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Inside-Outside: Political Transformation in Burundi and its Diaspora

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Introduction

Genocide, civil war, oppressive politics and ethnic discrimination have haunted the small African nation, Burundi, since independence, forcing large numbers of its population to leave the country and live in exile. Hundreds of thousands have been forced to live in camps in neighbouring countries – Tanzania, Congo, and Rwanda – while tens of thousands have made it to Europe and North America. Especially Belgium, the old colonial power, has a large Burundian population. With such a large diaspora, politics does not just take place inside the country. The peasants who crossed the border to Tanzania simply in search of safety ended up in large part in camps that are seedbeds of political mobilization (Malkki 1995; Turner 2001). Meanwhile the educated elite in Europe is busy doing ‘long-distance politics’ (Anderson 1994) lobbying with politicians, churches and NGOs and supporting the rebellion ‘at home’. One might therefore claim that the political struggle in Burundi has mostly taken place outside the borders of the nation-state itself.

In recent years, Burundi has experienced a political transformation that gives hope for the future. Negotiations between the government and various opposition groups, often armed and often with leaders in exile, have led to a power sharing agreement in a transition government that eventually should lead to a new constitution and democratic elections. What is interesting for our purpose here is not only that negotiations have taken place outside the country with participants from Denmark, Belgium, Kenya etc. It is also interesting because many of these opposition leaders are now returning to Burundi after years, even decades, in exile and are taking up positions in the National Assembly and the government. Similarly ex-combatants are returning and being demobilized or integrated into the armed forces. Finally, some refugees who are neither political leaders nor rebels, are returning, hoping for a better life than in the Tanzanian camps or in Nairobi’s slums, although many hesitate. They are suspicious of the peace process and worried about the lack of security in many parts of the country.

In this paper we explore what happens when the political field expands beyond the limits of the national borders. How does it affect the political process in the country? What does it mean in relation to questions of political subjectivity and

citizenship? Furthermore, we explore the historical changes that have taken place. Does the political field expand geographically during periods of political oppression inside the country – as was the case in the 1970s and 1980s? What happens when political reforms open the political debate inside the country – as is the present situation? Does it make the external opposition superfluous? What happens to the diaspora? How is the diaspora perceived from inside the country and how does the diaspora perceive the political situation inside the country? In this paper I try to see the political field from both these angles in order to overcome the bias that many diaspora studies have of only seeing things from the ‘outside’. Whereas most studies explore long distance politics from the ‘long distance’ perspective, I try to explore them from the receiving end as well.

The paper falls in three parts. First I present some ‘snapshots’ from different case studies, based on my ethnographic fieldwork in Bujumbura, Brussels, Nairobi and a Tanzanian refugee camp. With these almost synchronic snapshots the idea is to give a picture from different angles of the transnational political field which encompasses Burundi. These different snapshots illustrate that in spite of being a political field, it is far from being a homogeneous field.¹ The second part of the paper takes us back in time, outlining the changing political dynamics between homeland and diaspora from the 1960s up till today. Finally, the third part attempts to draw these findings together in an analysis and draw out the theoretical lessons. We will discuss the mutual influence of home and exile and we will discuss the question of political subjectivities and the quest for political citizenship and its futures.

Lukole: a political hot spot in the Tanzanian bush

Lukole refugee camp is located in the far northwestern corner of Tanzania, close to the border with Burundi. At the time of my fieldwork there in 1997-1998 it hosted close to 100,000 refugees from Burundi. They were all Hutu and had fled the violence that broke out after the democratically elected Hutu president was killed in October 1993. Tens of thousands of Tutsi had been killed by Hutu and the Tutsi dominated army retaliated by killing just as many Hutu. Later fighting broke out between government forces and a Hutu rebellion. This caused even more Hutu to flee the country and arrive in Lukole.

