MAPPING THE POLITY-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS IN SUSTAINABLE REFUGEE REINTEGRATION: A COMPARISON OF POST-CONFLICT RWANDA AND BURUNDI

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Abstract

Today, the voluntary return of refugees to their country of origin is widely perceived as the most preferred and durable solution. Yet, while voluntary repatriation is a desirable ideal – not least because most refugees themselves wish to return 'home' - the international community's development strategies to ensure its sustainability have, all too often, been unavailing. Specifically, and using a comparative case study approach to the return experiences in post-conflict Burundi and Rwanda, this dissertation finds that – without political will on part of the 'home' state and the international donors – efforts to facilitate genuine homecoming will remain inadequate. And may inadvertently, contribute to further instability. Fundamentally, the findings underscore the urgent need that, apart from the adoption of development-led approaches, the international community should pursue comprehensive state-building activities so as to create benign post-conflict states willing to open-up public goods for *all* returnees.

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Abbreviations

AU - African Union

BTI - Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index

CNDD-FDD - National Council for the Defense of Democracy - Forces for the Defense of Democracy

CTNB - Commission on Land and Other Assets

DG ECHO - Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

DRC - Democratic Republic of Congo

EC - European Commission

FAR - Rwandan Armed Forces

FRODEBU - Front for Democracy in Burundi

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

HCR - High Commissioner for Refugees

HRW - Human Rights Watch

ICG - International Crisis Group

IMF - International Monetary Fund

INGO - International Non-Governmental Organisation

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

NNGO - National Non-Governmental Organisation

NRC - Norwegian Refugee Council

OAU - Organisation of African Unity

OCHA - the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ODA - Overseas Development Assistance

PALIPEHUTU-FNL - Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People – National Liberation Forces

RPA - Rwandan Patriotic Army

RPF - Rwandan Patriotic Front

UK - United Kingdom

UN - United Nations

UNGA - United Nations General Assembly

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF - the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNSC - United Nations Security Council

UPRONA - Unity for National Progress

US - United States

USCRI - United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

WFP - The World Food Programme

WHO - World Health Organisation

WPG - World Bank Group

QIP - Quick Impact Project

I. Introduction: The 'Return Fantasy'

'Homecoming' is the idea, or ideal of 'going back' to one's home – the scent of all things familiar.[1] It is both the beginning and end of life: it is to start again, to begin at the beginning, to return to the 'metaphysical womb'; but it is also that imagined destination, "which maintains the hope of the final return … the final belonging (Gready, 1994, p. 3)." In Book 7 of *The Odyssey*, Homer describes the beleaguered Odysseus pining for his home after an almost decade-long peregrination abroad, so that he implores to Alcinous, King of the Phaeacians,

> "How much I have suffered . . . Oh just let me see
> my lands, my serving-men and the grand high-roofed house—
> then I can die in peace (Homer, 1997, 2.259-261)."

The agony of displacement,[2] or exile – of being 'out of place' – produces the 'inexhaustible' desire for all that is familiar - home. An 'emotional pull' that needs answering; displacement is to be escaped. No one is immune to the sirens of homecoming. "All refugees," former UNHCR spokesperson Melissa Fleming (2017, para. 19) writes, "want to go home someday."[3]

It is no surprise then, that the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of refugees into their country of origin (as opposed to local integration or resettlement in third countries) has been upheld as the "ideal, best … most desirable solution" (Stein, 1986, p. 269). Indeed, "[e]veryone supports the idea (Stein, 1986, p. 269):" UNHCR, NGOs, and governments have all come to endorse voluntary repatriation as the preferred long-term outcome for refugees (Long, 2013). "[O]f course," the 5th HCR Poul Hartling wrote in 1980, "voluntary repatriation, whenever feasible, is … the most desirable solution to refugee problems (UNHCR, 1980, para. 1);" but as his successor Jean-Pierre Hocké (1988, as cited in Engeland-Nouray) claimed in 1988, it is also "the most natural solution … for it enables refugees to *rediscover their social and*

[1] Homecoming, Renos Papadopoulos writes, is "not only the physical return back to their [refugees'] geographical homes but also the reconnection with all the complexity of the dimensions, layers, directions and everything else that home, in its primary sense, can provide" (Papadopoulos, 2002, p. 27).

[2] OCHA defines displacement as a situation in which people "have been forced or obliged to flee … in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters" (The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2004, p. 5).

[3] While this sentiment is widely held, empirical research shows that certainly not *all* refugees wish to go home. See, for example, Zeick *(*1997). The term 'refugee' refers a person who, "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themself] of the protection of that country." *The Refugee Convention to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951, 189 UNTS 137 (entered into force 22 April 1951), art. 1.

cultural roots, which give them the *comforting feeling of belonging* to their country of origin [emphasis added] (p. 154)."

While this methodological nationalism or 'sedentrist' logic through which refugee studies has traditionally viewed forced displacement is problematic – not least for that it is based on the principal presumption that "everyone wants to return to the country of origin, i.e., 'home' (Zeick, 1997, p. 447)," it is true that large numbers of refugees – likely a majority – want to go back "whatever the cost" (Hammond, 2004). As such, many refugees generally do not, as Lissa Malkki (1995) and others claim, assume something akin to a "deterritorialized global identity" that would render the desire to return obsolete; rather, they continue to cling to an identity that is exclusively territorially anchored (Kibreab, 1995, p. 1999). In his research on Bosnians returning to Sarajevo, for example, Anders Stefansson (2003, as cited in Hammond, 2004, p. 214) found that "people [from all three groups, i.e., Muslims, Serbs and Croats] wanted to return even though they knew they would never be able to reconstruct their prewar lives." Consequently, as "the idea of [return] continues to feature ... in the minds of displaced ... populations (Macdonald & Porter, 2020, p. 4)," voluntary repatriation is not only a desirable solution to the plight of most refugees, but also morally compelling.

And yet, at the same time, the voluntary return of refugees can only ever be deserving of the title 'most durable solution' if it is seen for what it truly is: "a complex process that can span many years, in which assistance is needed to enable people to construct their lives to the point that they can operate on equal economic, social, and political footing with other citizens of their country of origin (Hammond, 2004, p. 220)." Hitherto, the international community has focused too narrowly on socio-economic factors as causes of conflict and displacement, thereby falling short in identifying suitable measures that promote the sustainable return of refugees into their 'homeland (Chimni, 2004).' Fundamentally, UNHCR – the primary non-political international actor charged with independently representing the interests of (returning) refugees – alongside other UN agencies, INGOs, NNGOs, and international donors – interpret, as synonymous, the 'sustainability' of return with 'effective reintegration' that succeeds when "returnees are similar to the local population in terms of socio-economic conditions and security (Fransen, 2017, p. 1)." As such, the solution to achieving the sustainable reintegration of returnees is conceptualized as one of (socio-economic) 'development' – to the extent that "[i]mproving the coordination and funding instruments, and adopting more developmental methodologies" will a priori lead to better, and more effective reintegration results (Macrae, 1999, p. 1).

