe (1927).<sup>13</sup> In 1930, he went on to explain that *"the greatest harm the government could do to itself and to the country*

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<sup>10</sup> Only a few thousand inhabitants settled, more or less as a result of orders given to them, in the "indigenous cities" (created in 1926) which later became "extra-customary centers" and eschewed the authority of chiefdoms. These neighborhoods, settled in the lowlands around Usumbura, Rumonge and Nyanza-Lac, gathered the African population: Swahili and Congolese foreigners in the first place, then "refugees" and various migrants. Described as places of perdition and prostitution by the missions, access was strictly controlled by the Belgian administration (and included periodic roundups and the obligation for non-residents to always carry a "travel passport"). As a result, farmers' desire to settle near European urban centers was firmly and permanently discouraged until the 1940s.

<sup>11</sup> Nations Unies, 12<sup>ème</sup> session, 472<sup>ème</sup> séance, *Procès-verbaux officiels*, 1953, §.6-8.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. J. Perraudin, *Naissance d'une église. Histoire du Burundi chrétien*, Presses de Lavignerie, Bujumbura, 1963, 228 p.; J. Gorju, *Face au royaume hamite du Rwanda, le royaume frère de l'Urundi*, Bruxelles, 1938.

<sup>13</sup> J.-P. Chrétien, *Église, pouvoir et culture, Les quatre fleuves, Cahier n° 10*, 1971, p. 33-55.



would be to abolish the *mututsi* caste. A revolution of this kind would lead the country straight into anarchy and hatefully anti-European communism. Far from promoting progress, it would annihilate the government's action, depriving it of born auxiliaries capable of understanding and following it."<sup>14</sup>

The same year, according to the Ten-Year Plan, enrolments in primary education missions divided equally between the two kingdoms reached about 30,000 pupils, then 60,000 in 1940, and 80,000 five years later, and finally 110,000 in 1950. A small number, even then. The schooling effort only increased during the last decade of colonization under the next and last Ten-Year Plan.

The quasi-monopoly of teaching granted to the missions and the resulting access to new, socially highly valued functions demonstrated that the reality of power was now in the missions' and administrators' hands. The density of the network of mission, and their social activities, in particular those of the White Fathers, made them much more daunting for the ruling aristocracy than for the administrators, who were incessantly transferred from one position to another. Thus, unlike administrators who were content with learning Swahili (the vehicular language of Muslim and indigenous urbanites), the Fathers practiced exclusively Kirundi and Kinyarwanda to manage on their own their relationships with both the chiefs and the population whom they preached to and educated.

The conversion of chiefs and mass baptisms subtended the administrative remodelling. For the chiefs, the keeping of their posts and their careers were closely correlated with their attitude towards missions and their clergy. The realism and political opportunism of the leaders translated into thousands of conversions:

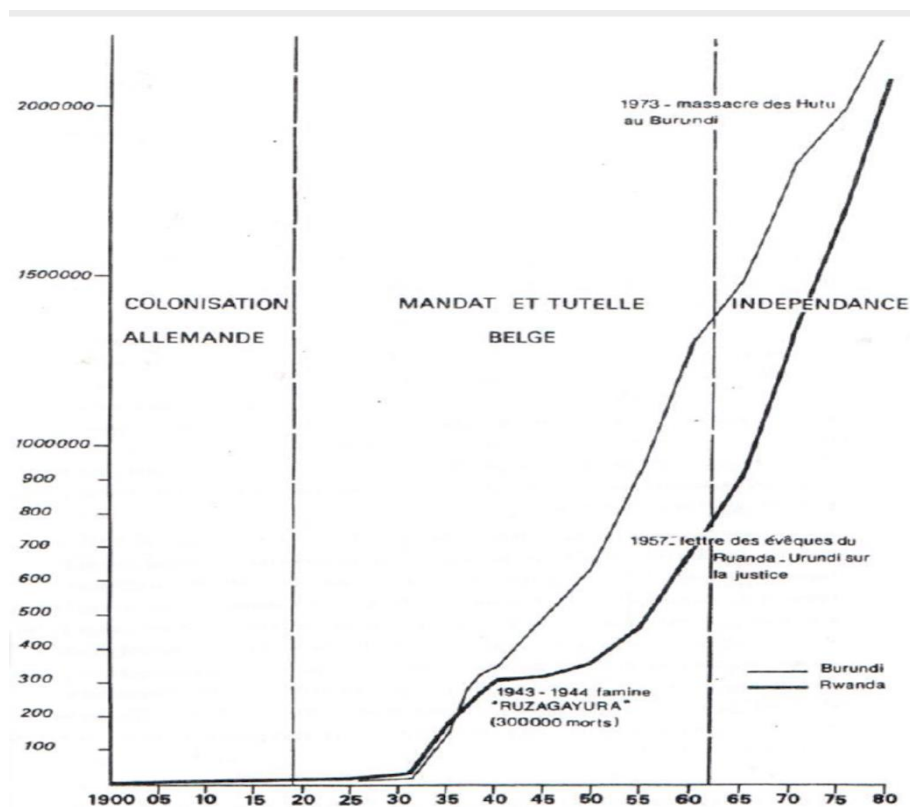


Figure 5. Growth of the Catholic Population in Burundi and Rwanda<sup>15</sup>

The rural populations, once abandoned to their fate by their now submissive leaders who had been turned into public servants of the colonial state, were cut off from their beliefs and cultural references, both denied and deprived of their value; they were also exposed to the brutality of the colonial administration. In their eyes, missionaries held out the promise of a new social order, an order where the power and the sacred mingled and confronted each other to impress souls who predisposed to recognize

<sup>14</sup> L. de Lacger, *Ruanda...*, p. 524.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Sirven, *La sous-urbanisation et les villes du Rwanda et du Burundi*, Université de Bordeaux, 1984, p. 97.

the existence of another god, better than *Imana*, the supreme being they had worshipped until then. This is why, in a subtle game of competition in the exercise of colonial power, the Catholic church used the relative autonomy conferred by its dual temporal and spiritual vocation to distinguish its field of intervention and its aims from the more prosaic prerogatives of civil authorities. As a consequence, the Catholic church enjoyed the benefits accorded to a state religion — entitled to require the civil administration to control competing religions (Protestant and Islamic) — while positioning itself among the rural masses as a natural intercessor and protector in the face of the arbitrary rule and the exploitation by both colonial administrators and customary chiefs.

Better than civil power, missions have captured the traditional characteristics of royal power and spread the image of the missionary as a sacred figure: a distant attitude made of intransigence and goodness, a magical-religious staging of initiation rites, and progress towards the mysteries of religion. All of which is reinforced by a monopolistic control of “vital services” (health, school, agricultural extension, and various assistance). The importance of their concessions, their access to modern agricultural inputs and techniques, the use of volunteers, and the recruitment of employees made missions true oases of prosperity and extremely active economic poles. In times of scarcity, they became the last resort of hungry populations.

A few socio-economic benchmarks provide further detail in this regard. In 1960, Burundi's population was estimated at 2,798,000 inhabitants. The population of Usumbura, the capital, which was boosted by the investments of the Ten-Year Plan, reached 45,000 inhabitants — up from 7,000 in 1940 and 18,000 in 1950; roughly 10,000 to 15,000 Burundi were grouped in a single neighbourhood under control. Bujumbura, which was administratively independent from the authority of the Mwami remained the city of German and then Belgian colonizers together with their respective Swahili and Congolese helpers. The Arab and Asian communities relayed the European firms' import-export trade, whereas the Congolese populations (about 50%) provided the bulk of the Europeans' workforce. The strong growth of Usumbura, starting in 1955, resulted in a reduction of the number of native wage earners working in neighbouring countries. Emigrants returned home, assured as they were of finding work in the capital. Rural migrants remain marginal.

This incipient “burundization” of the capital city, now renamed Bujumbura, was the result of populations that were acculturated or had broken their ties with their rural environment. It would be hard for them to return to the customs and constraints they had freed themselves from. The national appropriation of the capital occurred only after Independence and very partially since strategic positions in trade and the high- and middle-level public service could not, in the absence of trained national professionals, be recovered without compromising the very survival of these activities. Apart from the upper echelons of the customary political establishment and the people who depended on them, one should also note the influx of, and decisive role played by, the trained personnel in charge of monitoring food crops and cash crops. They constituted the backbone of the administration and, also at a technical level, supervised the activities “in the hills”. Almost all of them were absorbed by the new, “burundized” civil service.

As a reminder: in 1959, 48% of the ordinary expenditure of the Ruanda-Urundi budget was spent on the state's staff, 36% of which for the salaries and travel expenses of its European members, that is about 1,300 people.<sup>16</sup> These 1,300 civil servants earned the equivalent of 40% of revenue derived from coffee that year and earned thanks to the labour of some 400,000 indigenous farmers!

#### **4. Disenchanted Independence (1959-1965)**

The UN debates on the gradual emancipation of the territories under International Trusteeship led up to the publication in 1952 of a decree establishing a hierarchical series of councils: from the sub-chiefdoms to the country's Supreme Council. Appointed in 1955, the Governor-General, Jean-Paul

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<sup>16</sup> Association européenne des sciences d'études pour le développement-AESED, *Étude globale de développement du Rwanda et du Burundi. Rapport général, rapport analytique*, Bruxelles, 1961, 392 p.

Harroy, decided organize a consultation in 1956 on the basis of universal suffrage. The aim was to respond to the dual desire for emancipation of the Tutsi elites and royal lineages as well as of the discriminated and exploited populations who were sensitive to the struggles for independence that had gained the African continent. This double concern was expressed as early as 1955 by Pope Pius XII and then [clarified in 1957](#).

In this context, the major reversal of the Catholic hierarchy that was expressed by bishop André Perraudin of Kabgayi (Rwanda) in March 1956 deserves attention. Eager to thwart the influence of claims for independence among the princely elites of Ruanda and Urundi and maintain a stronghold on the region that was already severely compromised in the Belgian Congo and neighbouring Burundi, the colonial authorities supported Rwandan Hutu leaders campaigning for a “social revolution.” For their part, Tutsi monarchists in favour of independence were supported by prominent anti-colonialist and progressive voices from the Third World and therefore labelled as “Bolsheviks” by the Belgian propaganda. The confrontation between pro-Independence Tutsis and, on the other side, their Hutu “serfs” in search of emancipation from the dual tutelage of the Belgian administration and the high Catholic expatriate hierarchy, goes a long way to explaining the extreme simplification of the forms of mobilization of the respective supporters in the two camps and why their clashes crystallized around ethnicity.

#### *4.1. The deleterious impact of Rwanda’s “Social Revolution” on Burundi*

The agenda of the Hutu Emancipation Party (PARMEHUTU), which imposed itself in Rwanda, was not only the abolition of Tutsi political and economic privileges and the control of upward mobility but the expulsion of the Tutsi minority — the “Hamitic invaders” — and the repossession of the country by the Bahutu, its rightful owners. The new republican ideology was easily inserted into the inherited political schemes, based on exclusive political-ethnic approaches which were now used against the former elites and, in fact, all members of the banned ethnic group. Aggravated by the manoeuvres of the colonial authorities, this context of ethnic bigotry explains the violence that accompanied the “Social Revolution” of 1959, the legal *coup de force* of the “Republic of Gitarama” in 1960 and, after the independence referendum of 1962, the exile of King Kigeli. In 1963, two rounds of armed incursions by Tutsi refugees that were launched from Burundi aimed at regaining power. Stopped in extremis, they triggered numerous massacres in Rwanda and new mass departures of Tutsis. The leaders of the pro-Tutsi parties were executed. Periods of appeasement and of deadly violence alternated until into the early 1970s.