In the camp, refugees are taken care of by efficient humanitarian agencies. There is food and clean water, basic schooling and clinics. There are also special programmes for ‘vulnerable groups’ – the elderly, orphans, disabled, women and children. The refugees are treated as victims and expected to behave like so as

¹ Which is also Bourdieu’s point about the concept. It is fought over and contested and thus created through conflict.

well. This means restraining from politics which in UNHCR's eyes is perceived as selfish and destructive (Turner 2001). However, the camp is teeming with politics. A young man explains that he is forced to take sides with one of the two political parties in the camp; otherwise he is accused by both sides of supporting their opponent. Another young man complains that he cannot get treatment in the clinic because the Burundian staff there all belong to one of the two parties and only treat their own supporters. And a group of 'community mobilisers', employed by an NGO to support the vulnerable groups, explain that they have been forced to live in another part of the camp and commute to work each day because they fear 'men in long coats (hiding long knives)' that claim 'taxes' for the other party.

Not only does UNHCR discourage and disapprove of political activity in the camp. It is actually banned by the Tanzanian authorities, which means that all politics is clandestine. Although I was in the camp for more than a year and gained the confidence of many refugees it was only years afterwards, in May 2004, that a young man told me that he and his friends had been doing military training every day after school. I had met him as a big schoolboy in Lukole and now again in Nairobi as a young man, where he felt safe enough to tell me about it.

Why is everyone so involved in politics? There are a number of complex reasons that we cannot touch upon here. But basically political ideologies offer themselves as the answers to people's troubles and tribulations (Zizek 1989). They promise to solve existential problems. So when the Hutu arrived in Tanzania after experiencing traumatic events, the political ideologies explained to them why they were there. They gave their meaningless suffering a sense of purpose. Liisa Malkki writes in her famous and fascinating book (Malkki 1995) that 'mythico-histories' emerge in the refugee camps in the 1980s in order to provide such answers to a group of people whose world has shattered. What she ignores is the fact that these mythico-histories were strongly linked to the political ideology of Palipehutu. Palipehutu had been created by the Hutu elite in exile who had chosen a secluded refugee camp to 'raise the consciousness' of the Hutu people there. To put it a bit crudely, Palipehutu's main objective was to make the Hutu aware of their ethnicity and to demand the liberation of the Hutu people. When I did fieldwork in Lukole, some ten years later, Palipehutu had been partly replaced by another political party offering other ideological explanations. This is what caused the internal political conflicts in the camp. In later sections we return to the dynamics of these shifts in diaspora politics.

The political leadership in Lukole was extremely well organized and was connected to politicians in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Belgium and Burundi. I knew people who would take a local bus to the nearest town and call Nairobi from the post office to get instructions, in spite of the enormous risks and costs involved for these impoverished people.

Brussels: living in a time pocket

Each year on October 21st the Burundian diaspora is invited to a mass followed by a meeting to commemorate the death of Melchior Ndadaye, the country's first democratically elected president who was killed by Tutsi officers only three months after being elected. There are speeches by Ndadaye's widow and by party representatives and other dignitaries.

This is not shared by all the diaspora, however. On the well known internet site www.umuco.com an invitation is posted by 'La Diaspora de la Communauté Tutsi en Belgique' to commemorate 'the genocide against the Tutsi' to take place 23rd October, 2004. After the mass there will be testimonies by survivors and finally, during the drinks, 'dissemination of pictures and written documents on the genocide of Tutsi in Burundi.'

Similarly the genocide in 1972 is commemorated on April 6th but usually the Tutsi have their own commemoration for the death of the prince who was killed the same day. And in 2003 when I was in Brussels, a third commemoration was to take place because the Hutu could not agree.

In Belgium, home to the largest Burundian population in Europe, people would always tell me, when I explained my research, that there are at least two diasporas. The Hutu and the Tutsi do not mix at all. They do not great in the corridors at Louvain La Neuve, their favourite catholic university. They do not frequent the same bars. Newcomers of both ethnic groups lament this state of affairs and say that people here are far behind what is happening in Burundi at the moment. As a young Hutu doing his PhD in mathematics explains, in Burundi he has Tutsi neighbours, Tutsi teachers, Tutsi colleagues. They have to get along. Especially in the capital, Bujumbura, people are fed up with ethnic fighting and try to leave it behind them and look forward. In Belgium, he feels that people still think very much in ethnic terms and he finds it difficult to make Tutsi friends because Hutu and Tutsi move in separate spheres.