However, and using post-conflict Rwanda and Burundi as case studies, this research demonstrates that without recognizing and taking into consideration

the often-problematic features inherent in the post-conflict state, no developmental aid is likely to be enough to engender the sustainable return of returning refugees. That is not to say that (long-term) development assistance is not important; in fact, it is indispensable in any reconstruction and reintegration process due, in no small measure, to the socio-economic challenges often experienced by returning refugees. Yet, in the absence of a functioning state supportive of the public good, the "ability of returning refugees to secure the political, economic and social conditions needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity" will be a fundamental challenge, if not a mission impossible (Macrae, 1999, p. 3). By comparing the return experiences in Burundi and Rwanda, the present study thus challenges the dominant development-led approaches to refugee reintegration, and aims to advance a more holistic understanding of the conditions necessary for a sustainable return.

In what follows, section one will outline the different approaches to returnee reintegration and in that process, proposes a novel approach combining the insights of the development- and polity primacy approaches. Section two will provide a brief overview of the similar, but diverging histories of post-independence Burundi and Rwanda. Thereafter, section three discusses the role of the international community in the reconstruction and development process and its interaction with the institutional structures in place in each country. Section four reviews the ways in which the governing elites in both countries have, or have not, through their nation-building policies, facilitated the successful and sustainable reintegration of refugees. And the final section, before considering the implications of the returnee integration experiences in Burundi and Rwanda for policymakers and/or future research, answers the research question, which reads,

In what ways and to what extent have returning refugees been reintegrated in post-conflict Burundi and Rwanda?

II. The Reintegration-Development Problematique: Toward a New Approach to Sustainable Return

The displacement of refugees has been perennially recognized as a humanitarian issue, more than anything else (Bauman, 2002). With the historically prominent, if not pre-eminent, humanitarian/victimization discourse surrounding displacement, the figure representing the refugee was, and continues to be, largely an abject humanitarian victim – someone in a desert gasping for water, hoping to stumble upon the magical spring that is humanitarian assistance (Kumar Rajaram, 2002). As such, the global refugee regime's prevailing policy response – premised on an understanding of displacement as an emergency and temporary situation – has long been

humanitarian in nature, designed to address the short-term needs of refugees only (Zetter, 2020).[4]

In recent decades, however, there has not only been a growing acceptance that refugees, as a distinct social group, are not merely beneficiaries of humanitarian aid; rather, if anything, qualitative evidence has demonstrated that – as long as their participation and integration has been adequately promoted – refugees can be potential leaders and facilitators of positive change.[5] But also that humanitarian aid on its own – such as the provision of shelter, water, medical care, and sanitation – cannot serve as the figurative key to unlocking the displacement of refugees, which, according to the DG ECHO (2024), has become increasingly protracted, with many of today's refugees having been displaced for over 20 years. Indeed, while humanitarian aid may be able to provide short-term relief, it is simply not poised to solve the complex situations of refugee displacement and the underlying causes of refugee flight; "[t]here are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems (Ogata, cited in Scott-Smith, 2016, p. 2)," the late HCR Sadako Ogata famously observed in the early 1990s.

Almost concomitantly with the acceptance of this "new conventional wisdom" that humanitarian action alone is not sufficient to address many of the world's humanitarian crises (Rieff, 2002, p. 111);" a domain loosely characterizable as 'refugees and development' was gaining remarkable traction amidst a drastically changing geopolitical landscape (Malkki, 1995). With an institutional history going back to the first international agency dealing with refugees – the High Commissioner for Refugees of the League of Nations (1921-1938) – and popularized through UNHCR in the late 1960s and early 1970s – 'development' was increasingly being viewed as a category inextricably linked to the refugee phenomenon itself (Gasaresi, 1996). Jeremy Hein, for example, wrote in 1993 that "[e]conomic development and assistance to refugees are inseparable issues … because the 'refugee' is an indicator of world system dynamics (Hein, 1993, p. 45)." As such, in particular since the 1980s, UNHCR began to lead international initiatives providing short-term emergency-relief coupled with mid- to long-term development aid, also referred to as the 'humanitarian-development nexus' – such as Refugee Aid and Development, Returnee Aid and Development, the Brookings process, Targeted Development Assistance and, more recently, the Transitional Solutions Initiative. This, in an effort to support, on the one hand, refugees/returnees' resilience and self-reliance, and on the other, the needs of the countries and communities supporting them (Zetter, 2021).

[4] The global refugee regime encompasses "a set of norms, rules, principles, and decision-making procedures that help define states' obligations towards refugees (Loescher and Milner, 2011, p. 189)."
[5] See, for example, United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2022).

The logic of these development-based approaches, in simple terms, is that it can simultaneously benefit host/home states and societies, donors and, in theory, refugees/returnees, which, in turn, can lead to 'win–win' situations, empowering refugees/returnees "to be a 'benefit' rather than a 'burden' and reducing the long-term drain on finite humanitarian assistance budgets (Betts, 2011, pp. 13-14)." In much of the contemporary discourse in refugee studies, therefore, 'development' has been widely regarded as an important piece of the puzzle to overcoming protracted refugee situations and to tackling their root causes (Rist, 2007). In his study on UNHCRs efforts to implement the Returnee Aid and Development strategy in low-income countries, for example, Jeffrey Crisp observed that, especially in the immediate post-repatriation period, "[Development-led] reintegration programs have … provided communities with urgently needed resources … helped to boost the morale, motivation and living standards of returnees … helped to reconcile and reintegrate groups of people with different interests and political allegiances. And … contributed to the revitalization of local economies by removing some of the constraints to production and exchange (Crisp, 2001, p. 182)."

Yet, despite their significant, and positive short-term consequences, development-based approaches have, in most cases, stopped conspicuously short of delivering sustainable refugee returns (Macdonald and Porter, 2020; Buxton, 2008). Significantly, the almost complete dearth of any long-term success stories can, in large part be attributed to UNHCRs (2023) (and broader donors') conception of the root causes of refugee flight as being socio-economic in nature. Thus, in her address to the Institute for International Affairs in 1996, former UK Minister for Overseas Aid, Lynda Chalker, stated that,

"In the long-term it is clear that poverty and deprivation contribute to disorder and conflict. More prosperous countries with better educated and healthier people are better able to cope with the effect of disaster when it does strike. This is one of the reasons why our long-term development assistance strategy to poorer countries … is so important. It helps people progress out of poverty ... At a time of transition, aid also forms part of our efforts to enable major changes, political and economic, to take place without disorder (Chalker, 1996)."

This way, the international community not only equates 'effective reintegration' with a mere socio-economic benchmark – neglecting the equally important (re-)establishment of the protective relationship between the citizen, state, and nation (Long, 2013). It also passes over the crucial role of the state in facilitating socio-economic development. Too often, policy

makers and scholars of statebuilding erroneously presume the 'post conflict' state to be benign, willing, and able to implement developmental policies (Macrae, 1999). In practice, however, most such states exhibit one or more 'pathological features (Gasaresi, 1996);' they are "often deficient in the political will, institutional authority and[/or] organized power (Jackson, 1990, p. 31)," significantly affecting both the quality and quantity of the developmental space.

