

Burundi has, so far, escaped the genocide visited on Rwanda. But with more than 100,000 people killed in Burundi the last three years, there is growing concern because, as Jean-Pierre Chretien argues, "the fate of the two countries [has been] parallel, as in a game of mirrors in which each reflects the fantasies of the other."

Burundi: The Obsession with Genocide

JEAN-PIERRE CHRETIEN

In September 1961, the nationalist, broadly representative Union for National Progress (UPRONA) triumphed over parties manipulated by the Belgian colonialists in the pre-independence elections in Burundi. At the same time in Rwanda, the Hutu People's Liberation Party, or *PAROEN*, was victorious—the consequence of a socioethnic revolution brought about by Catholic missions and European administration. A generation later in Burundi, from October 1993 to the end of 1995, more than 100,000 people perished in an ethno-political crisis involving Hutu and Tutsi. A half century of colonial administration exercised according to the principles of a racial ideology that opposed "Bantus" and "Hamites" had not been able to destroy Burundi. But after 30 years of independent political administration, Burundi joined its neighbor from the north in the horror. The current crisis is the result of this recent evolution, which can be understood as having several stages.

THE STAGES OF ETHNIC AWARENESS

The assassination of Prince Louis Rwagasore, the charismatic leader of UPRONA, in October 1961, and the personal quarrels that immediately destroyed his party, favored the spread of the Rwandan model in Burundi. The ethnic ideology in these two countries, whose cultural and historic unity was strong, relies on a confusion between concepts of race and class. The Rwandan revolution between 1959 and 1961 was provoked by a

Hutu counterelite dissatisfied with the privileges of the former Tutsi elite, and reinforced by the Belgian administration's indirect rule. This tension spread progressively across the entire population: the Tutsi were collectively denounced as a race of feudal conquerors, and the Hutu were defined as the only true Rwandan people.

Burundi society had traits that enabled it to avoid this dynamic: the aristocracy of princes (the *ganwas*) distinguished itself from the Tutsi and the Hutu, with the former more highly represented in the governing milieu than in Rwanda. Yet political calculations favored the spread of the Rwanda model in Burundi: Hutu politicians quickly saw that they could profit from the defense of the minority Tutsi. This confrontation between two forms of logic, a "majority-based" Hutu one and a "security-based" Tutsi one, together with violence of an increasingly serious nature, characterizes the evolution of the country to this day.

The first major crisis began in 1965. After the assassination in January of Hutu Prime Minister Pierre Ngendandumwe, legislative elections in May showed an increase in ethnic solidarity, and 7 of the 12 ministers in the new government were Hutu. In October, an attempted coup was accompanied by the massacre of Tutsi peasants in the region of Muramvya (in the midwest of the country) by a militia organized by Paul Mirerekano, a Hutu UPRONA leader. The repression was terrible. Mass violence had become a political tool in Burundi. The importation of Rwandan revolutionary methods introduced fear into the Tutsi people, leading to the mistrust and the growing marginalization of the Hutu in the army and government, which was not the case at independence in July 1962.

JEAN-PIERRE CHRETIEN, research director at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris, is the author of *Burundi: L'histoire retrouvée* (Paris: Karthala, 1993), coeditor with Gérard Prunier of *Les ethnies ont une histoire* (Paris: Karthala, 1989), and coauthor of *Rwanda: Les médias du génocide* (Paris: Karthala, 1995). This article was translated from the French by Amy Billone.

The second crisis occurred in 1972. The regime established in 1966 by Captain Michel Micombero's military coup saw the rise to power of a group of Tutsi extremists based in the southern province of Bururi. In April 1972, extremist Hutu refugees massacred Tutsi in this region, which was followed in May and June by a systematic extermination of Hutu elites across the entire country. These reprisals permitted the "Bururi group," a veritable political-military mafia, to impose itself as much at the expense of the Hutu as at the expense of elites from the northern and central regions of the country. Thus, the political-regional antagonism became as virulent as the ethnic conflict. But the genocide of the Hutu elites in Burundi in 1972 created a lasting fear among the Hutu and seemed to justify a posteriori the persecution of the Tutsi that had begun in Rwanda 12 years earlier. From this point on, the fate of the two countries was parallel, as in a game of mirrors in which each reflects the fantasies of the other. In the end, the democratic, Christian Belgian influence that had triggered the Rwandan socioethnic revolution also promoted the same process in neighboring Burundi.