Despite the specifics of its historical heritage and repeated attempts to demarcate it from the events in Rwanda, the Burundian political framework was affected by the “Social Revolution” in the neighbouring country and the crystallization of ethnic references in its wake.<sup>17</sup>

The divisive debate about the pace and extent of the process of emancipation from the colonial administration was reflected in Burundi by the creation of more than twenty parties starting in mid-1959. The two most important parties channelled the rival interests of the two great princely lineages, Bezi and Batare. The first party, the UPRONA (Unity and National Progress) was founded by King Mwambutsa eldest son, Louis Rwagasore, who had rallied to his cause the country's main monarchists and independence leaders. The second, the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), was founded by members of the rival clan of the Batare rallied around Pierre Baranyanka and supported by the Belgian administration; they were in favour of delayed independence. A third political force, which namely included the People's Party (PP), did not contest the Tutsi tutelage and supported a constitutional monarchy but formulated strong socio-economic demands in favour of the poor.

In September 1961, in the framework of the [constitutional monarchy](#), the first legislative elections resulted in a landslide for a policy of “conservative adaptation”, in sharp contrast to the Rwandan

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<sup>17</sup> “To understand the post-independence political process in Burundi after independence, it is necessary to be aware of the parallel process in its twin country, Rwanda must know the parallel evolution of its twin, Rwanda.” (§ 81, p. 19).

revolution, and brought to power Prince Louis Rwagasore, who was execrated by the Belgian colonists who supported the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). The PDC was in favour of a delayed independence but was crushed in the election.

After Rwagasore's [assassination in October](#) 1961 and the proclamation of independence in July 1962, the resulting political vacuum and the intense political and economic competition for access to new plum positions and internal resources between the various contenders for power opened a long period of instability within weak institutions. The [Constitution of October 1962](#) enshrined the king as the effective head of state. He held legislative power in tandem with the Assemblies and he was assisted by an advisory Crown Council in appointing and dismissing ministers. However, since November 1961, the crucial element of power had been the Commissioner of the National Guard, then called National Defence who was placed under the direct orders of the king — he held the title of a minister but was not the government's authority. In July 1962, Zenon Nicayenzi (Tutsi, Gitega) was appointed Secretary of State of National Defence. In May 1963, he was replaced by Captain [Michel Micombero](#) (Tutsi, Bururi), who was shadowed by a Secretary of State in charge of the National Gendarmerie, Pascal Magenge (Ganwa tare, Kayanza). The latter also directly answered to the king.

#### *4.2. A powerless monarch in the face of political, clan and ethnic divisions*

Formally master of the game, the *Mwami* Mwambutsa and his relatives proved unable to master the ambitions and calculations within the government, the assemblies and the leadership circle of the majority party, the UPRONA, which became a quasi-single party and was dominated by fratricidal rivalries between members of the great Baganwa lineages (Bezi and Tare), regional oppositions and competitions between Tutsi and Hutu elites. A dualism of power was thus instigated: the rules of the formal political game were flouted, the majorities from the ballot boxes were transgressed, and the elections within the UPRONA were distorted as well. Alleged plots followed in quick succession, the governments kept changing, only the two Secretaries of State in charge of security remained untouchable.

Two groups consolidated within UPRONA and the parliament: the pro-Western “Monrovia group” (predominantly Hutu) and the pro-Third World “Casablanca group” (predominantly Tutsi) which comprised different wings as a function of their foreign supporters. Indeed, in the Cold War context of the time, the civil war that was playing out in the Congo spilled over into neighbouring countries. Bujumbura became a Chinese support base for assistance to Lumumba's rebels in the Kivu province (eastern Congo). In 1964, apparently also equipped by China, Rwandan refugees created a People's Liberation Army in Burundi that reinforced ethnic radicalization.

In 1965, events in Burundi accelerated. On 15 January, Prime Minister Pierre Ngendandumwe (a Hutu from Muyinga and a supporter of the “Monrovia group”), who had thrived to overcome political, clan, and ethnic divisions, was assassinated by a Rwandan Tutsi refugee right after formation of an ethnically “balanced” government had been announced. Among the alleged sponsors of the crime were several Tutsi leaders of the “Casablanca group”. The *Mwami* Mwambutsa then suspended the activities of the Nationalist Youth Rwagasore (JNR) which was acting as pro-tutsi militia. But the legal proceedings were subsequently shelved.<sup>18</sup>

On 23 March 1965, the dissolution of the government opened a six-month transition period during which the *Mwami* attempted to impose its authority. He increased the number of ministerial departments which were transformed into secretariats of state placed under his direct authority (including Justice, Security, Information). He chaired a cabinet of Secretaries of State, covering most of the government's realms of activity. He also replaced all elected mayors by appointed administrators. In May, the dissolved Parliament was finally renewed. This first election since independence resulted in two thirds of the representatives — both in the Assembly and the Senate — being Hutus, members of UPRONA and the

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<sup>18</sup> The defendants were released and the investigation dropped at the end of 1967 leaving unresolved yet another murder of Hutu personalities.



People's Party. Yet, the Mwami failed to appoint a Prime Minister belonging to the political majority. On 29 September 1965, he instead called upon Léopold Bihumugani (*Ganwa Bezi, Muramvya*), a relative of his, to head a government mainly composed of Secretaries of State.

On 11 and 18 October 1965, two failed coup attempts succeeded one another at short interval. The first was not elucidated, while the second was led by Captain Fidèle Ndabahagamyé (*Hutu, Kayanza*). Allegedly, other Hutu politicians and military, such as Commander Antoine Serukwavu (*Hutu, Kirundo*), the Secretary of State of the Gendarmerie, were implicated in the plots. The Mwami fled to Congo and placed himself under the protection of Belgian soldiers before reaching Europe. From there, he summoned Captain Michel Micombero and [Artemon Simbananiye](#) in order to instruct them as to how to "repress" the coup attempts. But the two did not respond to his summons.

On 20 October, a royal decree that was neither drafted nor signed by the king established a "military emergency regime" in Burundi. Captain Michel Micombero, the Secretary of State of Defence, took the de facto leadership of the country. Many Hutu figures were arrested, tried, and executed, including the charismatic leader of UPRONA, Paul Mirerekano. The "Monrovia group" was devastated. Tensions reached fever pitch when "a Hutu youth militia massacred Tutsi families in two towns in Muramvya province. This first ethnic massacre claimed nearly 500 lives. The armed forces carried out a bloody ethnic repression with the help of the UPRONA's youth wing. Several thousand Hutus perished, and a purge drove the Hutus from most positions of power." ([UN-Report](#), §.83)

The Secretary of State for National Defence, Captain Michel Micombero, a Tutsi officer of the Hima clan in Bururi Rutovu<sup>19</sup> province, and the Secretary of State for Justice, Artemon Simbananiye (Tutsi, Bururi), led the anti-Hutu repression; it spared no minister, MP, senator or officer — all of them were killed. And so were most senior Hutu officials. Swiss and American diplomats estimated the number of Hutu victims between October 1965 and January 1966 to be in the order of 2,000 to 4,000, among them between 1,500 and 3,000 victims from Muramvya province alone, according to the Belgian ambassador.

The sharing of power between Tutsi and Hutu, which had prevailed to varying degrees since independence in July 1962, thus came to a bloody end. These massacres, organized by the armed forces and the JNR, durably etched the ethnic divide into the collective memory. Alongside the ouster of Hutu elites, ethnically-based exclusions hardened the frustrations of some and the security strategies of others. Political life was degraded to a succession of real or supposed plots. In July 1966, Mwambutsa went into exile in Switzerland after his impeachment by his second son, Charles (Ntare V), aged 19. The latter was himself deposed in November 1966 by Captain Michel Micombero (26 years old), who proclaimed a Republic in Burundi.

## **5. A Republican Dynasty at the Pace of Military Coups (1966-1993)**

### *5.1. The First Republic of Captain Michel Micombero (1966-1976)*

On 28 November 1966, Michel Micombero set up a National Council of the Revolution (7 out of its 13 members hail from the Bururi province) and appointed military governors to head the provinces (4 out of 8 members originate from Bururi). This long-planned consecration marked the seizure of power by the "Bururi Group". Promoted to colonel, Micombero himself became President of the Republic, Head of Government, and Minister of Defence. UPRONA was recognized as the only party, actually the state-party from which all institutions of the Republic, including the judiciary, are derived. The *Indarungavye* ("those who stay awake at night"), i.e. the activists of the Rwagasore Revolutionary Youth (JRR), provided close supervision of the citizenry.

As prior to the instauration of a Republic, government reshuffles and revocations of ministers followed each other in quick succession, as did the replacement of UPRONA leaders and the top brass

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<sup>19</sup> Represented in various kingdoms of the region before colonization (Buganda, Ruanda, Urundi), the Burundian Bahima clan of Bururi would have ended the monarchy in 1966 with the coup d'état of Michel Micombero and retained power until 2003 with Jean-Baptiste Bagaza and Pierre Buyoya.

of the armed forces where false and true "conspiracies" also continued unabated. In September 1969, in a context of intense diplomatic tension, notably with Belgium, the USA, and the Congo<sup>20</sup>, the discovery of a plot financed "from abroad" led to the indictment and subsequent condemnation of many prominent personalities. In December, twenty-five ministers and high-ranking military were executed.<sup>21</sup>

In July 1971, yet another trial targeted, this time, former ministers and officers — Banyaruguru Tutsi from the "north" and rivals of the presidential clan from the "south". But unlike in 1969, the confusing management of this anti-monarchist trial divided the political establishment, sparking high tensions in the capital and international outrage. After the verdict, the death sentences were commuted, and the convicts were later released.

On 20 October 1971, a new Supreme Council of the Republic composed of 27 officers was installed; it comprised 24 Tutsi and 3 Hutu, while 15 of its members were natives from Bururi. In February 1972, the head of state and head of the UPRONA party renewed the national secretary of the party (André Yanda) and the secretaries-general of the integrated movements (Clémence Nahimana at the UFB and Émile Mworoha at the JRR).

In March 1972, though he had been invited to return to Burundi, the ex-*Mwami* Ntare V was arrested on arrival, imprisoned, and [executed on 29 April](#). On the same day, the national radio announced the dismissal of the government and UPRONA's national secretary, and the appointment by Michel Micombero (Tutsi, Bururi, Rutovu), the President of the Republic and Minister of Defence, of an ethnically and regionally homogeneous cabinet restricted to strategic ministries.

Informed of unrest in several parts of Bururi province (now Makamba, Bururi, Rumonge), the Ministers of the Interior and of Information went to raise awareness among provincial officials regarding imminent attacks by the Hutu rebellion, to organize the defence and deter the population from following the rebels.

A pro-Hutu insurgency involving "Hutus trained outside the country" ([UN](#), p.22, §85) targeted Tutsi populations in various parts of the country, particularly in Rumonge, Nyanza-Lac and Vyanda. On 30 April, military governors were appointed in all provinces. The insurgents claimed several thousand lives in a matter of weeks before being finally wiped out by the armed forces. The army, backed by the JRR, carried out a methodical anti-Hutu "[genocidal repression](#)" for several weeks. In all provinces and sectors of activity, "educated" Hutu or Hutu students, as well as Hutu traders or peasants with external signs of wealth, were systematically eliminated. More than 100,000 Hutu and many opponents of the regime, mainly Tutsi Banyaruguru, were killed. 200,000 Burundian refugees fled to Zaire, Tanzania, and Rwanda. UN-CS, S/1996/682 August, 22, 1996

Subsequently, Micombero's Republic morphed into a brutal military dictatorship of a man adulated as the head of a Party-State endowed with exclusive rights who evicts even his allies from the neighbouring rival commune of Matana. In light of which, the answer to the question raised in the [UN-Report](#) in 1985: "Is the selective genocide committed in Burundi fundamentally politically or ethnically inspired?" was not adequate (pp.12-20-23) as both motives had become inseparable.