As a result, Charles Gasarasi (1996) has argued, perhaps most vocally,[6] that we should move beyond approaching refugees as a development issue. Specifically, in his article entitled "Development, Refugees Generation, Resettlement and Repatriation: A Conceptual Review," Gasarasi claims that, since the "refugee question is a function and product of state behaviour, as is development itself (p. 11)," it is not 'development' that is to take centre stage; the (post-conflict) state is. As the only body having international authority to direct and implement macro-level policies, it is the state, and not the international community, that exclusively determines "whether and how international public resources are deployed on its soil (Macrae, 1999, p. 18)." Only through rehabilitating the 'pathological nature' of the post-conflict state first, as the raison d'etre of what Gasarasi coined the 'polity primacy approach' reads, can refugee reintegration be sustainable. Thus understood, the truism that there are 'no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems' can be taken further such that there can be no developmental solutions without a functioning state, willing to coordinate and implement developmental policies for all (Scott-Smith, 2016, p. 2).

Although this approach certainly has its merits, not least for that it addresses the crucial role of the post-conflict state in the reintegration process, it critically fails to acknowledge that 'treating' a dysfunctional state, let alone an unwilling one, is likely to take years, if not decades. There are no quick fixes to building state capacity (Fung, 2017). And with the majority of refugees returning home within one to three years after the conditions precipitating their flight have ended (Devictor, 2o23), it is – in most cases – a practical impossibility to redress the institutional weaknesses of the fledgling post-conflict state before refugees start coming back en masse. Moreover, given the idiosyncratic needs and vulnerabilities of these returning refugees, the returnee situation simply does not allow for a delay in the delivery of humanitarian- and development aid.

Consequently, 'development' is to remain an important part of future reintegration efforts, for that UNHCRs and other (inter)national partner organisations' – through mostly micro-level interventions – have, as Crisp

[6] See also, for example, McSpadden (1999).

evinced, engendered significant tangible results in the immediate post-repatriation period. Nonetheless, considering that these often community-based projects have, only sparsely, translated into long-term macro-economic improvements, the polity-primacy approach is equally instrumental to producing more sustainable outcomes. As such, it not just 'development' that is to take centre stage; it is 'development' ánd the 'state' that should inform the international community's efforts to realising an environment conducive to the sustainable return of refugees. Indeed, what is needed is a holistic approach, one that requires significant will, in addition to concerted effort, on part of the international community to finally practice what it preaches. An approach that prioritises improving political stability alongside implementing micro-projects and where possible, and with the consent of the host-state, macro-developmental policies that focus on socio-economic- as well as political development.[7] The essential elements influencing sustainable reintegration outcomes can thus, be summarized as follows,

sustainable returnee integration = state capacity + political will (on part of the international donor community and the 'home' state) + (socio-economic and political) development

III. Methodology and Scope

This study uses a comparative case study approach, which is particularly well-suited to uncovering complex, multi-faceted influences through context-sensitive comparison, to demonstrate that the factors influencing the sustainable reintegration of refugees are diverse and multi-dimensional – problematising the reductionist logic underpinning the prevailing development-based approaches. In particular, through critically evaluating the post-conflict reintegration processes in Burundi and Rwanda, which have been described by UNHCR as successful,[8] it challenges the taken-for granted assumption in much of the discourse in refugee studies that the 'problematic' of return is largely one of aid management and/or a lack of funding. And instead, points to the equally important role of the post-conflict state in creating an environment propitious for the successful, long-term reintegration of refugees as well as challenges the concept of 'development' generally interpreted as purely socio-economic in nature.

Significantly, in comparing the post-repatriation experiences in Burundi and Rwanda – both of which are ideal candidates for comparative research owing

[7] In the literature, the term 'political development' has been interpreted in many different ways, but for the purposes of this dissertation, political development is understood as the increase in returning refugees' political mobilization and participation. See generally, Pye (1965).
[8] See, for example, United Nations (2015) and the United Nations Development Programme (2022).

to their many shared characteristics (e.g., similar ethnic make-up, shared colonial past) and essential differences in their post-war trajectories (e.g., nature of the ruling parties, approaches to reintegration) (Rieder, 2015) – this research synthesises, in modest fashion, the underlying patterns, similarities, and differences across the returnees' reintegration processes in each country. It broadly identifies – on the basis of a thematic analysis that investigates the relationship between both the 'international' and the state, and the state and the returnees – the drivers and impediments for the sustainable reintegration of refugees in Burundi and Rwanda – uncovering the crucial role of the heretofore rarely examined 'home' state in post-conflict development processes.[9] Ultimately, this study aims to further contribute to our, albeit confined, understanding of the enabling conditions for the durable return of refugees.

Though, it only relies on primary and secondary sources – such as academic publications, policy reports, news articles, and speeches of government officials – and, therefore, does not – and cannot – provide a fully comprehensive analysis of the intricate variables determining the sustainable reintegration of refugees. Rather, it presents a modest attempt at building a broader and more comprehensive understanding of 'post-return' development, one that can serve as an explanatory framework for future research.

IV. 'The False Twins:' A Historical Background

With important historical, geographical, social, and political commonalities, Burundi and its northern neighbour Rwanda are arguably more alike than any other two countries on the African continent (Lemarchand, 2007); they are "conjoined twins (Kiwuwa, 2015, para. 1)," or "so cliché has it (Jones, 2017, p. 385)." They are small and perched on the crest of the Congo-Nile divide in east-central Africa, landlocked, and densely populated. Their climate, topography, religion, traditions, language, and predominantly agrarian economy are also relatively similar. Although exact figures are not available, both countries are said to have roughly the same ethnic composition: 85-86 per cent Hutu, 14-15 per cent Tutsi, and 1 per cent Twa (Uvin, 1999). They were independent kingdoms – with slight variations in socio-political structures –[10] long before they were colonized by Germany in the late nineteenth century and, following their defeat in the First World War, brought into the same administrative unit, Ruanda-Urundi, under Belgian Trusteeship. And, most significantly, since their independence in July 1962, Rwanda and Burundi became mired in recurrent ethnic-political violence, such as political

[9] This is also noted in Tegenbos and Vlassenroot (2018).
[10] See generally, Taulbee (2017).

assassinations, coup d'états, genocides, and civil wars – attributable, in large part, to "the capture of the state by one ethnic group … whose leaders have systematically prevented the other from accessing state institutions and resources (Daley, 2009, p. 167)." The struggle "for resources, for power over those resources, and for a voice in governance (Maguire, 1995, p. 89)," in other words, lies at the root of the ethnic tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi in both countries. As such, the story of conflict in Rwanda and Burundi is not, as Linda Maguire (1995) observed, "at its base, an ethnic conflict (p. 89)."

