Partisan identity politics in post–war Burundi

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Introduction

This chapter deals with identity politics, and how these have changed in Burundi's post-war settlement. Our starting point is the observation that in the era of ethnic power sharing and multi-party democratization, the Hutu-Tutsi divide has become less important, and the persistence of identity politics manifests itself mainly along a new fault line: partisan affiliation. The objective of the text is twofold. First, it will provide insights into how some of the most successful parties in Burundi after Arusha − CNDD-FDD, FNL, and MSD − have attempted to make Burundians identify with the party, by looking into the particular arenas and repertoires, registers, and strategies of partisan identity politics. Secondly, we analyze what these partisan identity politics mean for Burundian citizens' political subjectivities and agency, and argue that both rational choice motives as well as very political dimensions inform the partisan identification and activism of many Burundian citizens. This analysis will also briefly address how ethnicity has sneaked back in since the 2015 crisis, and how this relates to partisan identity politics.

The text builds on data gathered during different periods of fieldwork for different research projects on local governance and on recent dynamics of political conflict and violence. We rely on interviews, informal conversations, and observations of the public sphere. Fieldwork was conducted in Bujumbura Rural province and in the capital Bujumbura from 2011 to 2017. Additionally, regular follow-up interviews with key interlocutors who left Burundi in 2015 and interviews with members of the Burundian diaspora in Belgium have informed the research. Given the sensitive nature of the subject, all the interlocutors quoted here have been given pseudonyms.

While we explore the repertoires of three different parties, it is important to note that this chapter is not the outcome of a research designed to provide an exhaustive comparative analysis of the Burundian partisan identities. Historically important parties which are still active, such as UPRONA

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and FRODEBU, or new types of political formations such as CNARED, a coalition of parties and political actors, are not included here, as we did not obtain substantial primary data on them. However, we do believe it is safe to argue that on the basis of their demonstrated capacity to construct collective solidarities, the three parties selected here are particularly well suited to illustrate the different aspects of partisan identity politics and explore the diverse repertoires and practices used by political movements for mobilization in the post-Arusha era.

1. Context: parties and identity politics in post-war Burundi

The 2000 Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation provided a blueprint for rebuilding the Burundi's institutions after decades of ethno-political conflict, during which Hutu rebels opposed a Tutsi dominated single party state. The agreement introduced multi-party democratization and ethnic power sharing, avoiding monopolization of power by the Hutu through providing overrepresentation of the Tutsi minority. It also included an ethnically mixed security apparatus. Before the war, political formations were explicitly aligned with ethnic interests. All parties have to have ethnically mixed governing bodies and present ethnically mixed lists of candidates when participating in elections. Explicit ethnic mobilization is forbidden. One of the most striking achievements of these measures introduced by the Arusha Agreement has been the decreased importance of ethnicity in political competition, which was noticeable almost immediately after the war ended. With the introduction of multiparty elections, the number of political parties exploded in Burundi – over 40 were registered for the 2010 elections. The results of the 2010 local elections, the last credible indicator of the relative strength of political parties, show that many of these parties hardly have any electoral weight, and it is safe to assume that this reflects their limited capacities for mobilization. It is also important to note that despite constitutional provisions inhibiting ethnic mobilization, most of the major parties do continue to have ethnic constituencies. It is also important to note that despite constitutional provisions inhibiting ethnic mobilization, most of the major parties do continue to have ethnic constituencies, which is taken into account in the 2005 constitution. Historical 'pre-war' parties such as former single party UPRONA and FRODEBU are still strongly perceived as respectively Tutsi and Hutu formations. Unsurprisingly, this is also the case for the former Hutu rebellions CNDD-FDD and FNL and their different offshoots.

Despite the Arusha Agreement's undeniable achievements in reducing ethnic tensions, it did not succeed in radically reshaping and democratizing the way politics is done in the post-war arena. As has become clear over the years, displaying and using a capacity for violence are still part and parcel of the repertoire of political actors, both in government and opposition. And