Having successfully crushed various armed incursions of refugee opponents at Burundi's borders, and then obtained their neutralization thanks to the cooperation of the Rwandan and Zairean presidents, Juvenal Habyarimana and Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, Michel Micombero granted himself a new mandate in July 1974. He promulgated a new [Constitution](#) in which no provision was made for assemblies or popular elections. Chosen as General Secretary of the single party UPRONA by handpicked voters, Micombero became ipso facto President of the Republic. He retained power through terror for another two years. A

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<sup>20</sup> Since the early 1960s, Burundi's various political forces have been under intense pressure from diplomatic representations directly engaged in national conflicts and, above all, regional issues at the core of which lies the control of power and resources of eastern Congo. In October 1971, China formally opened an embassy. It henceforth played a major role in financing the forces and regimes which it supported.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Rapport politique 093/100/CAB/68 du 18 avril 1968 in Rose Karambizi-Ndayahoze, [Le Cdt Martin Ndayahoze. Un visionnaire](#), Éditions Iwacu, 2016.

megalomaniac and poor manager, he was overthrown on 1 November 1976 in a coup d'état that was organized by an officer of his home commune to save a traumatized and exhausted country.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 6: Michel Micombero and Jean-Baptiste Bagaza

### 5.2. *The Second Republic of Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Baptiste Bagaza (1976-1987)*

The coup gave rise to widespread relief, especially among the victims of the fallen regime. After fifteen years of independence, it was necessary to break with the institutionalized political inconsistency that had been established by the outgoing monarchical regime, the sinister decade of social and political segregation, and the traumas caused by the 1972 “genocide of Hutu elites”. Little known to the public, Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, the Deputy-Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, set up a Supreme Revolutionary Council on 2 November 1976, composed of 30 Tutsi officers, 14 of whom were from Bururi. Similarly, of the 19 members of the new government, 15 were Tutsi, 8 of whom originated from Bururi. The only significant political opening was the appointment of a Prime Minister hailing from the rival commune of Matana and the ouster of the most radical Tutsi elements.

While remaining silent on the First Republic's traumatic events, Bagaza proposed a policy of “national reconciliation” and a sounder management of the state. The first two years of the Second Republic were devoted to the restoration of the state's authority through a process of controlled democratization of UPRONA, which was restructured from 1977 onward, and the subsequent return to civilian rule ([constitutional referendum of 1981](#), legislative elections were held in 1982). Several progressive measures were taken to strengthen national unity and increase benefits for the people, especially the rural population. These measures include the abolition of the capitation tax as early as the fiscal year 1977; the abolition of age-old duties of labour and/or remittances from harvests for land use rights (*ubugererwa*); and the recovery of state and private lands that had been taken over by politicians and officials of the former regime (including exiles from 1972-1973). Accompanied by an overhaul of the communal administration, these major advances in farmers' economic security allowed for a significant change in the political climate and encouraged many refugees to return to their hills of origin.

Jean-Baptiste Bagaza also benefited from favourable international economic circumstances. High levels of coffee prices, market liquidities and international financial aid enabled an ambitious investment

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<sup>22</sup> Dead in 1983 in Mogadiscio.



policy. Burundi's face was rapidly changed thanks to infrastructure development, the urbanization of provincial centres, the equipment of the capital's outlying districts, the opening-up and development of the east of the country, the long-term reconstitution of the potential for agricultural fertility (reforestation, coffee, tea, etc.)



Figure 7: Tea plantations

The strength and effectiveness of the system were based on the close symbiosis between the state and the single party apparatus. From the top of the hierarchy down to the supervision level of the laborious populations by way of the various management levels of the administration, the state functioned as a rhizomatic system of pumping off and then redistributing national and international resources, especially through development projects. This system then structured and nurtured the clientelist chains from negotiations with donors to the achievements of the projects. For instance, in agricultural schemes, the share of the initial funding that actually reached the final beneficiaries was little more than 20% to 30%. The elites' business-friendly compromises and the illicit drains on the private economic sphere exploded in proportion to the scale of state investments.

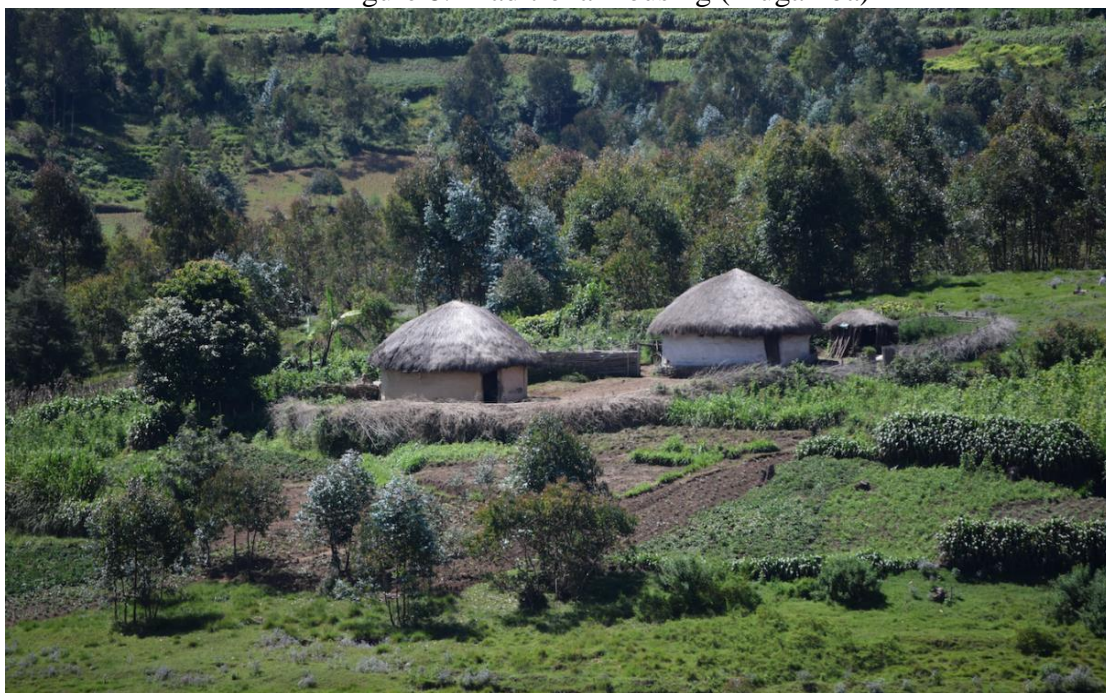
In 1986, at a time of structural adjustments programs that were imposed on many other African states to address their financial crisis, Burundi was doing well at the regional level. It benefited from a lean devaluation, with an external debt of \$70 per capita. This was not as good as Rwanda which, with its \$47 per capita indebtedness, managed to defer any devaluation and continued to benefit from the international donors' favour. Rwanda's performance outshone the Burundian authorities and increased the discontent of rural populations and producers on whom economic austerity measures were imposed.

Modernization under duress was equated in the producers' minds with the budget-intensive reproduction of bureaucratic monsters of which the Regional Development Societies were apt caricatures. Criticism focused on the authoritarian political-administrative straightjacket. One complaint highlighted the low profits derived, even in good times, from cash crops. Another took aim at the intense mobilization of the rural population to promote certain technocratic approaches — such as the villagization policy and especially the popularization of a number of agronomic themes: the thinning out of banana plantations, row seeding, etc. — which, in fact, jeopardized the food security of rural households. The third, explicitly political complaint concerned the inability to lay the foundations for an effective decentralization, not so much in favour of the provinces where the provincial planning commissions only replicated the authoritarian and hierarchical national model but, rather, in favour of the communes which were not for nothing called the "basic cells of development."



Thus, small producers did not benefit much from agricultural "modernization". The regime proved unable to ensure an equitable regional spread of the investments that were made and to establish an effective decentralization in the context of an authoritarian, omnipresent, and predatory bureaucratic framework.

Figure 8: Traditional housing (Mugamba)



More fundamentally, despite some notable efforts, the Bagaza regime did not want to confront the crucial blockage that was going to become decisive for the future of "ethnic" conflict, that is the opening up of channels of access to the cities for the rural youth who had massively benefitted from primary education. Access to secondary education and universities, integration into the civil service and the army, and hiring in the private and the parastatal economic sectors remained "ethnically" controlled. This blockage was not a deliberate strategy of social segregation but an impotence to counteract heavy trends enshrined in social practices and most deeply rooted among the managerial staff in general and the urban public service employees in particular.

Finally, despite rising criticism and opposition, the political debate remained tightly controlled. Freedom of expression fell victim to the fear that the political police and the security apparatus as a whole inspired. The [conflict with the Church](#) and the expulsion of missionaries that would come to seal the fate of the regime were only the most visible form of such excessive policing.

These practices and the inability to translate the stated objectives into action were not in and of themselves original. What really changed over the years of President Bagaza's rule was due to the increasing maturity of the urban and rural populations, and the political demands they voiced. Indeed, they raised issues such as corruption, democratization, alternations in power without a coup, electoral procedures, the role of assemblies, the election of communal administrators, and many more. It should be noted in this regard that the social benefits of peasants had declined with the departure of missionaries or their decreasing activities, a fact that called into question the willingness of state structures to finance social infrastructures and public goods according to the needs, and to appoint permanent and honest employees to ensure the maintenance work and the vital supply of, for instance, drugs and schoolbooks, among many other things.

Adding on to this disenchantment, the collapse of coffee prices on the world market in 1987 provided opponents with an argument to denounce financial misappropriations, irretrievable loans, as well as questionable industrial or engineering contracts that had been signed despite the tinkering economy. Clearly, President Jean-Baptiste Bagaza deluded himself with regard to his purported political

connections with the peasantry when he spoke at large participatory meetings on the hills. His words were often a far remove from the practices of the local authorities.

All of this came to a head on 3 September 1987, when Major Pierre Buyoya, who hailed from the same commune as Colonel Bagaza, seized power in a putsch.

### *5.3. The Third Republic of Major Pierre Buyoya (1987-1993)*

The coup d'état of 3 September 1987 was akin to a simple change of government. It was all about returning to the initial spirit of the Second Republic. Elements of continuity were not in short supply (among them, prominently, the composition of the Military Committee for National Salvation and of the first government of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic that was formed on 1 October 1987). Two important decisions marked the advent of the new regime: the release of many political prisoners and the denunciation of “greedy practices” that led to the arrest of members of the former government. These openings also freed space for the expression of claims for more democracy.

The baptism of fire for the new regime was not long in coming. In August 1988, in the north-east of the country, tensions between the population and the local authorities, heightened by the activism of pro-Hutu opponents who had found refuge in Rwanda, triggered anti-Tutsi massacres which, in turn, prompted a violent military crackdown: between 10,000 and 15,000 people were killed, and 60,000 others fled to Rwanda — the vast majority of the victims and refugees were Hutu. The management of this crisis laid bare major fault lines. For instance, the proportionate use of force against the Hutu populations that the minister of the Interior, Colonel Aloys Kadoyi, advocated for was is deliberately overstepped by the armed forces and the military on the spot. Similarly, radicals within the Hutu opposition militated in favour of armed self-defence while more moderate elements did not. Under pressure, the Presidency hastened to resolve the crisis in the two provinces by engaging in reconstruction and allowing for the return of almost all refugees as early as 1989. At the national level, a public debate about “national unity” accompanied the appointment, in October, of a government based on ethnic parity and led by a Hutu Prime Minister, Adrien Sibomana.



Figure 9: Prime Minister Adrien Sibomana

The transition sought by the Buyoya-Sibomana tandem allowed for considerable progress in demystifying the ethnic taboo and reintegrating opposition forces into the political life. The arrival of Hutu ministers in the government restored more regular competition between eminent personalities of both ethnic groups. Hutu notables now occupied a significant place in the trade. Crucial economic



sectors, the armed forces, and secondary and higher education remained tightly controlled ethnically and regionally, but important steps were taken with regard to transparency and the rule of law. The power of the executive allowed to contain the extremists. Still, the conquest of democratic rights and the learning of the rules of peaceful confrontation provoked enormous resistance from the political nuclei that controlled the major institutions of the state (army, justice, embassies) and/or had hitherto secured control of most of the resources of the state and thus of the country.



Figure 10: The first government of “National unity”

After five years of frantic political overtures (national commissions, [national charter](#), [constitution](#), [presidential and legislative elections](#), etc.) not only did the executive couple hold but the conduct of the elections of 1 June 1993 and the final — unexpected — victory of the opposition candidate were described in the international media as a strong sign of democratic vitality. It was the personal success of two men, and the collective victory of an entire people who elected their leaders for the first time in a democratic vote by universal suffrage. For the President and the Prime Minister, completing their terms in office regularly could already be considered a feat. Before that, in the history of independent Burundi, no Head of State or Prime Minister had ever left power of his own volition.