These, and other similarities notwithstanding, significant differences do exist between the two countries. For example, while the Hutu-Tutsi divide began to take on a more pronounced character in both countries in the early 1950s, the degree of cementation differed significantly. In particular, and unlike in Burundi, Hutu-Tutsi strife in Rwanda led to the overthrow of the Tutsi-dominated monarchy in 1961 – giving rise to markedly different paths to independence that had significant ramifications for the post-colonial period.[11] Similarly, the dynamics leading up to the extreme violence that characterized both wars were the result of different processes. Whereas discrimination and unequal access to scarce resources in Burundi – particularly among the Hutu – led to the outbreak of violence, it was the moral exclusion of the Tutsi that laid the foundations for the genocide in Rwanda (Uvin, 1999). This brings us to yet another difference: in the decades following independence, the Tutsi minority controlled most of the political and economic institutions in Burundi, while the Hutu majority predominately dominated in Rwanda (Dunlop, 2021). After the civil wars in Rwanda (1990-1994) and Burundi (1993-2006), they continued to be dominated by a particular ethnic group, yet in opposite ways. Thus, in recent decades, Rwanda has been ruled by a Tutsi-led party, the RPF, and Burundi by a Hutu-dominated one, the CNDD-FDD, although the power of the CNDD-FDD continues to be more limited as the consociationalist features enshrined in the constitution have – at least to some extent – been able to withstand the party's increasingly authoritarian tendencies.[12]

The most important difference, however, and which directly challenges the simplistic and oft-applied description of the two countries as conjoined twins, is the institutional design that characterises post-conflict Burundi and Rwanda (Folarin, 2023). Indeed, as René Lemarchand (2004) put it, "no other two societies on the continent had more in common in terms of size, social structure, traditional political systems and ethnic configurations (p. 408)."

[11] The Hutu revolution (1959-1962), for example, led to an exodus of tens of thousands of Tutsi to Uganda, "an event that lies at the root of the formation of the former rebel movement and current dominant political party [in Rwanda], the RPF (Vandenginste, 2014, p. 265)."
[12] See for an overview of the political power-sharing model adopted in Burundi, Vandeginste (2019).

And yet, “none are more unlike each other from the standpoint of their emergent polities after a decade of bitter civil strife (Burundi) and one of the most appalling bloodbaths of the last century (Rwanda) (Lemarchand, 2007).” The reason for this can largely be found in their diverging passages to peace. In Rwanda, the RPA – which was established among the Tutsi diaspora in Kampala, Uganda in 1987 as the armed wing of the rebel movement RPF – managed to defeat the French-supported FAR in July 1994. Although the Government of the Republic of Rwanda and the RPF had signed a comprehensive peace agreement (hereinafter: the 1993 Arusha Accords) in August 1993, it failed miserably in its implementation as groups of Hutu extremists – who had felt excluded from the negotiation process – together with the presidential guard and members of the FAR would orchestrate between April and July 1994 the mass killing of predominantly Tutsi, but also Hutu moderates. As such, the “dominant modality of Rwanda’s transition from conflict to peace” was a military victory (Vandegiste, 2014, p. 266) – paving the way for, what in theory, would become a majoritarian democracy. In practice, however, and despite the RPFs stated aims of wanting to “rebuild the unity of Rwandans, establish democracy in the country and … work for the progress of all its citizens (RPF, n.d.)” -- Rwanda would soon drift towards Tutsi-led authoritarianism.

Burundi’s path to peace, on the other hand, was remarkably different, significantly longer in duration, and ended with an exogenously imposed peace agreement. Unlike the RPF, there was not a rebel movement in Burundi strong enough to effectively challenge the Tutsi-dominated government, with even “different factions of the rebel movements fighting each other rather than the common enemy (Turner, 2013, p. 22).” It was only in August 2000, almost seven years after the assassination of the first democratically elected Hutu-president, Melchior Ndaday, plunged the county into a civil war, that the Burundi government and seventeen political parties – as a result of increasing war fatigue, mounting regional and international pressures, coupled with a skilful and charismatic chief mediator Nelson Mandela signed the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement (hereinafter: the 2000 Arusha Accords) (Hajayandi, 2016). While rightfully considered a breakthrough at the time, not least for that it was aimed to institutionalize the representation of all Burundi’s ethnic segments in the state institutions and provide for a broad-based coalition government, important stakeholders to the conflict – most notably the largely Hutu rebel movements CNDD-FDD and Palipehutu-FNL – had refused to sign onto the Agreement. The civil war, therefore, continued unabated and only officially came to an end in 2006 with the Comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement that was concluded between the newly installed, and ethnically diverse government and Palipehutu-FNL.

The emergence of authoritarianism and consociationalism in post-conflict Rwanda and Burundi respectively, as Lemarchand alluded to, has turned out, however, not just to be an important difference between the two countries. It would, in fact, go on to determine their (diverging) post-conflict economic and social trajectories; not only affecting those who stayed behind, but fundamentally – and even to a greater extent – those who returned.

V. The International Community and its Role in Post-Conflict Burundi and Rwanda: An Active Bystander or a Passive Participant?

When the 'apocalyptic' dust surrounding the Great Lakes region slowly began to settle in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it left in its wake two countries annihilated and destitute: their physical capital and basic infrastructure destroyed; social capital disintegrated; and human skills severely depleted.[13] In Rwanda, 40 per cent of the country's estimated 7 million people were uprooted (29 per cent) or killed (11 per cent) – making it "one of the highest casualty rates of any population in history from non-natural causes (Prunier, 1995, p. 265)." This unprecedented scale of devastation prompted widespread international quilt, which significantly influenced subsequent aid priorities. Similar numbers can be observed in Burundi, where the almost 13-year long civil war left 21 percent of the country's pre-war population of around 6 million either dead (5 per cent) or displaced (16 per cent) (Ggombe & Newfarmer, 2018, p. 318). As such, nothing and no one was spared: almost everyone "has a dramatic story—of hunger and deprivation, fear, flight, and loss of family and friends (Kumar, 2001, p. 28)." Post-conflict reconstruction in Burundi and Rwanda would, therefore, be "an ambitious and complex task, arguably as difficult as that Europe confronted after the Second World War (Newbury & Baldwin, 2000, p. 3); only a "mini-Marshall plan (UN, 1997, para. 6)," former joint UN/OAU Special Representative for the Great Lakes region, Mohamed Sahnoun, remarked to the members of the UNSC in January 1997, could help rehabilitate the shattered and traumatized 'false twins.'

While Sahnoun's call for the adoption of a Marshall Plan-type economic recovery program fell on deaf ears, it was not long after that Rwanda, unlike Burundi, which was still caught in the middle of a civil war, would start seeing a sharp increase in development finance and technical assistance. Indeed, as the political, social, and security situation began to stabilize and many refugees successfully returned to Rwanda in the late 1990s, the focus of the international donor community shifted from providing humanitarian assistance and short-term reconstruction projects to creating conditions

[13] Burundi and Rwanda, however, were not the only theaters of armed conflicts in the region. Uganda and the DRC, for example, also experienced dramatic civil wars during the 1990s and early 2000s. See, Daley (2006)

conducive for the sustainable reintegration of refugees as well contributing to "the restoration of total peace, reconstruction and socio-economic development (UNGA, 1996, para. 1)." To achieve these objectives, bilateral- and multilateral donors, such as the EC and the World bank, would provide substantial sectoral and budget support in the following decades; particularly around policy priorities outlined in Rwanda's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, which include education, communication infrastructure, health, energy, water, and transport. Before long, development assistance to Rwanda exceeded more than 40 per cent of its overall government expenditure, significantly contributing to the country's recovery process across a range of sectors (Le Roux & Aikens, 2023). In a recent study, for example, the IMF found that economic growth in Rwanda "averaged 8.5 per cent a year over the 1995–2022 period… [and] has been accompanied by significant improvements in living standards for Rwandans, including reductions in poverty, hunger, and child mortality (IMF, 2023, p. 3).