In 1976, Colonel Jean-Baptiste Bagaza ousted Micombero. Between 1976 and 1987, Bagaza dealt with the results of the two crises through police intimidation and economic development. Burundi was effectively modernized, as was Rwanda during the same period under the presidency of General Juvénal Habyarimana. The most visible difference between these two "enlightened despots" lies in their relationships with the Catholic Church: the link between the church and the single-party National Revolutionary Development Movement (MRND) in Rwanda was tight, while in Burundi administrative persecution took place in anticlerical fashion.

This political-religious quarrel finally provoked Bagaza's fall in 1987, which benefited the new regime under Major Pierre Buyoya. It was also cleverly exploited by the Hutu extremist movement that had been reorganized abroad beginning in 1980 under PALIPEHUTU auspices: both the dictatorship and the persecution of the church was connected to Tutsi domination, although many Tutsi were equally affected by these politics.

The elements of the current crisis, in gestation for the past 30 years, crystallized in the late 1980s. The evolution that accompanied Burundi's development, along with the insufficient but real reintroduction of the Hutu into the political arena, had

changed international environment, had to free Burundi (like Rwanda) from the ethnically obsessed sociocultural ghetto and extricate it from the rubble of a political life in which the only change was that provided by military coups arbitrated by the Bururi faction.

The opening made by Pierre Buyoya responded to these issues, but it risked failure from the start under the shock of a new, violent crisis that exploded in the northeastern communes of Ntega and Marangaraof in August 1988. The process is characteristic of the strategy of tension devised by PALIPEHUTU. Rumors, circulating primarily in rural areas and in northern schools, described Buyoya as a new Micombero and announced the imminent return of the massacres of 1972; the purpose of these rumors was to incite the Hutu to "overtake the Tutsi" and massacre them preventively.

It was to accomplish this "task" that armed bands set out the night of August 15, 1988; in the days that followed, the Tutsi in the two northeastern communes were exterminated. Military repression, hesitant at first, turned into massive reprisals the following week, causing the flight of approximately 50,000 Hutu peasants to Rwanda. The violence succeeded in reigniting the fire of ethnic hatred and reinstating majority-based Hutu logic and security-based Tutsi logic. Fear became an essential tool of political action and ethnic definition—a strategy of terror that is still employed today.

THE ABORTED DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

In 1988 the fire was circumscribed by justice. The refugees began to return at the end of the year, and President Buyoya formed a new government, headed by a Hutu prime minister, Adrien Sibomana. Ethnic parity, known as "shared power," became the golden rule. Despite extremist threats from both sides (Tutsi conspiracies in 1989 and 1992, a PALIPEHUTU attack in the west of the country in November 1991) the course was set: in February 1991 a charter of national unity condemning "all discrimination or exclusion with respect to any part of the population" was adopted by referendum; in March 1992 a new constitution reestablished political pluralism; two leagues supporting the rights of man were created; an independent press emerged; and the predominantly Hutu Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), which was created secretly in 1986 by expatriates, returned from Rwanda and was made an official

changes seem to have been made possible by the national debate about unity, which addressed what was at stake in the "ethnic" question and, in a general sense, by the maturation of civil society.

However, in 1993 the approaching presidential and parliamentary elections showed that emotions connected to the memory of past dramas, especially the 1972 massacres, still haunted the collective mentality. PALIPEHUTU propaganda, circulated by the Rwandan Hutu integration movement (and expressed in the monthly publication *Kangura*, which devoted numerous articles to the "brothers" of Burundi) was covertly used to promote obsession with the return of persecutions and hatred of "the Tutsi army."

The presidential campaign manipulated ethnic solidarities and took advantage of the pedagogy of unity developed in the preceding years. FRODEBU apparatchiks used anti-Tutsi discourse capable of regrouping the Hutu majority and suggested that the Hutu of UPRONA betrayed their cause. UPRONA responded in a similar fashion.

Nonetheless, the transition seemed to go smoothly, as international observers noted. The elections, held in June 1993 without serious incident, produced nuanced results: the UPRONA candidate, Pierre Buyoya, received one-third of the votes (much more than the 14 percent typically given to the Tutsi group). FRODEBU's candidate, Melchior Ndadaye, won the majority of the vote, with 64 percent. The legislative elections confirmed this trend, with FRODEBU winning 65 of 81 seats.

After the elections, President Ndadaye denounced "the ethnic sickness" from which the country suffered and condemned all ideologies based on exclusion. He also formed a cabinet presided over by a Tutsi technocrat close to UPRONA, Sylvie Kinigi; granted amnesty to PALIPEHUTU terrorists, but also authorized the return of former President Bagaza; and he preached respect for the army, with which a good relationship seemed to be forming. However, Ndadaye had to respond to his partisans' desire for change and distribute positions to them. A "spoils system" was put into place that ranged from ministerial cabinets to school administrations, with former officials systematically replaced by FRODEBU militants.