The successive government teams, which were open to new ministers eager to learn the ropes of power politics, had assimilated relatively rigorous principles (fighting corruption, setting up a Court of Auditors, etc.) and steered the national economy without excessive demagoguery while also introducing political competition, freeing the press, and, for the most part, guaranteeing human rights. In sum, they demonstrated that the country had personalities determined to silence the ethnic demons.

The election of a Hutu President, Melchior Ndadaye, and then of a parliament dominated by his FRODEBU supporters, were the final step of a transition process and return to civilian rule that could claim to be exemplary for Africa. The dignity of the outgoing team, the new President's firm commitments to respect human rights and democracy, a comprehensive political amnesty, and the initiation of a process to bring home the refugees from 1972, opened up prospects for lasting national reconciliation.

## 6. Civil War in the Wake of Military Coups (1993-1996)

### 6.1. *The bad losers*

On 3 July, one month after Melchior Ndadaye's election of and just before his inauguration, a first attempt to assassinate the new president demonstrated that president Buyoya's support from diehard Tutsi circles had been mainly due to his ability to delay or prevent the questioning of "real" privileges. The hatred directed by the same circles against the Hutu of UPRONA who were proponents of a peaceful strategy of democratic overtures was a measure of the profound sense of betrayal harboured by the losers over the electoral outcome.

The event clearly stood out but had only a limited impact. Among the population, no one doubted that the peasants' massive vote in favour of the FRODEBU had been a deliberate and weighty act. By not voting for UPRONA as the authorities asked them to do, they had taken the proclamation of democratic power at its word positing that they could bear the consequences of their vote.

In this context, President Ndadaye appointed a government of national unity led by a Prime Minister, Sylvie Kinigi, a Tutsi from the UPRONA party. During the three months of democratic transition before the assassination of President Ndadaye on 21 October, the two political blocs evolved in contradictory ways ([UN-GS, §42-45](#)). Within the FRODEBU, a rapid "culture of power" developed and distanced the party from the PALIPEHUTU, which had called upon its activists to vote for Ndadaye and FRODEBU. Conversely, within UPRONA, the multi-ethnic leadership was overwhelmed by new warlords denouncing an "ethnic coup d'état" and threatening to join the Tutsi extremist parties. For example, François Ngeze, a former Minister of the Interior and a Hutu, who was suspected of culpable sympathies towards the 3 July putschists, became the hero of the UPRONA meetings in August and a personal rival of President Ndadaye. He took the step from words to deeds on 21 October when he became, "by duty", the head of the National Salvation Committee set up by the putschists. Thus, he dragged with him into opprobrium and vindictiveness all of UPRONA'S Hutu.

Triggered by an apparent "improvisation" by the rank-and-file and non-commissioned officers, the coup d'état turned out to be politically devastating ([§.185-187](#)). At the end of October, the new administration, whose incoming office holders had not yet had the time to really take over, and even less so to implement the policy for which they had been elected, enjoyed a large national and international credit. The assassination at its helm seemed to confirm the pro-Hutu extremists' view that ethnic hatred was the alpha and omega of Burundian politics.

Because of the past traumas and their self-defence reflexes, FRODEBU voters, overwhelmingly in favour of change by democratic means, felt collectively in charge of defending the decapitated national institutions. As soon as the president's assassination was announced, "intensive intercommunal fighting broke out, affecting in particular the provinces of Ngozi, Bubanza and Kirundo. It is estimated that some 50,000 people, mostly Tutsi, were killed and a further 700,000 fled to Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zaire or were dispersed within Burundi. Devastation and destruction ensued" ([§.II.C; §.188-189](#)). The violence of the clashes and massacres against the Tutsi were no longer considered a suicidal uprising by isolated groups, as in 1965, 1969, 1972 or 1988, seeking to force the hand of fate, but as the expression of a determined political will ([§.189-198](#)).

The resistance of the rural populations, the rejection of civil society and the churches, the unanimous disavowal of the international community, and the existence of legalistic officers capable of breaking the army's esprit de corps were all decisive factors in making some of the seditious officers and UPRONA accomplices hesitant to fully commit. On 24 October, general staff officers noted the National Committee of Public Salvation's inability to control the country which was sinking into civil war. They called on the ministers who, for the most part, had taken refuge in the French Embassy's premises, to restore the legal order and resume their duties. As the president and vice-president of the National



Assembly had also been assassinated, Sylvie Kinigi was in charge of the interim and responsible for bringing to a halt the violence affecting several provinces of the country and neighbourhoods of the capital.



Figure 11: Monument to the President Ndadaye

#### *6.2. Two Powerless Presidents in the face of a “Creeping putsch” (1994-1996)*

On 13 January 1994, the National Assembly passed an amendment allowing the election of the Minister of Agriculture, Cyprian Ntaryamira (a co-founder of FRODEBU), as new president of the Republic ([UN-Report II.C](#)). Yet, because of the "shutdown" operations organized by the pro-Tutsi parties in Bujumbura and the armed operations against active guerrilla groups in some of the capital's neighbourhoods, a new government including all political forces was only formed on 11 February. Powerless in the face of violence, the new president remained in function only for a short time. He died alongside President Juvenal Habyarimana in the 6 April 1994 attack on the plane in Kigali which took them back from a regional summit in Dar-es-Salaam dedicated to the two countries. That night when they were informed of the death of Cyprian Ntaryamira, the president of the National Assembly, Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, and some civilian and military decision-makers saved Burundi from sinking into a tragedy similar to that was to unfold in Rwanda.

On [7 April at dawn](#), Burundi's national radio announced the appointment of Sylvestre Ntibantunganya as interim president. But on 18 April, the Constitutional Court invalidated this decision, demanding that it be taken based on a consensus of all political parties and then adopted by a vote of the National Assembly. This requirement served as pretext for yet another coup attempt, on 24 April, which was however quickly neutralized. Subsequently, heavily influenced by the Tutsi genocide and the RPF's victory in Rwanda, the Tutsi opposition parties, supported by large sectors of the army, openly questioned the legitimacy of the 1993 electoral process labelling it “a tyranny of numbers” that arithmetically advantaged the Hutu-dominated parties. Bitter negotiations with the opposition blocked the inauguration of Sylvestre Ntibantunganya until the signing of a "Government Agreement" on 3 October 1994 which deprived him of a large part of his constitutional powers.

Appointed Prime Minister, Anatole Kanyenkiko, a member of the opposition, immediately became a target for the Tutsi extremists who had taken control of UPRONA. They obtained his resignation in February 1995. The government formed on 1<sup>st</sup> March by Antoine Nduwayo failed to stop the overbidding war between extremists of all stripes.

Thus, at the end of March, under pressure from Tutsi militias supported by the military, several Hutu districts of Bujumbura were emptied of their population — its inhabitants fled to Zaire. The clear weakening of FRODEBU and president Ntibantunganya freed up political space for Hutu extremists<sup>23</sup>, who supported an armed struggle against the "Tutsi reconquest". Attacks, political assassinations, operations of "pacification" by the armed forces: for a year, these trivialized forms of political violence terrorized the population.

Placed de facto under the "protection" of the army, the president could neither impose himself nor contain the civil war in the making. Faced with armed forces and paramilitary groups fighting in the provinces of the interior, and then also in the capital, political leaders and national forces committed to peace could not protect citizens and not even ensure their own security. In this context of a "creeping putsch", the situation came to a head on 25 July 1996, just after the massacre of hundreds of displaced Tutsi by Hutu rebels in [Bugendana](#). Some expected Jean-Baptiste Bagaza to return to power, but it was Pierre Buyoya who imposed himself. President Ntibantunganya sought refuge in the U.S. Embassy. The putsch end-run an attempt led by Tanzania to deploy as a buffer force Ethiopian and Ugandan troops along the Zairean border, if not to control the actions of Burundi's military hierarchy.

### *6.3. The Heavy Human Toll of the "Democratic Transition"*

Between October 1993 and the return to power of Pierre Buyoya in July 1996, more than 600,000 Burundians sought refuge abroad. The flight of Hutu or Tutsi peasants was as much an expression of their will to survive as of a desire not to participate in the massacres. Initially, depending on the regions and the perpetrators of the killings, the refugees were of both ethnicities. After the ethnic cleansing of the capital in 1995 and the army's return to power in July 1996, almost all of them were Hutu. [But, even abroad, they were not safe.](#)

At the same time, there were hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs). In the days and weeks following President Ndadaye's assassination, the majority among them were Tutsi peasants taking refuge in urban centres under the army's protection in order to escape the vengeful fury of FRODEBU militants and Hutu populations. In 1995, the organization by pro-Tutsi activists of "shutdown" actions in Bujumbura and the concurrent clashes led to the cleansing of the capital's Hutu-majority neighbourhoods by the army. Bujumbura became a quasi-monoethnic city.

As during previous tragedies, these crimes went unpunished. At the international level, the conclusions of the [May 1994 UN preparatory mission](#) and the following [report of February 1995](#) led to a United Nations fact-finding mission which was deployed in Burundi in October 1995 "to establish the facts concerning the assassination of the President of Burundi on 21 October 1993, as well as the massacres and other serious acts of violence that followed." The [final report](#) which, in the words of its authors, was based [on "late" and "uncertain" investigations](#) analysed the strategies, crimes, and responsibilities of various political and military actors during the two weeks following the assassination of president Melchior Ndadaye. However, the report didn't go any further because Pierre Buyoya seized power 48 hours after the report was released at the United Nations.

## **7. From Total War to the Return of Peace (1996-2005)**

No tutelary power approved of the coup. Wait-and-see was the most widely shared attitude despite the declared hostility of the United States. The "Buyoya" solution objectively relieved the international community, who was unwilling to support any African military deployment. The reaction of the countries of the sub-region was openly hostile. A total embargo was put in place by all neighbouring countries on 31 July, with the backing of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The new government partially yielded to the OAU's demands by re-establishing the National Assembly and the political parties on 12 September 1996 but refused to open negotiations with the ousted representatives of power.

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<sup>23</sup> But also Tutsis whom occupied important ranks in the organization of the rebellion at its birth.

On the assumption that the national sentiment was hostile to the embargo, they accepted it as a consequence of their choice.

The same month, having reorganize and rejuvenated the armed forces, Buyoya embarked on a total war strategy against the various rebellions and regained control of country. Thereafter, the military regime launched a radical policy of regrouping Hutu peasants in army-controlled camps with a view to isolating Hutu guerrilla movements. At the end of 1996, despite the authorities' censorship, various counts estimated that between 500,000 and 600,000 people were rounded up in camps, and tens of thousands had fallen prey to hunger, disease and military violence.

Outside the national borders, Buyoya joined the Ugandan-Rwandan offensive in Zaire to clean up rebel bases in Zaire's Kivu provinces; the survivors fled to Tanzania in early February 1997. This policy allowed Buyoya to re-unite the people on his side and neutralize his opponents. Former President Bagaza was placed under house arrest. The main achievement of this course of action lay in the survival of the new power, which demonstrated the futility of external pressures. The Tanzanian authorities' stated support for the ousted FRODEBU leaders, however, caused tensions between the two countries. These tensions culminated in direct fighting between the Tanzanian and Burundian armies, in addition to the renewal of sanctions by the region's heads of state in September 1997.

### *7.1. The Forced Opening of a Negotiation Process (1997-2002)*

The gradual re-establishment of a functional administration throughout the territory was accompanied in January 1997 by a timid political overture in response to demands by the ousted majority parties and the countries in the sub-region.

The peace process promoted by the authorities comprised several components. The first consisted of popular "sensitization" meetings in the communes of the interior of the country. Whatever the participants' conviction, these media operations revealed the extreme weariness of the population after five years of civil war. Negotiations with rebel forces committed to armed struggle were the second part. But, satisfied as they were with the internal balance of power, the authorities did not expect much to come out of that. The third and most important component aimed at establishing an "internal partnership" between the various conflicting political forces.