Apart from the ethnic cleavage there are cleavages among the Hutu as well. These are based primarily on time of arrival. I realised this when visiting the three principal cultural groups in Brussels. In theory, these groups are simply concerned with traditional drumming and dancing, and are open to all. However, it turns out that one has almost exclusively Tutsi members. Another has Hutu members who arrived in relation to the massacres in 1972 – as well as their children who often are born in Belgium. The last group consists primarily of Hutu who arrived after the troubles in 1993. Like in the refugee camp, the refugees who arrived here first are – broadly speaking – more ethnicist and radical in their opinions while the newcomers have a more nuanced view on the conflict. It seems that the longer you have stayed in this democratic and safe environment, the more radical your

opinions are. The Habermasian idea of a public sphere does not seem to apply. Rather, Anderson's dystopian vision of long distance nationalism (Anderson 1994) seems more appropriate.

Given the present peace process a few of the Hutu have returned to Burundi to help build the nation as they would put it. The majority have chosen to stay for the time being. At political meetings they would criticise the Hutu leadership in Burundi for giving in to the Tutsi, and they would claim that the Tutsi could still take power in a military coup as they had done before. In fact they believed that the Tutsi still held power because they controlled the army. In private conversations, people's choices to stay or go were more complex and involved a number of human factors. A middle aged man and his wife who both are unemployed – in spite of him having a PhD in geology and her being a nurse - and live in a flat in a high rise building on the outskirts of Brussels say that they would return first thing there was peace. I'll get the first plane, they say. But then they start reflecting more seriously on the issue. There is the question of healthcare and the children's schooling. And in Burundi he might be able to get a job in the state, but that would be badly paid. One might be able to survive off the wages up country but not in Bujumbura where living is expensive. And security is bad outside Bujumbura. Most refugees would have similar hesitations although to varying degrees. They feel lonely in Brussels where everyone is so busy. In Bujumbura there would always be visitors, a Tutsi housewife tells me but also admits that it was because you had domestic servants in Bujumbura, making socialising easier.² On the other hand, they are well aware that life is tough in terms of finding employment at the moment. Or as a successful young man who has been lucky to get a job as a doctor – after doing extra courses – tells me, while driving me home in his brand new Audi: 'It has taken us years to get this far in Belgium. Why throw it all over board and start all over again?'

There is in other words a difference between the public reasons given for private choices to stay in Belgium in spite of political reforms in Burundi, and even though the present president is a Hutu. This is due to the fact that everything is politicised in diaspora. Every choice has to be related to political strategies – just like the cultural groups or the commemorations. Rather than say that they remain here because they have a nice house or for their children's sake, they claim that the Hutu who have returned either are on the pay check of the Tutsi or are too naive to see that they are being tricked. In this manner, they manage publicly to uphold the image of themselves as political dissidents that are forced to live in exile, rather than being individuals who make pragmatic choices in life.

² Most of the refugees in Europe, whether Hutu or Tutsi are from the elite and used to comfortable lives with servants at home.

Another lesson to be drawn from the Belgian case is the sense that although they are all very keen to follow the political process, and spend a long time on the internet or discussing politics with each other, they somehow manage to interpret things according to anachronistic views, leaving them in a kind of time pocket. They are simply out of touch.

Nairobi – a dumping ground for ‘have-beens’

The Burundians that I encounter in Nairobi in May 2004 are mostly young men – and quite a few young women – living clandestinely in Kawangware and Sattelite, a fairly new, semi-rural, very poor part of Nairobi. They have virtually no income and live with the constant threat of being stopped by the police and having to give a bribe or going to jail. They try to study at one of the three secondary schools for refugees from the Great Lakes or at the so-called ‘university’ but they can rarely afford the school fees. Meanwhile they all hope that they will be lucky one day. They hope that fortune will give them a ‘sponsor’ to study here or in Europe. Or they hope that the UNHCR will resettle them in Europe or the USA. They have put their faith in God. Their Pentecostal belief helps guide them and keep their spirits high while it functions as a way of keeping discipline. It makes them stay away from sex, alcohol and gambling. Although they help each other like brothers through the hard times, their projects are strictly personal. It is not a political – let alone military – solution they seek.