under the ruling CNDD-FDD regime, patronage, coercion, and identity politics remain important techniques of governance and political mobilization, as much as they were under single party rule. Even if, as will be discussed at the end of this text, ethnicity has made something of a comeback since 2015, the main difference with the pre-Arusha period is that practices of inclusion and exclusion, as well as dynamics of political violence, are now more associated with intra-party differences than with the Hutu-Tutsi divide. Access to state resources and to employment has become greatly determined by various degrees of identification with the CNDD-FDD and by affiliation to networks which are controlled by strongmen of the ruling party. This is very tangible on all levels and in many aspects of everyday life on the hills. Through its domination of the legislative, administrative and security apparatus, the CNDD-FDD party also strictly controls the framework and environment in which the other parties operate, in a way which can best be described as authoritarian and repressive. Unsurprisingly, much of the political violence in the post-Arusha era has happened along partisan fault lines. This partisan violence comes in various shapes. It ranges from vandalism against party infrastructure in turf wars over the presence of party symbols in the public domain, over confrontations between militants and sympathizers of different parties, such as in Bujumbura Rural after the 2010 elections, to state violence directed at opposition party activists and ruling party dissidents, as has been widely reported by human rights monitors during the last decade. And both the leaders of the FNL and MSD, Rwasa and Sinduhije, have been involved in attempts to organize armed resistance against the Nkurunziza regime, and militants of these opposition parties have played a crucial role in political violence since the 2010 elections.

2. Parties, mobilization and identities: concepts and entry-points

Ethnographic and sociological approaches are not very prevalent in the literature on contemporary African political parties. Lebas' (2015) comparative study of mobilization practices of opposition parties in Zimbabwe, Kenya and Zambia provides interesting insights in how choices in terms of mobilization strategies can help opposition parties retain a strong support while base faced with repression and lack of resources, realities also faced by Burundian parties. In the case of Burundi, we concur with Tobolka (2014), who, amongst other factors, points to the importance of distinct collective identities to explain the cohesion and resilience of opposition parties in a context of electoral authoritarianism, without further elaborating on these identities. However, in the second part of this article, our exploration of the repertoires and strategies through which these identities are constructed, will not be limited to the opposition. Three parties in particular will be

examined: the ruling CNDD-FDD, FNL, and MSD. The CNDD-FDD, being in control of the state's resources and security apparatus, is playing on two fronts regarding partisan identity politics: in addition to mobilization for the party itself, it is in a position to shape the environment in which the other parties have to operate. FNL and MSD can both be considered as opposition parties, notwithstanding the peculiar status of the FNL (see below). It can be argued that in the current political landscape, regardless of the great variances in electoral success or legal status, these are the three parties with the most important capacity for mobilization. All three of the parties under study are relatively new, meaning they only registered as a formal political party after the signing of the Arusha agreement. However, two of the parties, CNDD-FDD and FNL, have a long history as rebel movements, which, as shall be demonstrated, strongly informs their institutional make-up and the repertoires they rely on. As one of the youngest political organizations in Burundi, without a history in the wartime past, the MSD managed to establish itself as a relatively strong brand in the post-war political marketplace. FNL and MSD are by far the parties who have been most explicitly targeted by repression and violence by state institutions and CNDD-FDD affiliated state and non-state security actors, yet have continued to demonstrate a strong sense of collective identification and cohesion.

Obviously, nobody is born with a party membership card, and identification with a party lacks the foundational qualities of other forms of social identity, such as ethnicity. We agree with Brubaker and Cooper (2000) that between essentialist and reified notions on the one hand, and the multitude of constructivist qualifications on the other, the term 'identity' as such is analytically not very productive. We therefore prefer to talk about partisan 'identification' and 'identity politics' rather than partisan identities. Identification can mean self-identification, but can also refer to practices and strategies of parties, both to make people identify with them as well as to categorize other groups. Given the strong sense of self-identification and collective solidarities. Structured around political parties we have observed, and the difficulty for Burundian citizens in the post-Arusha era to escape being categorized in terms of party-allegiance, we believe that these partisan identification practices are one crucial element of political subjectivities. This notion, as conceptualized by Krause and Schramm (2011), conveys how people and groups relate to power and governance and how they can stake claims. Political subjectivities encompass imaginary, but also emotional and political dimensions of belonging and citizenship. It is in this sense that we will approach partisan identification and identity politics from the receiving end – the perspective of Burundian citizens in their everyday navigation of the post-war arena –in the final part of this text.