After intense discussions, these forced agreed on a political platform with a timetable, a Transitional Constitutional Act adopted by the representatives in the National Assembly<sup>24</sup>, and on the establishment of a transitional government reintegrating FRODEBU ministers. An agreement signed by all parties provided for the opening of comprehensive negotiations and for a ceasefire, on 20 July 1998. The involvement of all political groups (including rebellions) led to the lifting of the regional embargo in January 1999.

While adherence to the Partnership enjoyed broad support within the official political sphere (government, parliament, parties), the rallying of opponents and the creation of a broad "National Convergence for Peace and Reconciliation" were mainly aimed at strengthening the weight of certain personalities in the internal power struggle between FRODEBU leaders and beyond. Thus, fighting between the rebel movements and the armed forces continued during the negotiations organized in Tanzania under, first, President Nyerere's mediation and, then, Nelson Mandela's stewardship. The Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Burundi, which was extended to new political groups, was signed on 28 August 2000.

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<sup>24</sup> Now enlarged to include all political forces that were not represented in 1993, the Transitional National Assembly increased from 81 to 121 members.





Figure 12: President Pierre Buyoya signs the Arusha Accords

The implementation of the agreement, in December 2000, was immediately stalled by a rebel offensive launched by the PALIPEHUTU-FNL. Although this offensive was stopped in extremis by the Rwandan army's massive intervention that cut it off from its rear-base in the Congo in February-March 2001, it still succeeded in infiltrating military elements into the northern suburbs of Bujumbura where they held out for three weeks. Having suffered heavy setbacks in the Congo, and faced with a very mobile internal guerrilla war, the Burundian army was gripped by doubt. A coup d'état carried out by non-commissioned officers on 18 April 2001 — neutralized within 48 hours — illustrates the unease among its troops and the institution's degraded image (abuses, corruption).

In May 2001, in addition to some 500,000 Burundian refugees in Tanzania, more than one million Burundians were either displaced or disaster-stricken.

### *7.2. The formation of a National Unity Government (2002-2005)*

The new [Constitution](#) of October 2001 paved the way for the inauguration in January 2002 of a Government of National Unity alongside a transitional parliament, extended to representatives of other movements but chaired, respectively, by FRODEBU and UPRONA personalities. An alternation at the end of an 18-month period stipulated that Domitian Ndayizeye (a Hutu of the FRODEBU) would succeed Pierre Buyoya for an equivalent period of time.

This highly symbolic handover of power took place on 30 April 2003, amidst the deployment of an African Union peacekeeping force of 2,800 soldiers. Domitian Ndayizeye dealt with the issue of concluding a ceasefire with the components of the Hutu rebellion that had been left out of the Arusha Agreement. The government's priority was to negotiate with the two rebel factions — the [National Liberation Forces](#) (FNL) and the [National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Defence Forces of Democracy](#) (CNDD-FDD) — that had continued to launch sporadic attacks against the army as well as civilians in different provinces.

In 2004, the National Transitional Assembly thus again welcomed [representatives of armed political movements](#). This recognition enshrined the military balance of power that now prevailed on the ground and enabled crucial progress on the issues of the release of political prisoners, the rehabilitation of victims, the reforms of the administration and the army, the creation of a special unit to protect the transitional institutions that would replace the South African contingent charged with that task, prior to the adoption of the [Constitution](#) of the new Republic in 2005 that was to be followed by the elections.



### *7.3. The Return of Peace during the First Term of the CNDD-FDD (2005-2010)*

In the 2005 elections, voters did not re-elect into power the FRODEBU party, presumably because they considered it in bad stead to implement the integration of Burundi's former armed forces (FAB) and ex-rebellions into a new, truly national army. The CNDD-FDD, the most powerful Hutu rebel movement, which was well poised to impose itself on both the regular army and the other former rebellions of the Hutu camp, won a [large majority in both Houses of Parliament](#). The parliament ultimately elected Pierre Nkurunziza President of the Republic.

What followed were five years of political settling-down, during which opposition parties were tearing each other apart while the CNDD-FDD established itself all over the country, though not without escaping a series of internal leadership crises and quarrels over resources drawn from its position in power between the party's military cadres and the groups that supported them. President Nkurunziza had little impact on these conflicts that eluded him. Using his personal charisma in countless contacts with rural dwellers, he embodied unity by default in the eyes of the population.

A few months before the end of the legislative mandate, an almost complete renewal of its candidates for the election and a tightening of the grip it held on the core military, allowed the CNDD-FDD to confront the verdict of the voters without much fear in the face of a divided opposition ([01. Analysis Notes 2009.09](#)).

In the 2010 local elections, CNDD-FDD candidates registered massive support from rural populations, who aspired to stability after 25 years of military rule and ten years of war. For the first time in the country's history, voters were called upon to cast their ballot at the constitutional deadline for fresh elections. The high turnout and massive scores obtained by the CNDD-FDD expressed real satisfaction with an incumbent power that had been able to appease ethnic divisions and to place the armed forces under the control of the executive. This “national reconciliation of the army with the people” was probably the determining factor in the CNDD-FDD's victory.



Figure 13: President Nkurunziza on electoral campaign

For their part disavowed, the opposition parties boycotted the rest of the process, even going as far as to ask their elected candidates to resign. But the majority of them refused throwing their support behind the CNDD-FDD in the national (legislative and presidential) elections before ultimately joining the ruling party's ranks ([02. Analysis Notes 2010.10](#)).

## 8. The Nkurunziza Era and the Consecration of the CNDD-FDD as the new Party-State (2010-2020)

The near-total absence of elected representatives from the opposition at the various echelons of representation gave the CNDD-FDD party almost exclusive power. Within the party, the "civilians" who took control of the communal and provincial administrations emancipated from the informal bodies of the CNDD-FDD (the "Militaries," the "Council of the Wise," etc.) as they were now drawing their legitimacy from the ballot boxes thanks to a quasi-plebiscite by voters of the rural communes. Elections there had been duly supervised by the activists of the League of Youth, the *Imbonerakure* ("those who see far"), as well as by elected MPs, who had been nominated candidates by the party's grass-roots "hillside assemblies". The unexpected scale of the victory boosted both activists and the party leadership. They immediately announced that they were committed to turning the 2015 election into an even bigger landslide victory than the one in 2010. The management of local problems, the strengthening of the supervision of the population, the structuring and the permanent mobilization of the party's activists and cadres became a priority in pursuit of their goal — to retain the full power ([03. Analysis Notes 2011.09](#)).

### 8.1 *Becoming "the first democracy in the world to receive a mandate by almost all voters" (2010-2015)*

The gamble to become the world's first, almost unanimously acclaimed democracy was not out of reach when peace prevailed in Burundi, the various opposition forces had self-dissolved, "national reconciliation" was reflected in the administrations and the CNDD-FDD party by a conduct and policies that were freed from ethnic distrust, and rural populations benefited from social programs improving their education and health. From this point of view, the armed forces' exemplary integration was central in highlighting the enduring political achievements of the Arusha process.

Though the passions, traumas and fears stemming from recurrent clan, regional and ethnic conflicts still weighed on the memories of Burundians, these deadly cleavages were now no longer at the heart of tensions, particularly among the younger generations who longed for peace and pinned their high hopes for a return to democracy to the ballot boxes in the 2005 and 2010 elections.

Similarly, the citizens' public expression unshackled itself, and Burundi became a regional reference for [free media](#). No longer did politicians monopolize the airwaves, now journalists were organizing live debates with the people in "the back of beyond", on the hills in the interior of the country.

In 2012, during the commemorations of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence, the "synergy of public and private media" [[04. Analysis Notes 2012.03](#)] organized [unprecedented and strong exchanges on negotiated peace, national unity, the new integrated armed forces, the role of churches and civil society organizations](#). Similarly, in 2015, the four former heads of state explained at length, again live, [their respective records](#), generating record audiences throughout the country. For the first time since his eviction, J.-B. Bagaza spoke publicly about his reign and the entire country came to halt listening to what he had to say. Proud of his achievements, he nonetheless recognized violations of freedoms — a cathartic moment both for him and millions of listeners "on the hills".



Figure 14: Presidents Jean-Baptiste Bagaza , Pierre Buyoya, Sylvestre Ntibantunganya and Domitien Ndayizeye

But even then, journalists in their diversity had to compensate for the impotence of political debaters ([05. Analysis Notes 2013.01-2015.01 Médias](#)) either without popular support, as far as the "opponents" were concerned, or too busy consolidating their stronghold on their constituencies and their political future for those who controlled various spheres of power.

Triumphantly re-elected in 2010, it took Pierre Nkurunziza two years to oust several members from the party's leadership [[06. Analysis Notes 2012.09](#)], set up a hand-picked team devoted to him, and ensure effective control of the *Imbonerakure* youth — made up of soldiers demobilized after the CNDD-FDD came to power in 2005 — who were selected by the party to carry out various political and administrative tasks. The *Imbonerakure* then became the instrument of close control of the populations to ensure the continuity of the CNDD-FDD as a *de facto* single party.

In April 2012, after the election of Pascal Nyabenda as president of the party, the new leadership shored up its bases within the police, the army and public administrations. It then vowed to structure intellectual circles, including journalists and academics. Pierre Nkurunziza's most loyal supporters trained these groups of young activists, who would then bypass the local administration, the police, or the judiciary and directly invoke the authority of the party leadership or the services of the Presidency to prevail. The way they functioned as a parallel power structure brings to mind the Rwagasore Youth of UPRONA under the former military regimes.

The youths of the CNDD-FDD were establishing themselves as a decisive political-military force allowing Pierre Nkurunziza to position himself as the centrepiece of the power apparatus and thus also as the party's unavoidable candidate vis-à-vis the two other forces likely to compete with him (the Police) or to oppose him (the National Defence Forces, FDN) invoking the Constitution. Either of these forces, thanks to their powerful positions and supporters, could have presented alternative presidential candidates. It is also clear that most general staff officers saw themselves first and foremost as guarantors of the constitutional order, above political competitions.

Pierre Nkurunziza's most important achievement during his second term was to build a fully dedicated support force within the party and to strengthen the Special Brigade for the Protection of the Institutions (BSPI) under his direct command. In this way, the President could play on par, or even outperform, the other two political-military forces.

In ten years at the helm of Burundi's institutions, he incrementally changed the balance of power between the governing bodies and the party's components. Having finally succeeded in concentrating in his hands the tools and resources of power, it seemed unbearable for the President to renounce his prerogatives ([07. Analysis Notes 2014.03- 2015.02](#)) and Chronology 2014 *infra*. All the more so as he felt that he still had to go one last important step further to ensure the long-term sustainability of the

CNDD-FDD's power. This involved profound changes of the Constitution and its dissociation from the Arusha Accords.<sup>25</sup>

Nkurunziza's stubbornness to remain in power, then shared by most of the region's residents, obliged him — as the newest member to have joined the presidential club — to hold his own among the revolutionary or progressive "New Leaders" of Central and East Africa, patented and recidivist gerontocrats who amended their Constitution to run for new mandates. As it turned out, the electoral calendar had the least experienced head of state go first. He triggered an earthquake before achieving his aim by dint of force. His amateurism contrasted with the professionalism shown by his peers in the region!<sup>26</sup>

### *8.2. The earthquake of Pierre Nkurunziza's third term and the generational divide*

The incumbent's total control of the election campaign that no other candidate or party thought possible to challenge was blown to bits in an unexpected scenario which threatened the regime itself. The popular mobilization since the announcement of the third-term candidacy of the outgoing president on 25 April 2015, and the failed putsch of 13 May as well as the subsequent violent repression, laid bare the complexity of solidarity and fractures within the armed forces, as well as the structural conflict between the army and the police.

But the scale of the protests, and the protesters' stamina, originated in deeper economic, social, and political frustrations. The protest openly targeted the CNDD-FDD cadres and activists who, after ten years of struggle, had governed the country for an equivalent period of time during which they had arrogated themselves undivided political and economic control. Even more than in 2010, the elites still had not assimilated the rules of democratic competitions: cohabitation, alliance, alternation. Violence and repression marked the opening of the election campaign. The CNDD-FDD justified this muscular approach with security concerns and the constant reaffirmation of its "democratic" legitimacy in the face of political opposition that was still ill-prepared.