Not that Nairobi always has been this way. There used to be many politicians living here. It was the junction between the camps and the elite in Europe. It was here that meetings were arranged, arms deals were sealed, and plans conceived. Everyone came through Nairobi on their way from A to B. Now most of the politicians have returned to good positions in the Burundian government. There were many jokes, while I was there, about the so-called officers who returned to become officers in the Burundian army. Most of them did not know one end of a gun from the other but saw their chance of cutting a deal and getting a good position in Burundi. The few politicians who are left in Nairobi either belong to the last rebel group that refuses to join the negotiations³ or are in Nairobi for other reasons. They have meetings and write declarations but are aware that their role is minor.

The young born again men hesitate between staying and returning. This is because in spite of Nairobi being a tough place to live, they are well aware that life will also be tough on them in Burundi – and the idea of Nairobi being a metropolis is very important to them. Their main reason for being there is in their own words ‘communication’. They also fear returning – often for good reasons. Young Hutu

³ I met two representatives of Agathon Rwasa’s faction of Palipehutu.

men who have been in exile are often considered rebels or genociders by those who remained. And most of these boys have been involved in the rebellion one way or another before becoming born again Christians.

Bujumbura- the pragmatics of real politics

I had been given the directions to Ngendakumana's house in Mutanga Nord but got lost on the way anyway. This is an area where massive new houses are shooting up along the mountain side. It is not as classy as the old villas that lie further south, where the established elite live but it is still a far cry from the run down townships below the hillside; Cibitoke and Kamenge where the majority of Bujumbura's population lives. The roads are potholed but the walls around the villas are huge. People jokingly call this area 'le quartier d'Arusha,' alluding to the fact that it is financed by the handsome *per diems* that these politicians received during the lengthy peace negotiations in Arusha. 'Why do you think the negotiations dragged on for so long?' they say. However, among ordinary Burundians there seems to be no more animosity towards the returned politicians than towards any other politicians. Politicians are generally believed to be 'ventriotes' – only interested in filling their own bellies.

I finally find his house by sighting the South African soldiers outside. Like all returned politicians he has guards from the South African Defence Force 24 hours a day. This was agreed in the Arusha accords and a prerequisite for Hutu politicians to return. They simply do not trust the government forces after what happened to 'their president' in 1993. Ngendakumana seats me in a room that has enough sofas around the walls for about 25 people. There is no other furniture. One can imagine how these rooms serve an important function as meeting places. He is also waiting other visitors and is busy coordinating on his mobile phone. He used to stay in Belgium and is a member of one of the last rebel factions to have signed a peace agreement with the transition government. The party leader is still in Dar es Salaam, while Ngendakumana is his *porte parole* and has only been here in Burundi a short while.

Nahimana is another returned refugee now in the National Assembly. I visit him in his 'home'. It is a small, newly built hotel-apartment where he lives alone. This is obviously a temporary solution, as he has left his wife and children in Ringsted, Denmark. He is a Tutsi himself but a member of Frodebu and has always been a strong critic of the *ancien regime*. Just like the refugees who are still in Belgium weighing the pros and cons of returning, the choice for people like Nahimana and Ngendakumana has not been straight forward. Many returning politicians leave their families abroad. Perhaps they do not quite have faith in the peace process that they are part of. They actually admit that they sometimes negotiate solutions without having 100% confidence in the solution. So they are waiting to see what

the future may bring before jeopardising the safety of their families. Fleeing the country alone is after all easier than as a family. There are also more pragmatic reasons. Butasi is a member of the National Assembly who has lived in camps in Zaire, then in Tanzania and finally in Amsterdam where he stayed for two years but was never granted asylum. When in Holland, he sent money to his wife in the camp, so that she could go to Lusaka. He returned in February 2002 and has brought his wife and smallest children from Lusaka but left the oldest there. She has followed the English language school system and is finishing her secondary school. He does not know where to send her to university. 'It is so expensive in Zambia,' he explains.

In spite of the pragmatic circumstances around choosing to return, they see their choice as part of a heroic deed – a duty that History has given them. They have to return to help rebuild their country – whatever the personal costs. In their discourse they are in other words sacrificing themselves for the common good – running the risk of being killed, having to live with armed guards all the time, living separated from their closest family. They see the ones who remained in Europe as selfish and comfortable, although they would not put it so strongly.