The accelerated return of the refugees led to a number of conflicts. In many regions witch hunts

were launched against Hutu who had remained loyal to UPRONA. Moreover, incessant reports of agreements from Arusha to Rwanda created a disturbing situation on the northern border. In this context, President Ndadaye seemed to have taken excessive measures with certain of his partisans, but Tutsi extremists did not give him the chance to find middle ground.

In October 1993 the democratic process collapsed under the double shock of a military putsch and widespread killing whose genocidal form was predictive of what would happen in Rwanda six months later. Burundi's internal evolution has been suspended because of this double catastrophe.

The putsch that exploded on October 20 was the work of a battalion that was led by extremist officers nostalgic for the old regime and benefited from the complicit passivity of other units. Questions remain as to the nature of all the uprising's sponsors (including foreigners), but the assassination of President Ndadaye and many of his direct collaborators represents an irreparable institutional and human rupture.

The ouster of the putschist group two days later and the military's declarations of loyalty made no difference. The government took refuge at the French embassy, except for two ministers who created a government-in-exile in Kigali that was protected by Rwandan President Habyarimana. Quasi-unanimous reprobation by civil society, by the largest part of Burundi's political class, and by the international community removed all hope of success from this criminal and absurd enterprise.

But the death of Ndadaye on October 21 gave the signal the next morning for the killings that took place in the northern, central, and eastern parts of the country and that consummated the destruction of Burundi society. The "popular anger" said to justify the killings poorly disguises their organized character: roads barricaded and bridges cut in a few hours, bottles of gasoline and machetes distributed to bands of young militants; systematic arrests of Tutsi and Hutu UPRONA members who were then executed in the name of slogans about the necessity of avenging the death of the president or sending the Tutsi back "to Egypt"; ethnic sorting in schools; and calls to the popular "resistance" through Radio Rwanda and RILM (the station that would distinguish itself during the Rwandan genocide).

The "popular anger" said to justify the killings poorly disguises their organized character.

This mixture of planning and horror (patients killed in hospitals, entire families slaughtered with machetes) would recur in Rwanda in 1994, sometimes with the same actors; many Burundi refugees affiliated with PALIPHEUTU would be implicated in the genocide in the neighboring country.

The Burundi pogroms affected whole provinces, such as Karuzi or Rural Bujumbura. Communes were entirely purified of their Tutsi elements; these included Mwumba, Rango, and Ruhororo in the north, and Mbuye, Rutegama, and Gishubi in the center. Making innocent Tutsi peasants hostages—which recalled what had happened in Rwanda for 30 years—prevented FRODEBU from organizing against the putschists and undoubtedly helped discourage foreign intervention. The reaction of the armed forces, at first weak or limited to the rescue of threatened groups, took the form of massive reprisals against Hutu peasants in several places, notably in the central and eastern parts of the country. The parties who were present disputed the roles they played in the killing of some 100,000 victims in this bloody crisis.

THE LOGIC OF CIVIL WAR

The impunity that the putsch leaders enjoyed prolonged the crisis; although many were arrested, including those responsible for the October 1993 massacres, no one was tried. Moreover, the genocidal nature of the massacre was systematically denied by FRODEBU.

Yet these events did not merely leave their traces in the cemeteries. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees who fled, first to Rwanda (especially families sheltered by the men involved in the killings in the north of the country), then to Tanzania (in order to escape the reprisals), more than 200,000 "displaced" people (essentially Tutsi) were chased from their land. They were regrouped within Burundi in camps that were guarded by the army, where they lived in destitution. Young people from these camps made up the bulk of the Tutsi bands that sought vengeance, aided by soldiers who had lost families in this torment.

Burundi found itself in a general state of insecurity: in many places those who had not been refugees or who were "displaced" had to flee; periodically becoming "dispersed," they joined repatriates from Rwanda after the summer of 1994, who returned with a new wave of Rwandan Hutu refugees. The country thus emerged from the events of October 1993 with a mutual mistrust

that led many Hutu and Tutsi to put an end to their ancestral cohabitation. This situation nurtured different extremist groups and encouraged the development of civil war.

The international reaction often leaned toward military intervention. However, the special representative of the UN secretary general in Bujumbura in 1994 and 1995, Ould Abdallah, tirelessly called for political solutions first and stressed the risk of a general explosion that foreign intervention would bring, especially after the failure of the UN Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) to handle the genocide in Rwanda. It is therefore necessary to try to better understand Burundi's own political game over the past two years.