For all political forces, the disconnect with the younger generation was total: the ones who were 20 years old when they voted in 2010 had only been born when Ndadaye was murdered. Their lives had been marked by war and the rebel fighters (CNDD and then FNL) who held the hills at night. They expected the return of peace to re-found political life not concerning past heroes but plans for the future. However, in 2015, the generational divide deepened. Obsessed with his personal score and the majority he needed to reshape the institutions, Nkurunziza played the card of anti-urban populism, anti-elitism, of hopes transcended by religiosity to lessen his impotence in the face of the frustrations of young people.

While intense mobilization had ensured that rural populations had obtained minimal basic benefits of education and health, there had been few tangible results in agricultural production, commercial activity, living standards, and employment, even as land constraints were increasing. No production sector was driving growth or absorbing a significant labour force. This economic lethargy and the ruling elites' managerial weaknesses caused a profound disenchantment that the authorities refused to acknowledge.

This impotence was not unique to this regime. But in 2015, the level of expectations of the post-Arusha generation had changed. This generation's formative experiences had been a broad debate of all Burundian realities, which had covered all spheres and provinces of the country and made possible the return of peace and the political emancipation of an entire people. It was also the generation of freedom of expression. It had accompanied the development of independent media and aspired to democracy without having really tasted it. The post-Arusha generation could not bear the stifling of public liberties and the increasing authoritarianism imposed by the ruling party during the election campaign. That is why, on 19 February 2015, when Bob Rugurika, the director of the African Public Radio (RPA), the

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<sup>25</sup> It should be remembered that the pro-Hutu armed rebellion movements were not involved in its development and had to recognize its provisions in order to be involved in the transition process and integrated into the new constitutional framework.

<sup>26</sup> Like the Ugandan, Rwandan or Congolese Presidents in power since 1971, 2000, 2001...



most listened to in the country, was released from prison, [the population in jubilation and prayer was massed](#) all along the 50 kilometres of his return from his place of detention to the capital-city.



Figure 15: The triumphant arrival of Bob Rugurika in Bujumbura (19 February 2015)

This manifestation would remain engraved in the collective memory, all the more so as this was the second time (cf. [December 15, 2014](#)) since the CNDD-FDD had come to power that protesters spoke out with no fear of the police who didn't show up to boot. On those days, political and civil society activists overcame their fear of repression and paved the way for further transgressions to impose respect for the freedoms of expression, assembly, and demonstration during the campaign. Voting was still a very recent conquest, a rare act which was taken seriously.

On 25 April 2015, as soon as the third presidential candidacy was confirmed, these new urban and rural generations, Hutu and Tutsi, all political hues combined proclaimed their rejection of an authoritarian system of governance claiming never-ending rule without citizen control. A situation which was similar to that experienced by their elders under previous military regimes. This was the meaning of the rallying cry of the protesters, *Si ndi umuja* ["I am not a slave"] which they had taken from a homily of the Bishop of Gitega in December 2014. It was a totally new [ethical claim](#) that leaders could not understand.

The demonstrators — unemployed workers, the urban 'precariat', idle rural migrants, jobless students or graduates — denounced a power unable to meet their aspirations but obsessed with the annihilation of those who opposed their perpetuation in power. At the end of May, there was no longer any dialogue or mediation. The exiled opposition stood by its positions while the security forces took over entire neighbourhoods.



Figure 16: Scenes of riots in Bujumbura, April 2015

In June, an *ad hoc* electoral commission proposed a new electoral calendar. A series of elections, heavily influenced by the party in power, were organized. The radicalization of the official campaign led by the CNDD-FDD, which focused on denouncing the putschists of the 13 May coup and assimilated any manifestation of opposition to insurgency, provoked a vote of fear among the rural population that was cut off from any reliable source of information. It was a deterrent fear, while the opposition called for a boycott [*cf.* [09. Analysis notes 09.2015](#)]. It turned out to be a timely for the CNDD-FDD, allowing the party to reach the pourcentage needed to free itself from constitutional constraints and the stipulations of the Arusha Accords, the ultimate target of the “re-foundation of the Republic.” In June and July, after elections “[neither free nor credible](#)” according to the UN, the CNDD-FDD exceeded the two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. Pierre Nkurunziza was re-elected with 69%.

### 8.3. Pierre Nkurunziza’s last term – one too many (2015-2020)

The composition of the first government formed after the elections clearly showed that a security-based option had been chosen. All key positions were manned with generals and police commissioners. Among the civilians, five ministers from the ranks of the National Liberation Forces (NLF) were appointed, including Agathon Rwasa, who became first Vice-President of the National Assembly in exchange for an opportunistic rallying that allowed him to save his support basis and his popularity [*cf.* [10. Analysis notes 2015.09](#)].

On the diplomatic front, Burundi's spiral of violence was [inflaming tensions with Rwanda](#), which saw tens of thousands of Burundian refugees pour across the border, an issue that durably undermined the promising regional alliances that were taking form and shape with the support of South Africa and Tanzania. In October 2017, Burundi withdrew from the [International Criminal Court](#)<sup>27</sup> and [closed the UN Human Rights Office in March 2019](#). The country had become disreputable again.

Inside Burundi, the brutal security order established after the 2015 coup [was not relinquished](#). No important medium- or long-term task, or even just a cause for mobilization undergirded or justified the

<sup>27</sup> A [withdrawal that does not affect the Court’s jurisdiction](#) over crimes allegedly committed there in [2015-16](#).



excessive personalization of the regime, and monopoly on power, that the the CNDD-FDD claimed for an indeterminate period of time.

All the while, the mismanagement was getting worse. Even with competent cadres, the CNDD-FDD couldn't restore economic growth, give work to the younger generation, and put an end to the plundering of public resources. Falling exports, capital flight, inadequate infrastructure maintenance and drastic cuts in social benefits would have been enough by themselves to discourage international aid. The sanctions imposed by donors, lenders, investors, and markets were there for all to see, and so were Burundi's "associate corruptors", particularly China. Largely insensitive to political contingencies in business relations, their main reference was the guarantee of their investments' stability.

In March 2018, Pierre Nkurunziza was named "[Supreme Guide of Patriotism](#)", just before the adoption in May of a constitution safeguarding the main achievements of the [Arusha Peace Accords](#) in terms of formal representation.<sup>28</sup> The new dispensation allows the president to seek two more seven-year terms, thus allowing him to remain in power until 2034 ([like Paul Kagame in Rwanda](#))! The only concession that was made, in March 2019, was for Agathon Rwasa — already associated with the government — to be finally given legal recognition of his party, the National Council for Freedom (CNL). As a consequence, [the CNL could partake in the 2020 elections](#).

At the end of this third term, the dismal context eventually forced the leaders of the CNDD-FDD to push towards the exit a President who had become "unpresentable" in the face of the growing challenges and the regional and international isolation of the country. In January 2020, Pierre Nkurunziza renounced his candidacy in exchange for a golden retirement coupled with a guarantee of impunity. General Évariste Ndayishimiye became the party's candidate. An astute main, who had remained in the background, he was by then probably the only choice susceptible to be accepted by his peers.

Opposition groups also contributed to popular disenchantment. Unable to recover since their boycott of the 2010 elections, the popular movement of 2015 had eluded them. Grouped in the National Council for the Respect of the Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Burundi and the Rule of Law (CNARED), but divided among themselves and powerless, the exiled leaders finally engaged in scattered negotiations with the CNDD-FDD in 2019 to return home and try to campaign. Their bases were siphoned off by the CNDD-FDD and the National Council for Freedom (CNL) of Agathon Rwasa. None of them could influence the electoral process which was dominated by the unequal confrontation between the powerful Party-State and the main opposition party that had been active inside the country but whose activists and cadres were harassed, if not arrested or even murdered.

The [election campaign was very tense](#). The population was supervised by the *Imbonerakure* Youths and forced to finance the official party's campaign. The high voter turnout gave the main opposition candidate hope that, in the ballot boxes' secrecy, the desire of the electorate for change would have been expressed. No one believed the [results that were finally validated](#), but on all sides, realism prevailed. Alongside a very explicit [statement by the Catholic bishops](#), the heads of diplomatic missions accredited in Burundi took note of the provisional results granting General Évariste Ndayishimiye two-thirds of the vote and encouraged, like the African Union and the United Nations, all actors to preserve peace. [Agathon Rwasa](#) denounced an "electoral masquerade," [presumably](#) proven, and his party filed appeals without any illusion about the outcome. Potentially strong and legitimate, but with no position in the state apparatus and hence powerless, the CNL was looking for a new strategy.

On June 8, 2020, the [unexpected death of Pierre Nkurunziza](#) significantly changed the scope of the transition. After taking office on 23 June, the new President of the CNDD-FDD appointed as Prime Minister Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni (previously Minister of Public Security) and as Minister of the

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<sup>28</sup> Ethnic parity (50%-50%) in the Army and Police, in the Senate, where there is also gender parity; 60% Hutu and 40% Tutsi in the National Assembly and the Government, approval of the main appointments by the Senate). The main abandonment concerns the withdrawal of the National Intelligence Service of the Defence and Security Corps with an obligation of ethnic parity of its members.

Interior Gervais Ndirakobuca (until then head of the National Intelligence Service), in other words: the two generals who had been in charge of public security.



Figure 17: New government's swearing-in on 30 June 2020

These appointments excluded from the outset any overture and bestowed key positions on enriched members of the nomenklatura. In the face of negative international reactions, special emphasis laid on the fight against corruption was aimed at [restoring the regime's image](#). Other announcement effects or openings followed. On 15 August 2020, the President and his government showed up in Gitega for the celebration Assumption by the Catholic bishops, well known as firm defenders of public freedoms and peace. Journalists from the *Iwacu* press group were released and the representatives of all political parties received greetings at the end of the year celebrations. On January 25, 2021, after the renewal of the CNDD-FDD's governing bodies during an extraordinary party congress, President Ndayishimiye urged his followers to "be at the forefront" in the implementation of the national program to fight corruption. On 19 June 2021, the anniversary of his appointment, he delivers [first assessments](#) of his achievements and calls on every Burundian to be personally [co-creator of a new and beautiful Burundi](#). In August, he fustigated yet again the corruption that plagued the country, this time targeting the Burundian judiciary... These promises were intended above all for international [bodies](#) and donors who were waiting for energetic decisions from the authorities to remedy the country's bankruptcy.

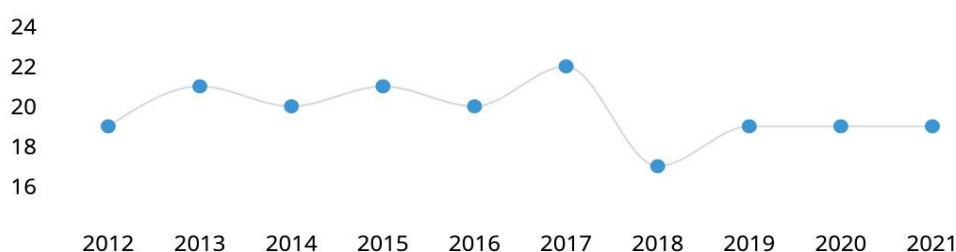


Figure 18 : [Corruption Perceptions Index Burundi 2021](#) Score Change 2012-2021<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> A country's score is the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 means very corrupt and 100 means very clean. Ranked in 2020, 165th out of 180 countries analyzed in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, it drops to 169th place in 2021 (168th place in the latest 2019 [Doing Business](#) ranking).