When talking about the politicians in Europe they agree that they are very radical and uncompromising. 'It is easy just to criticise when you are sitting comfortably in Belgium,' they say.⁴ 'But here we have to find solutions. We must compromise. That is what politics is about. You cannot achieve anything without compromise.' In the words of Butasi who puts the blame on 'democracy and liberty': 'In Belgium you can say whatever you want without it having consequences – neither for your security nor for political decisions. Here things are more *delicate*. Here, you have a big responsibility. Your words have consequences. So you have to compromise.' One would think this man had read Anderson! He goes on to explain that politicians here are 'partenaires' while those that are 'there' just criticise. But it takes time to adapt and gain this attitude of reconciliation; he says and claims that he has also changed his opinions and approach after returning. The reason behind this, he claims, is that the Burundians in Europe get their information via the internet, by phone etc. 'but they prefer to believe the news that they get from the rebels rather than what we tell them. The internet is their Bible!'

The political leadership in Bujumbura is well aware of the power of the diaspora – to which many of them used to belong – and the president and other high ranking

⁴ Belgium is perceived to be the worst place for in-fighting and radical politics, because it is so closely linked to Burundi. Nahimana says 'to live in Belgium is like living in Burundi.' That is why he chose Denmark. In other words, it seems to have brought all the divisions from Burundi with it but not the imperative to negotiate.

politicians regularly meet the diaspora in Europe in an attempt to have a dialogue and ‘soften’ them.

This picture of the reconciliatory politics in Bujumbura is not all glossy, however. Several Tutsi groups – such as Action Contre Génocide, PA Amasekanye, and a faction of Uprona – see the returning Hutu politicians as *génocidaires* who planned a genocide against the Tutsi in 1993. Some would go so far as to say that they kidnapped and killed their own president as a pretext to unleash the genocide on the Tutsi. For these Tutsi groups it is not only the returning Hutu that are bad for the country. Anything coming from the outside is considered a threat to national sovereignty. Thus they were against negotiations taking place outside Burundi, they are against the deployment of foreign peacekeeping troops and they are against an international tribunal. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain this discourse but it is related to a general, strong anti-colonialism that has been central to the Tutsi regimes ideology since independence (Turner 2001), and finds expression in paranoid conspiracy theories about the Catholic Church and Belgium using the Hutu in order to divide and rule the country.

From another perspective, Hutu politicians who remained in the country during all the ‘dark years’ find that the returnees are taking all the limelight. They feel that they struggled and suffered most, while the leaders in Europe had an easy life where they did not risk being jailed or killed for their opinions. Now the exiles have come back and taken all the attention due to their good connections, while those who suffered the most are not acknowledged.

In sum, there are many perspectives on the role of exiles, stayees and returnees respectively, depending on which angle one sees them from. The difficult personal choices in relation to a transition period which could result in peace and prosperity but could equally end in genocide and war are inserted into political discourses. The perception of returnees range from anything from opportunists who want a piece of the peace cake, over naive pawns in the Tutsi game, to heroes who are rebuilding the nation or *génocidaires* who have conned the international community into letting them into power again. Similarly, the diaspora can be seen as sensible people who can see things clearer from a distance and therefore see the dangers in the so-called peace process or radicals who are out of touch and simply read their own internet sites, reconfirming their own prejudiced views.

Burundi’s transnational political field: a historical overview

As the case studies above show, Burundi’s political field extends beyond the national borders of the territory of the state. Refugees and emigrants engage in

long distance politics⁵, trying to influence the political situation at home in various ways. In Tanzania they train young men and send them across the border to fight. Nairobi used to be the coordination hub, connecting the region to Europe, and the elite in Europe have the financial means and the freedom of speech to function as spokespersons of their party in relation to the 'international community'. They lobby host societies in a manner of ways from approaching national politicians to performing dances at cultural events and informing school children about their country and its problems. The Burundi Committee in Denmark (Burundikomiteén) is illustrative. Being founded by Danish Baptists who have had missionary activities in Burundi since the 1920s, this small organisation with only ten members (roughly half Danish and half Burundian) used its connection to a Baptist member of the Danish parliament to arrange a meeting with the parliamentary committee of foreign affairs. The chairman of the Burundi Committee, himself a Baptist, happens also to be the chairman of Palipehutu. Likewise, internet sites are often hosted in Denmark (Agora, SOS-Burundi), Canada (BurundiYouthCouncil.com) and of course Belgium (ARIB.org, Burundi-realities, etc). It is also clear from the cases that the situation is changing now and that the diaspora has to find new ways of relating to the homeland.