3. Three cases of partisan identity formation

3.1. CNDD-FDD

By the end of May 2017, a video, which we believe perfectly illustrates the way CNDD-FDD attempts to construct a collective sense of identity, circulated on different social media channels. The video, shot by a member of the audience with a mobile device, shows young girls dressed in CNDD-FDD party outfits publicly performing a theatrical song in front of one of the countless CNDD-FDD huts which dot the countryside.[2] The girls, purportedly minors, are asked by an adult chanter whether they, members of the party's youth league *imbonerakure* (those who can see from far), had forgotten about the country's painful past. They answer by bringing a particular reading of Burundi's political conflicts, reciting the different episodes of violence, and graphically depicting the 1993 killing of Hutu president Ndadaye by Tutsi army officers. When they are consequently asked whether the 'page has been turned', the girls lament: 'noooo, those people never change: with their insatiable interests, they are always on the lookout, now they present themselves as the ones who right the wrongs but they exploit us just like fleas in our pants!'[3] This video caused a stir on social media, with opponents criticizing the CNDD-FDD for indoctrinating young children. It gives an interesting insight in the registers which CNDD-FDD relies on in its attempts to construct a party identity. At the time, it also illustrates how the party uses its hegemonic position and monopoly on the public spaces of rural Burundi for its brand of identity politics, which aims to reinforce its own mobilization potential by categorizing and branding a range of "others", in this case civil society activists (the ones who pretend to right the wrongs), who are seen as the descendants of the 'putschist 'Tutsi regimes'.

Since coming to power in 2005, the party draws on multiple registers and narratives in its project of partisan identity construction. It had to find a balance between on the one hand leaning on its past as Hutu rebellion and on the other hand cultivating an image of mainstream party capable of steering the country through the reconstruction and democratization project which took off after Arusha. In the first years after disarming, the latter strategy was important to reassure both Burundian citizens and international partners. The party quickly succeeded in attracting a large number of Tutsis – from civil servant to disadvantaged urban youth – which helped to tone down its radical ethnic image (Nindorera 2012 : 27). On the one hand there

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[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvRO3KEtCF4 (accessed 08 September 2017)

[3] This and all subsequent quotes by interviewees were translated into English by the authors.

is the official public ideology of national sovereignty and democratic major-ity rule which CNDD-FDD claims to incarnate, in opposition to the decades of minority rule where political change came through coups d'état rather than elections. There are also the policies of proximity and working along-side the rural population in semi-obligatory public work programs. Equally important for the party's image is the cult around the bonhomie and accessi-bility of president Nkurunriza, a head of state who prefers to spend as much time as possible on the hills, in tracksuit and wellington boots, making his hands dirty planting trees and building public infrastructure for Burundi's future generations.

On the other hand, the CNDD-FDD continues to build on its experi-ences and political capital developed as a rebel movement. Even though it didn't win the war and came to power thanks to a negotiated settlement (to which it never formally adhered), the centrality of the CNDD-FDD's history of armed struggle has become the key feature of the party's iden-tity politics and legitimation efforts. Like in Uganda, where the 'liberation argument' has provided legitimacy and regime cohesion for decades (Reuss & Titeca 2017), the CNDD-FDD banks on its historical role in dismantling Tutsi domination and changing the balance of power in favor of the (Hutu) majority through a combination of armed struggle and democratic strength. This rebel legacy is mobilized or operates in various ways to solidify a sense of shared identity around the party's origins.

Upon being agreed as a party, CNDD kept the 'FDD' (Forces de Défence de la Démocratie) suffix referring to its armed wing. Members are called '*abagumyabanga*', 'keepers of the secret', referring to the clandestine net-works of combatants throughout the country during the war. The party uses a whole jargon of expressions, going from daily conversations to campaign slogans, particular to the CNDD-FDD, and which find their origin in the wartime past. One of the most common ways to identify as a *mugumya-banga* in everyday situations is through the greeting '*komera*' ('be strong'), followed by the typical response '*ramba*' ('last long'). The use of these terms goes back to vernacular of combatants in the maquis, but is well mastered today by members without a rebel background, as well as by non-members who strategically make use of the terms (see below). Also in the party's campaign slogans, which according to one militant interviewed in Bujumbura in 2014 serve both to reinforce the motivation and unity of the members as to warn outsiders and opponents, reference is often made to the codes used by the fighters. '*Shirira!*' (Burn! or Shine!) or '*Guguna'('*devour with force'*)* for example, were calls to aggression used during combats. This kind of rhetoric is not restricted to the electoral period, but has become a fixture in Burundi's public space. These and other terms from the maquis are chanted during public rallies and meetings, but are also materialized in

countless 'monuments' and structures, which the party has erected all over Burundi. All bear the CNDD-FDD's logo of the eagle. But many also have slogans referring to the historic struggle, often in terms which leave little to the imagination, like '*Caratuvunye, Ntituzokirekura!' (*'we made sacrifices to get the country, we will not loosen our grip').