## 9. Structural Constraints and Democratic Aspirations

Indeed, remedial action were urgently needed. While the Burundian State controlled all powers and resources, regimented the daily life of citizens, had no longer has internal "enemies" beyond its control, Burundi was marginalized vis-à-vis its neighbour states, discredited internationally, its economy was moribund, and poverty at its highest level. It was the evidence of this paradoxical diagnosis that emerged from the evaluation of the three governance terms of the CNDD-FDD. While forced labour and taxes imposed on impoverished populations were reaching upper limits, managerial impotence and economic hardship were pushing the country to levels hitherto unmatched at the international level. This was not a temporary epiphenomenon since the GDP, which was already very low in 2005 with \$798 per capita, continued to decline after 15 years of CNDD-FDD management: \$751 in 2019, \$731 in 2020..., i.e. three times less than the per capita GDP in Rwanda.<sup>30</sup>

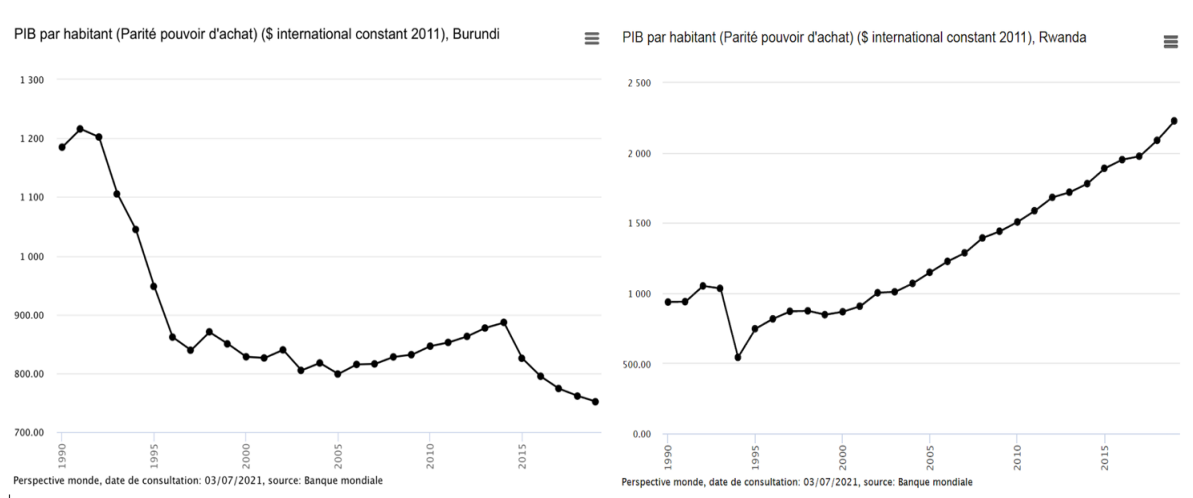


Figure 19: [Burundi 1993-2019 GDP per capita \(\\$Constant International PPP of 2011\)](#)

World Bank International Comparison Program Database

Already ranked by the IMF, in 2013 and 2014, the second poorest country in the world according to its GDP per capita, Burundi ranked lowest in 2015 and returned to second worst place in 2019, before it became again the lowest-ranked country in 2020 with a new contraction in economic activity of 3.2%! The IMF's recent debt forgiveness of US\$7.6 million does not solve the structural problem of Burundi's public debt. From 8.3% of GDP in 2019, the public accounts deficit widened to 9.5% in 2020, and public debt increased from 45% of GDP to 65% between 2017 and 2020.

Other elements such as the UNDP [Human Development Index](#), which, in addition to GDP, take into account elements of individual and collective well-being (longevity, level of education and inequalities) also attest to the impressive deterioration of the country's ranking: 138th out of 189 countries in the world in 1990 and 1995, 169th in 2000, 182th in 2005, 180th in 2010 and 2015, 185th in 2019 and 2020. Certainly, the impact of the civil war weighs on Burundi's performance, and the recent international economic situation amplifies the constraints. But this does not explain why in almost all economic and social areas Burundi's ranking is among the lowest in the world, though no new disaster or additional [constraints](#) can be invoked.

<sup>30</sup> This indicator illustrates the importance of a country's economic activity and the size of its generated wealth. In constant dollars, it is the most suitable for comparing economies with each other and across the years since the values are all reduced to the same reference year. In terms of international comparisons, this indicator is all the more relevant because it introduces the so-called PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) correction. The differences in purchasing power between the different currencies are then taken into account. Finally, to the extent that the size of the population is taken into account, it gives a very accurate picture of the wealth of a country. See World Bank, [other data](#).

On the contrary, taking precedence since 2012 over traditional exports of coffee and tea, which used to account for more than half of the country's export earnings, gold and more recently rare earths (imported by the United States) have become [the country's main export items](#). Potentially promising, but fatal for farmers on devastated land, it is however difficult, if not impossible, to accurately assess the exact economic impact of the mining sector, due to [the overall lack of transparency](#) and the complexity of the arrangements between [multiple partners](#).

### *9.1. The "people of the hills" facing their elites*

In the wake of the May 2015 failed coup, the integrated armed forces' co-management came to an end. The same is true for the mechanisms of checks and balances that had prevailed between the army and the police. As a result, the newly promoted rebel officers, who emerged victorious from the putsch, met no resistance when they embraced the practice of "financial catch-up" to compensate their "career delays" by comparison with their senior Tutsi colleagues and graduates of military schools. These practices, hitherto contained or concealed, evolved into a competition for personal enrichment commensurate to the powers they had at their disposal.

A Burundian adage says that peasants rise power "through their children", with the distance of a generation, via school, seminaries, and, in this case, the army that fought the war of liberation.



Figure 20: Burundian family

In a country familiar with authoritarianism that has been led since independence by successive military regimes that have appropriated the state for the benefit of private interests, the peasants' own children who make a good living from their parents' hard labour in the name of their status as liberators of the "Burundian people".

In doing so, they betray, without compensation in return, the people of the hills from which they came and who mostly sustained their struggle. This rupture is potentially deeper than ethnic and regional divides. Imagining that it had brought to power leaders from its own ranks, the peasantry was fully aware that beyond the atomization and inorganization of the workers of the land, for which it bears responsibility, it was through the very forms of exclusion from state power that derived its political inexistence as a class of small producers.





Figures 21-22-23-24 : Peasants (Muramvya) - Markets in Bujumbura

Yet the peasantry still provides almost all the members and all resources for the party-state whose decisions, even regarding the country's agrarian policy, are taken without the peasants input and, possibly, against their will for the benefit of the state's representatives who are selected by the current urban elites.

Indeed, under its various public or private false names, the state has established itself as an exclusive economic operator. Its officials and, in concrete terms, the party-state cadres decide on direct investments, and allot them politically strategic regions; they manage the productive interventions of the state. These interventions are designed outside the peasantry and almost always based on programs implemented under heavy constraints for them (land requisition and expulsion of the customary occupiers, authoritarian supervision, the tight control of upstream and downstream production...). At no stage do the authorities seek the agreement of producers outside the application of national and local priorities and "national watchwords" whose implementation at grass-roots level is ensured by the party through rigorous supervision: multiple contributions, community development work, youth financing, political animation meetings, not to mention the various forms of productive and administrative organization derived in different areas of activity ("cooperatives", health care centres...), including at the basic levels where party delegates, often peasants, perform only subordinate functions. All in all, the "peasant" is truly instrumentalized for externally defined and imposed purposes. He can only be called out for lack of understanding, under-performance, ill will, or derogation.

However, in Burundi, the peasants' acute awareness of the devaluation of their way of life and their dispossession is based on a rather particular ideological configuration because, unlike many African countries where agriculture is moribund, the daily submission of the domination is suffered is

compensated for by the awareness of massive potential power, if not of the peasantry as a class, at least of the peasant order.

This pent-up power is authentic even if it is expressed indirectly by setting limits to what state agents can exact in their attempt to boost production and ideological animation.

In a country where the state cannot live without the labour provided by the cultivators of the land (85% of the population) in the form of products and export earnings, this obligatory link and their retreat on their plots maintains the peasants' feeling of "holding" the state; a feeling that is widely shared despite the group's own differentiation. It constantly reactivates traditional rural values in certain aspects that take on an almost "totalitarian" dimension at an ideological level. It derives its strength from the centuries-old feeling of domination of nature and of the integration into a ritualized cosmic order that appears in the eyes of the land workers as the foundation of true power and the source of true wealth and in fact, for many of them in the face of misery, constitutes their ultimate line of defence.

## *9.2 Unavoidable Requirements*

In response to meagre agricultural resources due to the declining average size of farms at the accelerated pace of land pressure (425 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> in 2020 with a total population of 11.9 million inhabitants)<sup>31</sup> and transmissions (with an average farm size now below 0.5 ha), most producers reach the limits of the intensification that is required to cover their basic needs. This is a daily imperative shared by all producers over almost the whole territory and makes the financial drain and compulsory work "carried out in the interest of the people" increasingly unbearable.

There are two ways forwards. The first, which already prevails in Rwanda, is that of a subjugated and impoverished peasantry that is not allowed organic polyculture and must produce "under contract" on its own land, "enriched" with chemical fertilizers, crops to be commercialized under the omnipresent tutelage of the political technical cadres of the party-state. The peasantry thus covers the needs of the national market and maximizes export earnings. Impoverished, small producers no longer even have the opportunity to constantly push the limits of "intensification" and self-sufficiency on their own plots. Apart from efficiency and performance, this authoritarian labour model is already partly in place in Burundi and has always met there with resistance from land workers who believed in establishing "democracy" in June 1993. But already back in 1993, they were abused by their supervisors, who were also inspired by the Rwandan model of coaching and tutelary agricultural extension services.<sup>32</sup> The peasants warmed over the democratic hopes in 2005, then in 2010, and again in 2015...

The second way forward would finally consider the lessons of the past and the imperatives of the present. Having experienced since Independence, with much pain, all forms of divisions that can be exploited by authoritarian regimes, the peasants now know that their lot is not the result of any fatality but of struggles between elites for the capture of their resources.

Only the re-appropriation of the state, that would re-legitimize it in the eyes of the great mass of producers, could contribute to freeing energies and resources that are currently diverted from their purpose. This implies that peasants emancipate themselves from co-opted administrative and economic bureaucracies, under various guises, have appropriated power and wealth by force since independence, first for the benefit of a Tutsi and then of a Hutu elite. That is to say: peasants finally need to impose themselves through free and credible elections as self-organized citizens responsible for their reproduction and the future of a democratic country.

This might seem an illusion but, believing that the authoritarianism of predatory elites can prevail forever, is just as much of an illusion.

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<sup>31</sup> 11.5 million inhabitants in 2019, either an annual growth rate of 3.12% and a daily population gain of 995! At this rate, Burundi would reach 50 million inhabitants in 2098... (cf. ISTEEBU/UNFPA, *Projections démographiques 2010-2050*, Bujumbura, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> The opposition between these two approaches to autonomy or guardianship had been at the heart of lively debates during the "Workshops on Agricultural Policy" organized by the Ministry of Agriculture on 20-23 April 1993.



## 10. Overcoming “Divisions Inherited from the Past”

Indeed, getting out of misery and tomorrow’s uncertainty is a strong demand shared by a very large majority of rural and urban populations in Burundi. No one there, especially not the young generations and, among them, above all women, can be assured of an inhabitable future. This double requirement transcends the clan, ethnic and regional divisions inherited from the past.

Indeed, although the Constitution recognizes equality between men and women, the National Assembly has refused since 2004 to put on its agenda a bill that would establish equality between men and women in matters of succession, particularly in terms of land law. Thus, the President of the National Assembly declared on November 5, 2021 that on this issue "it was found that it was mainly educated women who talked about it and who wanted to hide Burundian culture. Then, invoking the latter, he did not hesitate to declare that satisfying this right would trigger clashes in Burundi worse than political and ethnic divisions: ['If people are currently killing each other, what will happen once this law is applied?'](#).

Thus, the demands for the emancipation of the younger generations and in the first place the rejection of gender discrimination that would allow the descendants of both sexes to inherit from their parents would today be more redoubtable than the clan, ethnic and regional divisions of the past!

It is in this depressed context that it is up to the President of the Republic to organize in mid-2022 the double commemoration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "events of 1972", according to the formula adopted by the Burundian Senate in May-June 2021 to debate the qualification of the “genocide of the Hutus of 1972”, which is certainly the most dramatic episode of violence in the independent history of the country.