Yet, the remarkable rates of socio-economic transformation in post-genocide Rwanda are not merely a consequence of increased donor involvement; but rather also a result of "[a]n effective, pragmatic, and corruption-intolerant political system (Ggombe & Newfarmer, 2018, p. 338)." The (returning) Tutsi elites, which assumed political and social control almost immediately after their decisive military victory in July 1994,[14] have long exhibited a strong commitment to (re)build a strong and centralized state, foster national unity, and boost poverty-reducing economic growth – giving rise to "[s]table politics, prudent macro-economic management, and a sound investment climate (Ggombe & Newfarmer, 2018, p. 338)." Indeed, unlike in Burundi, where the power-sharing arrangement hindered intra-institutional cooperation and policy effectiveness, the RPF's "monopoly on force and little tolerance for dissent" meant that it could – relatively unconstrained – hold a consistent line on a set of core policy issues and implement a seemingly effective reconstruction and development agenda (Ggombe & Newfarmer, 2018, p. 318). The success of the RPF's socio-economic recovery efforts in the past decades, however, is also attributable to its 'zero-tolerance policy for corruption', which has allowed Rwanda, unlike many other aid-recipient countries in Africa, to successfully channel most of its development aid into productive investment (Turner, 2013, p. 32). It is therefore, unsurprisingly, that Rwanda has repeatedly been hailed as "a textbook case of how to orchestrate a successful post-conflict reconstruction (Ggombe & Newfarmer, 2018, p. 318)."

[14] The RPF's leadership did initially pay lip-service to the terms and spirit of the 1993 Arusha Accords and created a transitional power-sharing government, but this, as Stef Vandeginste (2014) rightly observed, would only "temporarily and superficially affect the new constitutional setting (p. 273)."

In Burundi, on the other hand, effective leadership has been conspicuously absent, and its divisive political landscape has resulted in an almost complete lack of sound and coherent macro-economic policies capable of producing similar growth rates as in Rwanda. As such, while trend lines have gone up in both countries in the past two decades, Rwanda scores consistently better on a range of human development indicators, including GDP per capita, life expectancy, and primary school completion (McDoom, 2023). Nonetheless, the immediate aftermath of the civil war did initially produce significant socio-economic gains in Burundi, which was not only due to the initial peace dividend, but also because of the impressive levels of foreign aid received (WPG, 2025). Specifically, (1) the lull that marked the years following the signing of the Global Ceasefire Agreement in 2003 between the transitional government and CNDD-FDD, (2) the free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections in 2005, and (3) the strengthened relationship between the new CNDD-FDD-led coalition government and the international community motivated international donors to become actively involved in Burundi's recovery process.[15] Thus, starting in 2005, mainly Western and multilateral donors such as the US and the Peacebuilding Fund began supporting Burundi with significant aid contributions to help reintegrate returning refugees and internally displaced persons into their old, or new communities through the implementation of QIPs; that is, "small-scale, low-cost projects" that range "from being 'one shot' affairs to … "elaborate sets of activities" aimed to produce "rapid results and [to support] area/community development (UNHCR, 2004, p. v)." And, on the other hand, to support a variety of CNDD-FDD-initiated (small-scale) socio-economic programmes, including "free school enrolment, free access to health care for pregnant women and children under five, job creation through highly labour-intensive programmes … and the repair of infrastructure in various sectors (Rufyikiri, 2021, p. 20)." The initial success of these programmes – reflected, for example, in the real GDP growth rate that increased from less than 2 percent in 2000 to an average of 4.5 percent between 2004 and 2010; together with CNDD-FDD's domestic legitimacy and its decision in 2007 to make Burundi a new troop-contributing country to UN and AU-led peace missions made that the rebel movement-turned political party enjoyed an increasingly favourable international image.

Just as quickly as it came, however, the view of the CNDD-FDD as a benign peacebuilding actor determined to produce collective outcomes disappeared. Indeed, since the late 2000s, "the regime … slipped rapidly," in the words of Filip Reyntjens (2009), "towards practices that would destroy its [international] legitimacy: embezzlement, corruption, attempts to muzzle the

[15] This, to such an extent that OAD would quickly amount to over 60 per cent of Burundi's national budget. See, Lyer et al., (2018).

opposition, press and civil society (p. 8).” Consequently, despite several “milestone achievements” in the early post-conflict period (Specker, 2010, p. 1), the CNDD-FDD’s increasingly coercive and authoritarian governance strategies as well its deliberate weakening of the already limited in-country implementation capacity has led to a steady deterioration in relations with the international community; such that several foreign donors have withdrawn or suspended foreign aid to Burundi on an intermittent basis, which explains, in part, the lacklustre performance of Burundi’s contemporary economy (Buruhabwa & Curtis, 2021, p. 4).[16]

Nevertheless, the decision of CNDD-FDD’s leadership to forge a more authoritarian statebuilding path is not the only reason behind the almost continuous downward trend of development aid channelled into Burundi. Fundamentally, the failure to keep the international donor community on board has also been the result of a fractured and diffused political landscape. Specifically, the power-sharing provisions in the Constitution require, 1) the political parties to be ethnically mixed, resulting in an inherently fractured CNDD-FDD characterized by “internal fights, schisms, divisions and resignations (Specker et al., 2010, p. 18),” and 2) the formation of a coalition government, forcing the CNDD-FDD to work together with, and share ministerial posts among rival political parties such as the UPRONA and the FRODEBU. As result of these competing poles of power within the CNDD-FDD as well as between the CNDD-FDD and other political parties, coupled with the party leadership’s increasingly authoritarian bent and the lack of both coherent, long-term macro-economic policies and technocratic management, the CNDD-FDD has been unable to articulate a consistent narrative, and most importantly, one that could resonate with international donors. Interestingly, even though the CNDD-FDD has secured an almost complete monopoly over state and society – in particular since 2015 when the then-Hutu president and long-standing CNDD-FDD leader Pierre Nkurunziza pushed through a constitutional amendment that allowed him to run for a third term in office – it has not led to a concomitant rapprochement between the ruling party and the international donor community (Vandeginste, 2019).