In order to understand firstly how various diaspora groups emerged and secondly how they have changed, we need to explore the shifting political field in Burundi. Burundi is said to be comprised of three ethnic groups; the Hutu (85%), the Tutsi (14%) and a small group of marginalised Twa (1%). The figures may not be exact and there is doubt whether one can actually talk of ethnic groups rather than casts or classes. However, the groups are 'real' in the sense that hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in Burundi in the name of ethnicity. The Tutsi were privileged during first German and later Belgian rule. They were seen as rulers while the Hutu were considered by the Europeans to be best suited for manual labour. Shortly after independence a small group of low-caste Tutsi from a certain region monopolised political power in the country, breaking with the traditional elite and introducing a strongly modernist and anti-colonial ideology. They followed a double-sided policy of keeping power tightly in the hands of a small Tutsi elite while claiming that ethnicity was invented by the colonial administration in order to divide and rule the Burundian people.⁶ Burundians were essentially one people, according to official discourse, and mention of ethnicity was banned in the 1970s.

In 1972 a small Hutu revolt in the southern part of the country resulted in massive retaliation by government troops that systematically killed up to 150,000 Hutu,

⁵ For a discussion of this concept see: Anderson (1994), Schiller, Basch et al (1994), Appadurai (1996), Axel, etc.

⁶ See Lemarchand (1970, 1996) and Turner (2001, 2004).

mostly the educated (down to secondary school) and the elite who were assumed to be behind the plot.⁷ This watershed event forced hundreds of thousands of Hutu into exile. In the camps in Tanzania they tried to comprehend what had hit them, as mentioned earlier. People who had not previously identified themselves with ethnic labels became acutely aware of their Hutuness. They realised that they had been targeted and forced to flee due to their ethnicity. Therefore a major task of these refugees, led by Palipehutu, was to combat the government's ideology of 'one nation one people'. They insisted on the essential differences between what they saw as different races and on the long historical roots of the conflict between Hutu and Tutsi which, according to them, dated back to the 14th century when Tutsi invaded the country from the North and subjugated the peaceful autochthon Hutu.⁸

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the one party state controlled civil society down to the slightest detail, monitoring and punishing any dissent (Laely 1997). With such a limited room for political resistance inside the country, opposition politics was formulated in camps in Tanzania, among a young Hutu elite in Habyarimana's 'Hutu dominated' Rwanda and among a small Hutu elite in Belgium and elsewhere in Europe. The vice-president of Palipehutu was based in Denmark and took over the leadership when the first president of the party, based in Tanzania, died in 1989.

In the late 1980s the political situation in Burundi began changing. Due in part to pressure from donors to introduce 'good governance' and in part from Palipehutu which had begun to infiltrate the country from Rwanda and Tanzania. Party cadres were mobilising the Hutu population in the countryside and in 1990 launched a surprise attack on Bujumbura airport. The press was given more freedom and a new constitution was adopted in 1992. This constitution mentions that Burundi is made up of several population components, thereby indirectly admitting that there are several ethnic groups in the country (Reyntjens 1995, 9). The same year, political parties were legalised, as long as they were not based on region, ethnicity or religion, thereby excluding Palipehutu. Meanwhile Frodebu, a moderate 'Hutu party' with several Tutsi in the leadership, managed to avoid mention of ethnicity and emphasised democracy and human rights and won a landslide victory in June 1993. However, the optimism did not last long, as the elected president, Melchior Ndadaye, was – as I have mentioned earlier – kidnapped and assassinated in what Filip Reyntjens has called history's most successful failed coup.

What did this mean for the diaspora and the transnational political field? In Belgium the small group of radical Hutu with Marxist and revolutionary

⁷ For a detailed analysis, see Lemarchand and Martin (1974).