Again, these spatial and material articulations of partisan identification, which comprise flags, '*paillottes*' (little huts) alongside the roads, murals, little monuments and painted stones, have multiplied all over the country. Since suppressing the 2015 urban resistance have also mushroomed in the opposition strongholds in the capital. They serve a double purpose of demonstrating both members and outsiders that the party literally is everywhere and controls the hills.

Within the *abagumyabanga* community, there is an important distinction between different degrees of party 'identification'. The most notable one is between the real *maquisards* and the ones who joined afterwards. '*Le système*' is a term that is used by many Burundians to refer to the nationwide networks of patronage and parallel power which crosscut party structures, state institutions, and security services. But within the party it also refers to the hard-core of real combatants, a select group of people who, according to one CNDD-FDD member, all know each other from the maquis and have their own hierarchy and codes'. The CNDD-FDD's *imbonerakure* (those who can see from far) youth league is without doubt the most notorious example of partisan identity politics in Burundi. It is a very heterogeneous group which the party sees as a vanguard for its ideology but also an instrument for exercising control through coercision and intimidation. Since 2008, they have occupied an increasingly important space in the public arena. As the video mentioned above illustrates, their actions can be performative and symbolic, but, as we have witnessed several times, also involve everyday governance, resource mobilization and policing public life on the hills in much of rural Burundi. They have figured in numerous human rights and media reports as main perpetrators of intimidation and political violence. Again, the term comes from the maquis, where the *imbonerakure* acted as non-armed local auxiliary forces and sentinels, giving logistic support to the combatants. Within the *imbonerakure*, the same cleavages exist as in the party itself: war-time members, with a particular position for ex-combatants-and 'newcomers'. Interestingly, as one *imbonerakure* told us, radicalization within the movement was fueled by what they perceived as 'diabolization' campaigns by private media and civil society groups.

> 'After the accusations against the *imbonerakure*, the tougher members put pressure on the new members so that they would show they are real *imbonerakure*, ready to defend the party and intimidate the opponents' (Clovis, *imbonerakure* who joined after the war, Bujumbura, March 2015).

To conclude, it is also important to draw attention to the fact that as the hegemonic actor in Burundi's political landscape, CNDD-FDD has the authority to socially enforce its views on national identity and symboli-cally define different degrees of citizenship. A key notion here is the term '*abenegihugu*', often used in propaganda discourse for internal and external use. Literally translated, it means 'those who own the land', and is com-monly understood as the ones who fought for the land.

> 'In the maquis, we were taught that we were the children of the land, who had been chased by strangers: the Tutsis. Therefore we had to take up arms, to chase them out at our turn. We used this word to describe those who fought to chase the UPRONA regime, the ones who handled the arms and the ones who directly assisted the fighters. Those who joined afterwards are not concerned' (Anicet, ex-combatant CNDD-FDD, Bujumbura 2015).

This way of defining citizenship is in contrast to '*abanyagihugu*' (mere residents), which is used to describe members of the general population who do not necessarily adhere to the party. Especially since the 2015 crisis, the party's ideology actively promotes a national cosmology (Malkki 1995) in which different identities and categories of citizens are juxtaposed: on the one hand there is a 'silent majority' of peaceful law abiding mainly rural Burundians, and on other hand there are the '*abamenja*' (traitors, enemies of the nation) or '*mujeri*' (enraged dogs), a conspiracy of mainly urban civil society activists and opposition politicians who conspire with Rwanda and colonial forces to undo the electoral victory of the CNDD-FDD.

3.2. FNL

The FNL party is the result of the 2009 formalization of the PALIPEHUTU-FNL rebel movement. The FNL rebellion itself was borne out of PALIPEHUTU (Parti pour la liberation du people Hutu), the clandestine political movement founded by Hutu refugees in 1980, in a context well described by Liisa Malkki (1995). As its name suggests, PALIPEHUTU's origins are deeply rooted in ethnic strife.

The members go by the name '*abanamarimwe*', which literally trans-lates as 'those who are united for a common cause/truth'. But despite the centrality of unity in its ideology, today the FNL identity is far from lim-ited to a single, unique party which unites all *banamarimwe*. As many other parties in Burundi, FNL has known several splits and spin-offs, both in its war-time and post-Arusha existence. Since 2011, after interference by the Ministry of Interior, the main FNL party has been divided in a rather unpopular *de jure* wing under Jaques Bigirimana and a *de facto* wing under the last rebel commander Agathon Rwasa, who despite capricious politi-cal choices and strategizing, has remained popular among large parts of

the FNL constituency.[4] In addition to these two factions, there have been a number of parties claiming the FNL name, mostly with very marginal constituencies. We have also encountered people who consider themselves '*abanamarimwe*' without particularly adhering to or supporting any of these factions.