Conversely, despite its similar authoritarian tendencies, equally poor – if not worse – human rights record (HRW, 2023), and controversial policies regarding justice, resettlement, refugees, elections, and regional security (Hayman, 2007), the RPF has consistently and successfully managed to direct and manipulate donor relations. It was only in the early 2010s that several of its key donors – such as the US and the Netherlands – delayed disbursement or withdrew part of their aid to Rwanda after renewed accusations of its

[16] According to almost any international data set, Burundi ranks consistently among the poorest countries in the world. See, for example, Ventura (2024).

support for M23 rebels in the DRC. The difference in terms of quantitative aid received in both countries can subsequently be attributed to several factors. First, the RPF has, unlike the CNDD-FDD, long been able to exert almost complete political and social control with limited opposition to its reconstruction and development agenda, both within and outside the party, allowing for a consistent narrative to emerge, and most significantly, a compelling one through a discourse of 'national unity' and 'development.' Second, and closely related to the first factor, the RPF's long-term neo-liberal development strategies, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and Vision 2020, have – coincidentally or not – oftentimes converged with the priorities of the donor community, whereas CNDD-FDD leadership has not only lacked the political will for real socio-economic change, or been fixated on short-to-medium term development only, but also repeatedly accused international organisations and foreign donors of "challenging its sovereignty and underestimating [its] strong legitimacy and support (Buruhabwa & Curtis, 2021, p. 1234)." In recent years, therefore, the Burundi government has allowed fewer aid representatives and international diplomats in the country and has even expelled high-ranking officials, such as WHO representative Walzer Mulombo in 2020 (France24, 2024). Thirdly, in contrast to Burundi, Rwanda ranks consistently among the least corrupt countries in Africa (Transparency International, 2023), making the latter more appealing to international donors as they generally express a techno-bureaucratic vision of development. As Stefaan Marysse et al. (2007) assert, "in decisions on allocating aid, donors tend to refer to technocratic elements of governance rather than to political sensitivities (p. 25)." As such, while post-conflict Burundi is still more inclusive and the CNDD-FDD has still a greater post-civil war domestic democratic legitimacy, it seems that the more authoritarian and repressive RPF with its modern and technocratic drive has been more attractive to the majority of international donors. Finally, some authors have argued that the greater volume of aid in Rwanda can be attributed to guilt on the part of the international community resulting from its inaction to the 1994 genocide (Curtis, 2015, p. 1366), although the extent to which this has actually played a role in the allocation of aid is debatable (Desrosiers & Swedlund, 2022).

The variables determining the quality of donor-recipient aid relations, and subsequently, albeit to a lesser degree, the socio-economic growth in countries emerging from (civil) wars can thus, be said to include: (1) the mode of transition from war to peace, (2) the post-conflict institutional structure, and most crucially, (3) whether there is sufficient will both on part of the ruling elites *and* the international community. In Burundi, while consociationalism has had some success in maintaining peace and stability in the country, the 'pathological features' apparent in the post-conflict state – together with an apathetic international donor community that has been

seemingly unwilling to change the country's course – have resulted in a situation where the initial socio-economic gains made following the signing of the 2003 Global Ceasefire Agreement have largely been undone. In Rwanda, on the other hand, the RPF's iron grip on Rwandan political power and especially its leader Paul Kagame's determination to transform the country, together with an actively involved international community oblivious to the party's widespread human rights violations and authoritarian rule, meant that Rwanda would undergo quite significant and long-lasting socio-economic change.

As a result, it appears that Rwanda, unlike Burundi, does satisfy most of the independent elements that form part of the 'sustainable reintegration formula.' Specifically, there seems political will on part of both the RPF and the international community, considerable socio-economic growth as well as a dramatic increase in institutional capacity. The only element noticeably absent in post-conflict Rwanda is any form of political development. Burundi, in contrast, did see an increase in political development, at least in the early post-conflict period, but clearly falls short in all other categories – suggesting that reintegration success in Burundi, compared to Rwanda, has been more limited. This raises the question whether the more favourable conditions present in Rwanda have, in fact, resulted in better reintegration results. In other words, did both stayees *and* returnees benefit from Rwanda's post-genocide socio-economic transformation? If so, to what extent? And, more generally, in what ways have the different nation-building projects in Rwanda and Burundi hindered or created possibilities for the successful reintegration of returning refugees?

VI. Who Reintegrates? The Politics of Nation- Building in Post-Conflict Burundi and Rwanda

While the genocide in Rwanda and the decade-long war in Burundi left the countries' populations devastated and mourning, they also heralded a time of relief and cautious hope. Hope for a new beginning and a permanent rupture with the countries' "tribalist, ignorant, corrupt, and neocolonial [past] (Turner, 2015, p. 83). Not only shared among those who stayed, but also among those who had left – resulting in "some of the largest refugee return movements in the world (Fransen & Kuschminder, 2014, p. 59)." In Rwanda, the transitional government, in conjunction with international relief organisations such as UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP facilitated between 1994 and 2000 the 'voluntary' repatriation of more than 800.000 'old-caseload' Tutsi refugees and over 2 million 'new-caseload' Hutu refugees (Bruce, 2009).[17] Conversely, in Burundi, close to 50.000 '1972-caseload' refugees

[17] Old-caseload refugees are to those who left the country during the late 1950s and early 1960s when the Hutu overthrew the Tutsi-dominated monarchy. In contrast, the new-

and over 450.000 of the '1993-caseload' returned during the 2000s and early 2010s – either spontaneously or through tripartite agreements negotiated between the Burundi government, UNHCR, and the refugee-hosting governments (Vorrath, 2008).[18] Most significantly, the speed and scale with which the repatriation movements took place in both Rwanda and Burundi did not only, according to some experts, "[play] an important part in validating [their] post-conflict political order[s] (Johansson, 2010, p. 15)," it also represented a moral victory, in the sense that many of "[t]he main victims of the [civil] war[s]" were able to go back home (ICG, 2003, para. 3). Yet, the fact that most refugees had now successfully returned 'home' did not mark the end of [their] refugee cycle (Black & Koser, 1999), but rather the initial step in a long process leading toward their sustainable reintegration. Indeed, Rwandan and Burundian returnees found themselves in two different countries with both radically different approaches to peace- and nation-building – giving rise to a host of comparable, but also distinct reintegration challenges.

In Rwanda, the upper echelons of the RPF recognized that, in order to maintain, and preferably increase, its political dominance, it was crucial to break with the country's (neo)colonial divisive past – particularly after the cataclysmic genocide had left approximately 75 per cent of the Tutsi population dead (Verwimp, 2004). As such, in an effort to detract attention from its minority rule and "prevent the delegitimization that would likely ensue (King, 2020, p. 120)," the Tutsi-led government began promoting a policy of national unity based on "ethnic amnesia (Vandeginste, 2014, p. 263)." Specifically, and unlike Burundi, which institutionalized its societal segmentation through the implementation of ethnic power-sharing institutions, the Rwandan government's aim was to eradicate ethnic, regional and other divisions and build (read: impose) a shared sense of Rwandanness: 'One Rwanda for all Rwandans.' Ethnic identities, therefore, are officially denied – and "denying their non-existence involves severe penal sanctions (Lemarchand, 2007, p. 7)."

Within this top-down de-ethnicization project, the repatriation of both Tutsi *and* Hutu refugees became one of the RPF's most important objectives. In a 1996 national radio broadcast, for example, the then-Tutsi president Pasteur Bizimungu directly addressed the hundreds of thousands of Hutu still residing

caseload refugees refer predominantly to the Hutu who left Rwanda during, or around the April-July 1994 Genocide. Tens of thousands of Hutu refugees, however, were also (indirectly) forced by the RPF to return. See, for example, Human Rights Watch (2023).

[18] The 1972-caseload refugees fled Burundi in 1972 following the predominantly Tutsi-dominated government organized killing of hundreds of thousands of Hutu civilians. The 1993-caseload refugees, on the other hand, began fleeing the country in 1993 at the time of Tutsi President Melchior Ndadaye's assassination.

in refugee camps in neighbouring countries such as Uganda, Tanzania and Congo, stating,

> "I would particularly like to ask the refugees to return home, to tell them we await them, that they should stop living in misery in camps and humiliation of exile (USCRI, 1997)."