⁸ See Malkki (1995) for some fabulous examples of these mythico-histories.

inclinations were joined in the late 1980s by a number of Hutu post graduate students who were in Belgium on government grants. At first there was mutual suspicion between them, as the old refugees were convinced that these Hutu were ‘turncoats’ at best and spies for the regime at worst. One of these students from that era tells me how he had almost expected the exiled politicians in Belgium to have horns from the incredible stories he had heard about them.⁹ With the reforms in the early nineties some Hutu returned from neighbouring countries as did a few from Europe, and the political field moved back into Burundi where a lively debate was taking place.

Many remained in exile, however, sceptical of the process. These people were unfortunately proven right by the events, following the assassination of the president where some 30,000 Tutsi civilians were killed by angry Hutu and equal numbers of Hutu were killed in the army clamp down. Now these people say: ‘what did I say’ and use it as a reason for not having faith in the present peace process. Pascal, who was a student in Belgium at the time, went back to Burundi for a visit in October 1993. He thanks God today that he had a return ticket and a visa to Belgium in his hand. He returned to Belgium and sought asylum. He dare not return now in case the same happens. Now he does not have the return ticket and the visa.

Following the violence in 1993, Hutu guerrilla movements appeared in early 1994. According to some accounts that sound quite reliable (e.g. interview with ex-president Ntibantunganye, June 2003), the rebellion started spontaneously in several parts of the country. Only later did the overall leadership, which was made up of Frodebu leaders in neighbouring countries, take over the command of the rebellion. This is a tumultuous period in Burundi’s history. As opposed to the 1970s and 1980s, political debate does take place inside the country but the security situation is bad and too open mouthed critics disappear or leave the country.

The deteriorating security situation also results in a deteriorating economy. Peasants no longer plant crops for fear of having to leave before harvest or of having it stolen by rebels or government forces. The only economy that flourishes is the contraband economy, run by the political and military oligarchy. This situation of economic stagnation means that also a number of young Tutsi start leaving the country and seeking asylum in Europe and North America. This group of young Tutsi and a similar group of Hutu blur the borderline between refugees

⁹ Several of these old Palipehutu founders with whom I have talked would also emphasise this reputation that they had gained. In fact they enjoyed telling how unknowing foreigners – preferably Tutsi – would startle when they realised that the gentleman, they were sitting next to was actually the leader of Palipehutu. It is as if it gives them some secret power to have such a mythical status.

and economic migrants. They are less radical politically and in general less interested in politics altogether. Rather than directing their frustrations into political projects, they are adventurers seeking individual success. In this way we might question whether they are part of the diaspora at all.

In 2000 a large number of political parties and movements signed the Arusha Accords that had been mediated by Julius Nyerere and later by Nelson Mandela. Even Bill Clinton had used his political weight to push the last signatures through. November 1st 2001 marked the beginning of a three year transition period which in the last minute has been extended for another six months due to problems in carrying out national elections in the countryside. As we could see from the case studies above, the diaspora is in many ways superfluous in this situation. While one of their main *raison d'être* was to provide reliable alternative information, unrestricted by government censorship, their information now seems out of touch.¹⁰

Conclusion: a transnational political field in flux or dissolution?

This paper has attempted to illustrate the continuous and complex relationships between homeland and diaspora. Once people leave Burundian soil, they do not necessarily leave Burundi. On the contrary, during periods of political exclusion, it was necessary to leave the territory in order to enter the political field – at least if one did not simply follow the party line of the one party state.

The diaspora has had an enormous influence on the political process in Burundi. It is impossible to measure such influence, as it covers a whole range of factors that cannot be quantified. The most tangible influence is, obviously, the armed rebellion, using bases in Congo and Tanzania, allying with various militias from Rwanda and Congo and sending young men from camps. The influence of lobbying activity in Europe is harder to assess. As is the influence that internet sites might have on public opinion abroad and at home. When for instance, *agora.com* was banned in Burundi in 2002 because it allegedly incited ethnic hatred, a Tutsi in Denmark decided to host it in Denmark. He claims that it is not because he is radical but because he believes in the right to expression.