An FNL youth leader with a combatant background who took part in the anti-third term uprising in 2015, and who was disillusioned by Rwasa's decision to join the institutions after the 2015 elections, explained the disjuncture that exist between party and identity in the following way:

> 'Today, with Rwasa in parliament, I would rather follow Alexis Sinduhije or General Godefroid Niyombare *[who led the failed coup attempt in 2015 – ed.]*. Both have stood up to the Nkurunziza regime which has tracked us down since 2010. If they would come with an army, I would join immediately. But even when I would fight for these men, I will still remain FNL, that will always be my party, it is a matter of pride' (Jean, FNL youth leader, Bujumbura, July 2015).

Most members we spoke to agree that Agathon Rwasa has managed to steer the party through one of the most critical junctures in its existence because of the strong core ideals of social justice in the FNL ideology. In order to obtain legal recognition as a political party, FNL had to let go of all ethnic connotations in its name. Initial resistance against the elimination of the PALIPEHUTU prefix proved marginal. Today, almost all of FNL members and sympathizers we have spoken with since 2010 were univocal in their rejection of ethnicity as the main problem in Burundi. Whether they were victims of the 1972 violence against Hutu and introduced to the movement by Gahutu himself in the 1980s, or diaspora intellectuals, or long term members of the movement's women's league in Bujumbura Rural or 'fresh recruits' who joined in the mid 2000 to inflate combatant numbers: all observed that the Hutu rule of CNDD-FDD relied on the same techniques of governance and control, and reproduced the same kind of social order as the Tutsi UPRONA regime. Even though some of our interlocutors continued to mistrust the Tutsi political class, probably the most striking indication of the evaporation of ethnic primordialism which marked the initial PALIPEHUTU ideology is the fact that there was little resistance when Rwasa forged an alliance with the opposition UPRONA wing in view of the 2015 elections.

Alfieri (2014) observes how this revising of the ethnic rhetoric constitutes an ideological rupture in the party. However, many militants we spoke

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4 Similar divisions have been created in other oppostion parties, in a process called '*Nyakurisation*', from *nyakuri* meaning 'the real'.

to do not necessarily see this as a fundamental ideological shift. In the words of one ex-combatant: 'The ethnic position was part of the reality then, now we have to be liberated from another dictatorship' (Bujumbura Rural 2013). It is undeniable that Gahutu and the first generation of PALIPEHUTU propagandists played a crucial role in the production of a politicized Hutu identity with their primordialist take on social stratification and conflict in Burundi and their Hutu-nationalist ideology. This ideology inspired a generation of Burundian Hutu politicians, well beyond the FNL. However, the outspoken ethnic essentialism which has contributed to the party's extremist image somewhat obscures the emancipatory aspect of Gahutu's ideology (Turner 2010), which draws on Frantz Fanon and Paolo Freire as much as it does on the 'Hamitic myth'. It is this original aspect of liberation and emancipation, both of the imagined Hutu people as of individual Hutu, which many militants and sympathizers claim to be a central aspect of identifying as member, and which continues to motivate them. 'Being proud of what you are, that is the first pillar of our ideology. It is about truth and social justice'. (FNL member, Belgium, 2012). Or in the words of a civil society professional:

> 'In 1972, I lost many members of my family. Even if under president Bagaza things were a bit better, for us as Hutu, these events had a long impact on our self-esteem. We felt like second rang citizens, our lives had little value, until PALIPEHUTU came to our hill in the 1980s. They started teaching, on a small scale, clandestinely. They formed local leaders. Their message was not one of ethnic hatred, but of awareness raising: for the first time in my life, people told me that "as a Hutu, you are a beautiful person too, you are capable of doing great things and taking your destiny in your hands." That was a very powerful message' (Bujumbura, 2013).

After the elections of 2010, Rwasa was involved in remobilizing some of the FNL ex-combatants to fight the CNDD-FDD, a strategy which was not successful and made FNL militants – the majority of whom were not involved in the new rebellion – a prime target for state repression. Nevertheless, as a pioneer of the armed struggle, FNL has not mobilized its rebel past and historic role to construct a party identity in the same way CNDD-FDD does. Rather than emphasizing historic armed struggle and current resistance in its mobilization efforts, it is the persisting appeal of the founding father Rémy Gahutu and his pioneering ideology of liberation which acts as a major binding force between people who identify with the party, regardless of their particular background or trajectories in the movement. More often than not, the teachings of Gahutu are imbued with prophetic power by the members, and it is clear that they lend themselves well to *hineininterpretierung*. His successors and other party propagandists have been able to emphasize certain elements and omit others, in order to adapt Gahutu's heritage to conjunctural realities.