While Bizimingu's rhetoric suggested a commitment to inclusive nation-building, the actual experiences of many Hutu returnees were marked by exclusion and structural disadvantage. Significantly, the Rwandan government did not just facilitate the return of refugees for it desired so, to win the international community's goodwill, or its deep suspicion of Hutu refugees (and other Hutu living abroad) whose mere existence was – and continues to be – perceived as a threat to the nation-building project. Fundamentally, the RPF also needed them to return: "[i]n essence," President Paul Kagame stated in 2010, "our national socio-economic transformation project hinges on developing our greatest resources – the Rwandan people. They are our drivers of change and the managers of our production for greater overall prosperity (Office of the President, 2010)."

Yet, upon their 'physical' homecoming, most of the Hutu returnees would soon realize that the government's 'denial of ethnicity' and reconciliation agenda was never meant to be all-inclusive. The ruling elites outwardly expressed intention with creating "a new nation, a new state, and, ultimately, a new people (Turner, 2015, p. 81)." Yet, in reality, state favouritism towards the Tutsi would "pervade all spheres of activities" wherein "the Tutsi returnees—particularly those from Uganda—do best … then there are the Tutsi survivors … then the third group are those who support the government … [and finally,] if you are not in one of these categories, then you cannot do well (McDoom, 2022, p. 555)." In a 2005 report on returning refugees, for example, the NRC observed that the Rwandan government "blatant[ly] [protected] … the interests of returning Tutsi refugees to the detriment of the Hutu – their preferential treatment in allocation and distribution of assistance, in land sharing and resettlement (NRC, 2005, p. 12)." While Hutu refugees returning to central and northern Rwanda faced a relatively 'unproblematic' return home, in other parts of the country, Hutu returned to find their houses and land occupied by recent Tutsi returnees and/or were forced to share plots. Many Hutu, therefore, have "expressed that they felt worse off than the Tutsi returnees who were allocated land and were not asked to give anything, such as livestock, in return (Leegwater, 2015, p. 220)."

Similarly, although there is only a limited body of disaggregated data available on inter-communal inequalities in Rwanda as the explicit study of such issues is forbidden, findings do indicate that Tutsi 'survivors' and

returnees, which are overrepresented in the small and upper middle classes and largely reside in urban areas (Ansoms, 2009), have benefited most from socio-economic policies (BTI, 2024). This, in contrast to the predominantly Hutu subsistence farmers living in rural areas (Purdekova & Mwambari, 2022), although they have also enjoyed – at least to some extent – the positive effects of the RPF's large scale investments in public goods, such as universal healthcare and tuition-free education. More significantly, ethnic identities continue to be salient in contemporary Rwanda, despite the government's policy of 'ethnic nonrecognition.' If anything, instead of diminishing in relevance, the tools employed to bring about large-scale social transformation – such as the *ingando* re-education camps, *gacaca* courts, and *umuganda* monthly communal labours days – have only elevated sentiments of ethnic exclusion and disenfranchisement among Hutu (returnees) (Purdekova & Mwambari, 2022). Finally, Rwanda's democratic and civic space remains tightly closed and Hutu political representation remains elusive, with over 80 per cent of the 205 most senior figures in the country being Tutsi (Reyntjens, 2021). Consequently, the new-caseload Hutu refugees "feel much less represented than before" whereas the old-caseload Tutsi refugees "see themselves as being the most represented (Leegwater, 2015, p. 127)." Further, the new social balance of power that came with the exclusive military victory of the RPF meant that many Hutu returnees have not "[dared] to protest the occupation of their land and houses" and continue to stay largely silent regarding their worse socio-economic situation for fear of being accused of harbouring 'genocidal mentalities (Leegwater, 2015, p. 128).'

The outcome of the 1994 genocide, therefore – in terms of socio-political organisation – has been "a change in the occupants of the roles but no major change in the structuring of the roles (Ingelaere, 2010, p. 290)." Indeed, in many ways, the RPF can be seen as recreating the economic, social, and political environment that had led to the recurrent outbursts of ethnic violence during the mid- and late-1900s. As such, even though Rwanda has demonstrated relatively favourable conditions for the sustainable reintegration of *all* refugees, it seems clear that the lack of political will to politically, socially, and economically reintegrate the predominantly Hutu returnees has outweighed all else.

While the virtual absence of political opposition in Rwanda paved the way for the RPF to adopt and roll-out a comprehensive national unity and reconciliation agenda, within the more fractured political space in Burundi, the CNDD-FDD and its coalition partners opted for a "laissez-faire" approach (Reinold, 2019, p. 15). Unlike in Rwanda, where (one-sided victor's) justice and truth were seen as essential ingredients for long-lasting peace, the successive CNDD-FDD-led governments have not exhibited any appetite to address issues of justice, truth, and reconciliation, likely out of fear "that

[their] own crimes might be exposed in the process (Reinold, 2019, p. 20)." Indeed, "as many of [Burundi's ruling elite] have blood-stained hands," Stef Vandeginste (2012) writes, "their interests converge in having as little truth and accountability as possible (p. 359)." Paradoxically, however, whereas ethnic markers have remained part of everyday life in Rwanda despite the RPF's efforts to eradicate the ethnic consciousness in the population, the 'non-approach' to reconciliation and justice – together with the explicit recognition of ethnicity in the 2005 constitution – have led to ethnic pacification in Burundi – both among the masses and political elites. Thus, for the most part, "[b]urundians get along as neighbours, colleagues and friends, letting bygones be bygones (Turner, 2013, p. 27), and "political competition no longer coincides with ethnic rivalry (McCulloh & Vandeginste, 2019, p. 1185)."

In the same way that the Burundian government has shown little interest in truth-seeking, justice, and reconciliation, it also lacked the political will to implement the other dimensions critical to the resettlement and reintegration of refugees set out in the 2000 Arusha Accords. Yet, while the ruling elites' non-approach helped in closing the social, political, and economic divide between the Hutu and Tutsi (BTI, 2020), large segments of the returnee population have not been sustainably reintegrated; not in spite of the government's laissez-faire attitude, but because of it. Specifically, not only did the ruling elites increasingly indulge in – and turned a blind eye to – corrupt practices and rent-seeking behaviour; the social, economic and cultural reintegration of the 1972-caseload refugees has been relatively less successful as compared to those belonging to the 1993-caseload; the result of which can be attributed both to individual factors (e.g., language, education, and social networks) and structural factors (e.g., demographic pressure and institutional capacity).[19] Fundamentally, however, the most inhibiting factors for the sustainable reintegration of the 1972-caseload refugees – but also a significant number of 1993-caseload refugees – were poverty and their limited access to land and property. Thus, notwithstanding the initial success of the return process, in that many 1993-caseload "returnees' living conditions normally [became] similar to those of resident neighbours within a couple of months, and that it [took] one year to be truly on the same footing (Huggins, 2012, p. 12)," the narrative of 'success' that came to be endorsed within the international community was both pre-mature as well as belied "the diverse nature of the refugee experience and the multiplicity of categories of returnees (Huggins, 2012, p. 12)."

Indeed, while the 2000 Arusha Accords dedicated a specific section to the rehabilitation and resettlement of refugees, including a provision with

[19] See, for example, Fransen and Kuschminder (2012).