¹⁰ However, many of them still believe that they have access to 'the truth'. Those who are in Burundi have been fooled, they maintain, into believing that they have freedom of expression and unbiased news. This situation is in fact more dangerous than in the 1980s where the Tutsi so obviously showed their oppressive side. Now the Tutsi have constructed a facade of openness and democracy, while hiding their true intentions and thus keeping the key to 'real' power (see also Turner 2004, 2005). In exile, they can keep their head clear and see through these conspiracies, they believe.

There are influences the other way as well. As we have seen in the historical overview, changes in the political field inside Burundi have forced the diaspora to redefine itself. In the 1980s Palipehutu gained strength, vindicating a discourse of ethno-national liberation. With the reforms in the early nineties, however, the regime partially accepted the idea of ethnicity, rendering Palipehutu without a cause. Instead a group of young intellectual Hutu who had studied in Rwanda set the agenda as moderates, calling for democracy rather than liberation. Similar changes are taking place presently.

The question is whether it makes sense at all to talk about the homeland affecting the diaspora and vice versa. With a diaspora so dispersed, living in very different conditions – from refugee camps to clandestine lives in Nairobi to doctors in Belgium – and so politically split, the affects are bound to be equally divergent. Perhaps it is more fruitful to think of it as a single political field that happens to be spread, geographically, over several continents; a transnational political field. There are thus discrepancies in opinions but everyone engages in the same field – which is the whole point of Bourdieu's concept of the political field. It is through these struggles that the field is created.

This said I am not implying that national boundaries are irrelevant. We might see certain diasporic groups living in 'time pockets'. Especially in periods where the political field expands inside the national borders, those left outside are no longer central actors in defining the struggle and the field. They tend to create self-perpetuating circuits of political reason like leftovers from another era. I have not been able to go into detail in this paper on the issue of mutual positioning in the political field. It has, however, emerged from the cases that political entrepreneurs discredit each other according to where they are located in the transnational political field. In rough lines, those in North America and Europe are accused by those inside the country of being 'out of touch with reality' while those inside Burundi are perceived of by the diaspora as being 'blinded by power and position'. In other words, while the inside and the outside conflate in transnational political practice, the *idea* of the inside versus the outside is upheld as a significant differentiating principle in the game of political positioning.

The paper also raises important questions on the role of the nation-state and political citizenship within it. Involving oneself in politics as a great many Burundians abroad do, is to claim political citizenship rights¹¹ to the nation-state. Being in exile one is in a sense excluded from such full rights but then again those who fled did so because they did not enjoy full political citizenship in the first place. This is certainly the view of the Hutu who first fled the country. They felt

¹¹ As opposed to formal/legal citizenship.

like second rate citizens. To engage in politics abroad is a means for them to lay claims on the state.

With the recent changes in Burundi this might be changing – and here I am not simply referring to the turning of the tables; including the Hutu in the state and giving them full political citizenship. What is more interesting is the way politics itself is being transformed and perhaps being voided of power – like elsewhere in Africa. While the once exiled Hutu are now returning in numbers to build houses with the money from Arusha and take up posts in the state, young, urban, educated Tutsi and Hutu no longer dream of a future as a civil servant. Whereas the first generation of educated Africans in the newly independent African states strived for white collar jobs in the modern sector – especially the civil service – the crisis of legitimacy of the state and the general economic crisis compounded with structural adjustment plans to ‘slim down’ government expenditure has taken away the former glory of such careers. In Burundi, it was previously the privilege of the Tutsi elite to get such positions. But now the times are changing and it seems that by an ironic twist of (mis-)fortune the Hutu have arrived too late.

The youth can see that jobs in the political system lead to nowhere. They want to move into private business which has limited possibilities as well. But then there is always the option of getting a job with one of the international NGOs that have invaded the country in recent years. Alternatively, they dream of getting to Europe or North America in search of a better life. In Copenhagen and Brussels you see them earning money or doing business studies. They might be interested in politics and even active in an NGO but they also want a career. They are fed up with the middle aged men who hold PhD degrees in some obscure subject but cannot (they almost imply: will not) get a job and instead sit around on welfare complaining about the government in Burundi without doing anything constructive about it. These ambitious young men and women (for there are many women among them) do not pity them.

As opposed to the politically active these young people are not claiming political citizenship – whether they live in or outside the country. They just want to ‘get on with things’ – in line with our present post-political, neo-liberal day and age.

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