Figure 5: Invitation to Senate Debates

What is at stake in this qualification and, more generally, the scope of these commemorations will leave a lasting mark on the Burundian memorial debates and the future of this wounded country. Will it be a welcome opportunity for the new president to enhance the political debate and put his stamps on the beginning of his mandate or... a new pitfall?

### *10.1 A buried debate recently revived*

On this essential point, as various speakers pointed out during the Senate debates, it is indeed up to the international or national judicial bodies to decide on the characterization of these recurring mass crimes.

One can certainly question the strictly political motives that have blocked at various moments more consequential international judicial procedures but everything suggests that the revival<sup>33</sup> of such procedures seems at present very unlikely. At the national level too, they will give rise to much debate. Without harking back to a distant past, let us recall that the provisions of the Arusha Agreements established in 2000 (and redefined in 2005 by the UN Security Council) provided, within the framework of transitional justice, for the establishment of a Special criminal court with an independent prosecutor. But the current authorities have persistently postponed the installation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and refused to set up this court.

Thus, in April 2010, while the Ministry of Justice, Jean-Bosco Ndikumana, had transmitted to president Nkurunziza a report based on the national consultations that had taken place at the end of 2009 in the interior of the country, this report has remained confidential. The willingness to open a public debate is therefore uncertain. Some months later, the General Secretary of the CNDD-FDD party, Gélase Ndirabirabe, has stated that he did not see the immediate interest: reconciliation first, possibly truth-justice afterwards; the president's diplomatic adviser, Joseph Ntakirutimana, has said the opposite<sup>34</sup>, but the president himself was faced with a very delicate issue placed in front of him because of personal charges.

Finally, in order to appease all the officers of the newly "integrated armed forces", who could be accused of war crimes, the two highest state authorities from the CNDD-FDD and Uprona (the President and First Vice-President) have jointly blocked the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms and, without any public debate whatsoever, erected a monument in Gitega whose inscription "Never again" anticipated a hypothetical national reconciliation.

In September 2011, the issue of commemorations to be celebrated in the near future was raised by the CNDD-FDD. The programming as then envisaged included the following month the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Prince Rwagasore (13 October 1961, just after his appointment as Prime Minister); in April-July 2012, the triple celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Prince Ntare V Ndizeye on 29 April 1972; the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inter-ethnic massacres and the genocide of the Hutu elites and, on 1<sup>st</sup> July, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence. This was followed on 21 October 2013, by the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye; on 6 April 2014, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of President Cyprien Ntaryamira during the attack on the presidential plane in Kigali; and, on 18 October 2015, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the attempted coup against the monarchy. This anticipated programming reflected the desire to involve all the leaders who were victims of national divisions, including the royal family. For each of these events, "specific memorial messages" had been defined and the "inevitable resurgences" anticipated. The multiplication of political gestures of "national reconciliation" thus replaced the work of truth and justice incumbent on an evanescent CVR.

In the absence of a firm institutional commitment, this proactive scenario experienced various avatars (cf. [20120328 CVR RCN Burundi](#)). The commemoration "Rwagasore" did not mobilize much beyond UPRONA and some [NGOs](#). As for Mwambutsa IV Bangiricenge, buried in Switzerland, the family opposed the repatriation of his remains and in 2017 the [Swiss justice](#) ruled in their favour. For his son, Ntare V Ndizeye, [the search for the body was unsuccessful in 2012](#) and the Baganwa always ask at each birthday for the resumption of the search and the prosecution of his killers. In 2013, the celebration of

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<sup>33</sup> Recall us call that several United Nations reports that have not been followed up mention in the list of mass massacres qualified as genocide "the massacre of Hutus by the Tutsis in Burundi 1965 and in 1972" ([UN Report, p.9, 18-19](#)) as well as "acts of genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi minority on October 21, 1993 and the following days" ([Report, 1996](#), p. 74).

<sup>34</sup> Personal notes from interviews of 9 and 14 September 2010.

the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of President Ndadaye turned abruptly, ten days before the ceremony, into a shocking operation of mutual white-washing and distortion of the facts that happened between the head of state and its predecessor who was concerned by the issue...

The problem in Burundi lies in the fact that the crimes committed are the responsibility of regimes that have succeeded each other over the long term in a situation of recurrent impunity. In addition, the system of power set up by the Arusha Accords is at least theoretically, beyond the formal representation according to the electoral outcomes, a "distributed" power that does not designate a winner or a loser even though crimes have been committed, as always, by the various camps in the struggle for power.<sup>35</sup>

Itself a major player in this history, the CNDD-FDD cannot demonize those who fought it, nor grant itself impunity for its rightful share in the crimes committed during the war of liberation. The work of truth and memory, like that of justice, can only be accomplished collectively and contradictorily. Their admissibility lies in this. The credibility and strength of the truths stated and shared, as well as the legitimacy of a judicial decision, are neither imposed nor decreed. This is the price to pay for the truth to be received.

While since coming to power, the authorities have always tightly controlled the management of the past and the expression of memories remembered, they know perfectly well that saying the sufferings of the past and freeing themselves from fears are also springs of political mobilization that they intend to control.

Finally voted on April 17, 2014, [the law creating the TRC](#) unanimously endorsed the refusal of the judicial component. Meanwhile, the populations who had learned to "live together" in the rhythm of successive powers without imagining that anyone would respond to their distress have shown exceptional political maturity when they expressed with strength and clarity their desire for peace and national unity in order to strengthen the foundations of democracy and consolidate emerging freedoms.

This is why, despite the strong commitment of Bishop Jean-Louis Nahimana, at the head of the TRC from 2014 to 2018, the so-called ["Divided Truths Commission"](#)<sup>36</sup> proved powerless to overcome the globalizing "ethnic memories" that mask individual responsibilities. His successor, Pierre-Claver Ndayikayire, was explicitly mandated by the authorities to exhume the mass graves, carry out an inventory of the places of massacres and collect many testimonies in view of the commemoration of the next 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "events of 1972" (cf. [Report 2021](#)).



Figures 26-27: Activities of Truth, and Reconciliation Commission (Iwacu, 2020)

These investigations inevitably gave rise to controversies about the priority accorded victims of one camp and/or ethnic group and another, and about the partiality of the testimonies collected. This is especially the case since the sheer scale of the work carried out suggests that the task will take many

<sup>35</sup> The CNDD-FDD was only one component of the Hutu armed rebellion and the Burundian armed forces remained on par with a defense minister from the ex-FAB until 2015.

<sup>36</sup> "More than 70,000 testimonies collected, more than 4,000 mass graves identified thus allowing families to finally mourn theirs, more than 20,000 "alleged perpetrators" having agreed to testify."

more years, even a decade, to extend it to the countless sites linked to other massacres and crimes for which the institution is responsible.

Currently, this step taken, and in the absence of a formal international judicial qualification of the mass crimes that have occurred in Burundi since 1965, simple coherence would command that the exceptional commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "[forgotten genocide](#)" of 1972, is an opportunity to pay an inclusive tribute, approved by the Senate, to all victims of Burundian divisions. The authorities would thus adopt a position in line with their refusal to appear in April 2020 on the list of sponsor countries of the [draft resolution presented by Rwanda](#) to the General Assembly of the member states of the United Nations which excluded associating the mention of "other victims" with the day of commemoration of a "genocide against the Tutsi".<sup>37</sup> An exclusion strongly contested then by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the President of the Assembly of Member States, the representatives of the United States and Great Britain, etc.

Simple coherence would have meant that 50 years after the genocide an inclusive formulation would have assumed the painful legacy of the past and solemnly consecrated the overcoming of the ethnicity that the current authorities avail themselves of.

In addition, in the end, the choice of the exclusive qualification that the authorities validated finally led in April 2022 to the renunciation of any official commemoration of the "genocide of the Hutus of 1972". A belated, surprising and confusingly argued political renunciation that disregards the long mobilization of national representation to debate and endorse this recognition.

It illustrates the difficulty of the authorities and the national representation in defining and implementing a clear, assumed and understood national policy on the treatment of the divisions of the past. Procrastination similar to that which prevails over the priorities and future work program of the TRC vis-à-vis the many other major massacres in the history of the country. Not to mention the central question of the legal consequences that should result ...

Finally, since the TRC has undertaken to complete the updating of bitterness and responsibility for the whole past, the time has certainly come to know, through the voice of the highest national authorities, how they analyze the divisions of the past, what their conception of "national unity" is and, more generally, what policy they now intend to promote truth, justice and reconciliation.

Indeed, so that these moments of individual and collective overcoming are sustainable and assumed, the commemoration [is built](#) beforehand by mobilizing around the authorities the representatives of all the main forces of the country involved in this past so that they accompany the work of memory and truth, and ensure respect for the fundamental rights of all victims and actors.

### *10.2. Commemorations that engage the future*

The authorities' vision is also particularly expected on broader issues. Indeed, 2022 is not only the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hutu genocide, it is also the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of national independence that comes at the end of a decade of rupture that deliberately compromised the gains of the return to peace and democratic advances celebrated in 2012. The consolidation of a new authoritarian regime then resurrected official declarations and political discrimination marked by ethnicity. An argument alien to the demands of the protesters, but always solicited by the various regimes when their monopoly of power is likely to be challenged.

In a society with collective powers as restrictive as those in Burundi, the actions and words of the "authorities", whoever they may be, can have decisive weight because, beyond the individuals who carry them, they also represent belonging to an ethnic group, a region, a terroir, socio-professional solidarities, partisan commitments, confessional creeds, etc. Even when they are challenged, their statements and attitudes are listened to, interpreted, and they condition the opinions and actions of the governed,

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<sup>37</sup>Cf. [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#).



militants, subordinates, faithful, and among them, in the first place, the younger generations who accumulate subaltern positions. Generations who have not themselves experienced the most dramatic years and who would like to finally be able to emancipate themselves, and project themselves into a future to be built. For the elderly, debating or even assuming the crimes and sufferings of the past also confers the strength to long for a different future.

Clarifications are therefore certainly necessary for many of the authorities responsible for "national reconciliation", so that each Burundian can consider himself personally "co-creator of a Burundi" of peace and freedom... The commemorations of 2022 would then, certainly, be "memorable".

### **Downloadable add-ons**

1. [Chronology](#)
2. [Main acronyms](#)
3. [Selected Bibliography](#)
4. [Main documentary sources](#)

### **Thanks**

It is impossible to close this "story" without adding some thanks and tributes, *et je voudrais tout d'abord remercier le collègue et ami qui a traduit et... amélioré la version française.*

The thanks are addressed in the first place to all the staff and friends of the *Iwacu* Press Group which ensured a very wide publication of these "History". The constancy of the collective commitment of its executives and staff to make this media live – and, at many times, to survive – the courage they have shown each time the repression has fallen on several of its members who have had to expatriate, their colleague Jean Bigirimana who has "disappeared" for thousands of days or those who have been sentenced to heavy prison terms for having only done their job. Unjustified penalties and sorrows against a pluralistic and demanding media. Of course, this recognition concerns more broadly the entire corporation which has continuously mobilized for the promotion and defense of freedom of expression and information.

In addition, and it is important to stress this, even during the most tense and violent periods, there have always been people who, whatever their social functions, their political affiliations, have defended and protected the women and men of media or other activists attached to the liberties. At all levels, and under all the regimes I have known, there have always been high-ranking interlocutors who have been kind enough to hear complaints about repression and arbitrary and/or excessive violence, and who have then disavowed or even punished their perpetrators.

This "Burundian exception" is embodied even more on the hills among the dominated and exploited who only partially control the chain of oppressive mechanisms to which they are subjected. But they also know how to express crudely the limits of the grip and powers of the multiple authorities. Individually and especially collectively, they then excel at ironically mimicking their methods and remarks, possible diversions and saved the manoeuvring spaces they use.

Finally, I would like to thank all the people, from the hills to the capital, who during these years have allowed me to hear, see and understand. This was not always easy when the "researcher's" requests transgressed the constraints imposed or tolerated in terms of access to hills, contacts and freedom of expression vis-à-vis different authorities. But it has always been possible to achieve this. I would also like to thank the many national and international cooperations that have made possible and/or accompanied these research activities.

A. G.