"[s]pecific conditions [that] must be provided for sinistrés who believe that they can no longer return to their property, so as to enable them to return to normal socio-professional life," (p. 77) it soon became apparent that the government had no sincere intention of fulfilling its promises. Consequently, in a country that was already experiencing land shortages and overpopulation, the attitude of the state not only prevented many returnees' access to – and compensation of – land and property, but also made conflict between returnees and stayees an ubiquitous issue (Fransen & Kuschminder, 2012). In their research on the reintegration of returnees in the period between 2002 and 2012, Rema Ministries found that, in many instances, the "land the [1972-caseload refugees] once owned [had] already been allocated to others by the government; in others, relatives or secondary occupiers have already sold the land to third parties, or distributed the land amongst their descendants according to customary inheritance regulations (Huggins, 2012, p. 29)". Specifically, many returnees have felt a profound bias within the institutions involved in the system of restitution (The New Humanitarian, 2012), such as local NGOs, the CTNB, local courts, and groups of male elders, known as *Bashingantah*. Burundi's judiciary, for example - in addition to being "prohibitively expensive" and slow in processing its caseload – has been perceived as being both corrupt and politically partial "with 89 [per cent] of returnees seeing judicial institutions as flawed, compared to 46 [per cent] of residents (Huggins, 2012, p. 30)."

As a result, at the hands of many of the issues and complexities outlined above, coupled with general sentiments of insecurity largely based on political affiliation forced many of those who returned in the early 1970s *and* 1990s to flee once again. More specifically, although the people in Burundi did, between 2005 and 2015, enjoy a relatively free and active civil society – [20] in the build-up to, and during the political and human rights crisis of 2015 – many returnees and stayees increasingly felt "a targeted or generalised fear of persecution due to imputed political opinions and opposition to the CNDD-FDD (Purdekova & Birantamije, 2023, p. 5)." This, in turn, significantly contributed to a renewed refugee flight of approximately 400,000 people fleeing to neighbouring countries, of whom 60-80 per cent had been refugees before, and included nearly all of Burundi's civil society activists, journalists, and political opposition party leaders (purdekova, 2017). As such, for many of those who returned to Burundi in the early and mid 2000s, Theodore Mbazumutima writes, their return was ultimately not "a permanent move 'home' leading to a durable solution, but rather simply another form of forced displacement (Mbazumutima, 2023, p. 336)".

[20] See, for example, Popplewell (2018).

The cyclical nature of displacement in Burundi highlights the persistent challenge of attaining sustainable reintegration outcomes for returnees in contexts where political instability and insecurity remain unaddressed. Significantly, it underscores the importance of incorporating state capacity and political will into both policy and theoretical frameworks. Without these, return may often lead not to permanence, but to renewed cycles of displacement.

VII. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Drawing together the discussion on post-conflict reintegration in Rwanda and Burundi, there can be little doubt that the presence of political will – or lack thereof – largely determines the success or failure of any homecoming. While state capacity, and socio-economic as well as political development are all critical in facilitating the conditions necessary for sustainable return, the absence of a supportive regime –compounded with an apathetic international community – were the main determinants of the failed integration of returnees in both countries. In Rwanda, the RPF concentrated its efforts on cementing political power and manipulating the international community into acting as willing hostages to its narrative, it simultaneously entrenched ethnic animosity and prevented primarily Hutu (returnees) from reintegrating socially, economically and politically. Conversely, the CNDD-led coalition governments' ambivalence toward reintegration, reflected in its laisse-faire approach to tackling rampant corruption within the institutions dealing with land and property issues, together with a divided international donor community, affected the social and economic integration of large segments of the returnee population, but particularly those belonging to the 1972-caseload.

A further finding of this research, significantly influencing the conditions for the sustainable reintegration of refugees, is the mode of transition from conflict to peace and the resulting institutional structure. In Rwanda, the exclusive military victory of the RPF in 1994 meant that it acquired the unbridled authority to develop and coordinate a compelling narrative vis-à-vis donors, substantially contributing to its ability to secure aid and funding. On the other hand, the 2000 Arusha Accords that introduced consociationalism in Burundi obstructed the CNDD-FDD to construct a coherent narrative that resonated with the international community, despite its greater domestic democratic credentials in the early post-war years. Similarly, Burundi's political parties' diverging conceptions and understandings of post-conflict nation-building resulted in the absence of any long-term and successful macro policies regarding issues such as development, reintegration, reconciliation and justice. In contrast, the almost complete lack of political opposition and civil society in Rwanda meant that

the RPF was able to deploy its comprehensive nation-building project seemingly unchallenged and, along with its technocratic governance style, managed to implement effective long-term socio-economic policies.

Ultimately, the reintegration projects in Rwanda and Burundi illustrate that the development-led approaches alone are often insufficient in creating the conditions necessary for sustainable reintegration. For instance, despite the international community's understanding of poverty and deprivation as the root causes of conflict and refugee generation, and subsequently socio-economic growth as a means of facilitating a successful return, Rwanda's context demonstrates that socio-economic development is only one piece of a much larger puzzle. Indeed, if the international community continues to ignore the realities of the manipulative and discriminatory regime, renewed conflict and refugee flight may even become inevitable (Goehrung, 2017). Fundamentally, while it is increasingly being recognized that the reintegration of refugees is a complex and long-term endeavor - rather than purely a physical return to the homeland - the international community continues to conflate symptoms with disease; wherein state insecurity or poor governance are framed as symptoms and poverty and deprivation are assumed to be the disease. Yet, as this research demonstrates, state insecurity and irresponsible governance may be better understood as the root causes in fact bringing about the symptoms of poverty, deprivation, conflict and ultimately, refugee flight.

Therefore, it becomes increasingly clear that broader conceptual frameworks are invariably intertwined with future successful reintegration. Although the realisation of sustainable reintegration is, and will invariably remain, a fundamental challenge, if we start to better understand some of the most pertinent questions surrounding the reintegration of refugees, we can eventually increase the likelihood of sustainable returns. For instance, the ways in which aid conditionalities can steer post-conflict trajectories towards intended outcomes are under researched and yield inconsistent results. While conditional aid in Burundi, hinged on democratic transition, failed to achieve its intended outcome, applications of aid as carrot-and-stick incentivization techniques have proven successful in other African contexts. Further research is also needed to explore how best to include returnees within the design, development, and implementation of peace processes and state (re)building. Many returnees in both Rwanda and Burundi reportedly felt isolated from the peace processes, leading to a disconnect between the mechanisms implemented and what was needed by the returnees. This indicates that successful reintegration is hinged upon the inclusion of refugees into the design of return processes as well as to (re-)establish the social contract between the state and the returnee. Most importantly, experts may wish to dedicate specific focus to engaging with the most complex elements of reintegration, especially the parameters of what constitutes a sustainable

return in respective post-conflict environments and under which conditions. As the number of refugees continues to mount (UNHCR 2024), the critical importance of designing effective strategies for sustainable return is perhaps more important now than ever before. However, if the international community does not rethink its current approaches to returnee integration, it may instead be necessary to question whether voluntary repatriation should continue to be championed as the ideal solution for refugee situations.

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