Beginning in December 1993, institutions were reestablished around the government, which was physically tucked away in a mansion on the edge of Lake Tanganyika and protected by members of the French military. The National Assembly was first reconstituted with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, a close associate of President Ndadaye, as its head. In January 1994, the assembly unanimously made Cyprien Ntaryamira president of the republic; his selection was the result of a compromise between FRODEBU and UPRONA that had been made under the auspices of the UN. A new coalition government was formed in February, directed by Anatole Kanyenkiko, a Tutsi moderate from UPRONA. However, on April 6, 1994, President Ntaryamira and Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana were killed when their plane was shot down over Kigali, Rwanda. Burundi, unlike Rwanda, remained calm, thanks to political and military action.

With Ntaryamira's death, Sylvestre Ntibantunganya constitutionally became president. What followed was persistent political infighting. The insufficiency of this political bargaining can be seen in the rise of violence in Bujumbura and other provinces that began as early as January 1994. The capital became the object of ethnic purification: in Kamenge, a northern suburb of the city, Tutsi residents were forced out in October 1993. In January 1994, in different quarters in the center and south of Bujumbura, Hutu were expelled during "*journées ville-morte*" (literally, "dead city days") organized by small opposition parties and exploited by bands of young Tutsi. Murder and pillaging accompanied these operations. This continued in the suburb of Bwiza in March 1995. Only the Muslim suburb of Buyenzi and the bourgeois sectors of the center and the

east of Bujumbura remained mixed, despite provocations by extremists from the two camps. Insecurity in the city was heightened by assassinations and grenade attacks in the central marketplace, mixing the criminal and the political.

The formation of ethnic ghettos was reinforced by the organization of militia. At the beginning of 1994, FRODEBU youth were armed in the Kamenge section of the city with weapons purchased in Rwanda. The first shots were fired in February 1994 and the suburb became embroiled in urban guerrilla warfare. Between March 1994 and June 1995 attempts were made to disarm the suburb, and secret prisons were set up. The quarter was then permanently encircled by the army until its inhabitants left for the surrounding areas or for Zaire.

The choice of overt ethnic confrontation (Hutu militia against the Tutsi army) was made by the minister of the interior, Léonard Nyangoma, a former rival of Ndadaye's in FRODEBU and adept at Rwandan-style "majority-based" solutions. From March to April 1994 he denounced alleged riots on foreign radio stations. These extremist provocations led to his withdrawal from the government, and he left the country. In June 1994, he created the National Council for the Defense of Democracy, whose armed branch, the Forces in Defense of Democracy, collaborated with other Hutu extremist movements.

The collapse of the Rwandan government in July 1994 led to population movements that favored the multiplication of quarrels: the return of Burundi refugees who collided with "displaced" Tutsi, and the arrival of Rwandan refugees perceived as allies of Hutu extremists. Nyangoma's militia joined with soldiers from the former Rwandan army and with *interahamwe* militia who were hidden in eastern Zaire. Burundi began to look like a base from which the militias could launch attacks against the new Rwandan regime. Areas in central and the northern Burundi became sanctu-

aries or passageways between Zaire and Tanzania, provoking bloody confrontations with the army. The role of the latter was regularly denounced, with reality not always clearly distinguishable from propaganda.

It was in Bujumbura and in northwestern Burundi that a climate of civil war developed, leading people to expect the worst. In March 1995, attacks by Hutu militia in the center and the south of the capital were followed by terrible reprisals in Buyenzi and Kanyosha and an exodus toward Zaire. At the same time, carefully developed rumors provoked the departure of tens of thousands of Rwandan refugees toward Tanzania. The international press spoke only of the "second genocide" in preparation. In June and July, new tensions broke out with the assassination of dozens of Hutu students at the country's university. Vehicles were regularly intercepted on roads providing access to the capital, and their Tutsi occupants were massacred.

Fighting was especially pronounced in the provinces of Buhanza and Cibitoke; during the summer of 1995, a vast rebel camp was destroyed in the forest of Kibira. But the rebels succeeded in December 1995 and this January in cutting off the capital's supply of electricity. The primary victims of this insidious war were the peasants caught between the rebels and the army: Tutsi were massacred in camps of "displaced" people, and Hutu were punished, either for having denounced the rebels or for not having done so. Today there are numerous "displaced" Hutu protected by the army.

The situation is thus much more complex than it appears. Currently, official politics aims to create a centrist block that would neutralize extremists from both sides. All negotiation with the Nyangoma movement has been rejected, and Tutsi "intégristes" close to former President Bagaza have been disqualified as well. In Burundi, as in Rwanda, the search for a compromise between the actors of a racist logic has not been easy. ■