However, the FNL does makes use of its maquis experience to mobilize in the post-war era, but in a very different way than CNDD-FDD. Since 2009, when the party – at least the Rwasa section – had to operate clandestinely again, it has not been able to organize public activities. The FNL has no a broad public repertoire of symbols, songs, rituals or jargon which refer to its rebel roots, as the CNDD-FDD does, nor does it produce written output or have a strong presence on social media, which could be expected from a party which cannot physically organize anymore. There seems to be no centrally organized strategy to mobilize new members or to reinforce identification with the party. Instead, much of the shared identity around the FNL is constructed bottom-up, through clandestine mobilization. In Bujumbura Rural for instance, where the rebellion was socially embedded during the war and which constitutes its actual powerbase, networks of FNL militants have tried to transform the return to clandestine politics in the aftermath of the 2010 elections into something which reinforces the party's capacity to make people identify: it allows the party to maintain its aura of authenticity.

> 'We don't need offices, flags and public meetings to prepare ourselves for the election. FNL has been operating clandestinely in this area for years and years. We can easily fall back on that. Everybody knows we are here, even if you cannot see us' (Marc, ex-combatant, Bujumbura Rural 2013).

This resonates with Lemarchand (1994:147), who cited secret hill meetings, anonymous tracts and adherence to occult sects and other symbolic forms of contestation imbued with secrecy and mystery as important elements of the 'infrapolitics' of early Hutu resistance. Given how eagerly they are nurtured in the narratives of local FNL militants and sympathizers in Bujumbura Rural, these notions of secrecy, mystery and the clandestine, seem to contribute to a sense of complicity and the maintenance of a collective identity among militants and sympathizers of the movement in times of uncertainty and repression. Weakened as a formal party in the post-war political order, this practice of self-mystification as 'the original clandestine people's grassroots movement' imbues the FNL with what Kasper Hoffmann (2010) has called the 'charisma of authenticity'. In combination with members' personal experiences of emancipation and the successful recasting of the party's ideological underpinnings to adapt them to the new context, this has produced a strong sense of identification with the party which, among our interlocutors in Bujumbura Rural, was often expressed in emotive terms.

3.3. MSD

MSD is one of the youngest parties in Burundian politics, founded in 2007 and formally registered in 2009, just before the 2010 elections. There was no pre-existing formation or movement, nor was its founder and current president, Alexis Sinduhije, involved in politics before the peace agreement.

Sinduhije was a journalist during the war and rose to prominence after the Arusha Agreement, when he initiated the Radio Publique Africaine (RPA), which became the country's most popular radio station. He became a celebrity journalist, honored internationally for his reconciliatory talk shows and investigative journalism gained him international honors. Initially supportive of the CNDD-FDD's integration, he emerged as one of the fiercest critics of the CNDD-FDD government. In 2008 he was arrested on accusation of insulting the president.

Many Burundians perceive MSD as the party of the urban youth and cosmopolitan elite of the capital. It is also often qualified as a Tutsi party. A glance at the 2010 local level elections – the only more or less credible indicator for the weight of the party in the context of electoral competition – reveals the spatial distribution of the MSD's constituency. Nationwide, with an overall result of 3.75%, MSD emerged as the fifth party, approximately in the same order of magnitude as the long-lasting UPRONA and FRODEBU parties. But in Bujumbura, MSD became third, with around 25% of the seats. And it was the first party in Cibitoke, Musaga, Nyakabiga and Ngagara, the neighborhoods which had become 'tutsified' during the civil war, and which would become the center of gravity of the 2015 urban uprising. It also did well in richer residential areas such as Rohero and Kinindo. It is safe to assume that the urban MSD constituency is dominantly Tutsi, but on the other hand, among the MSD militants and sympathizers we encountered were also a number of disappointed CNDD-FDD and FNL supporters and former combatants. Regardless of ethnic and geographical background, MSD has been especially appealing to younger generations of Burundians. The majority of the members and MSD voters among our interlocutors, both Tutsi and Hutu, testified that one of the main reasons for rallying behind Sinduhije was that they could not identify (any longer) with the protagonists of the wartime political landscape and the Arusha negotiations, be they regular political parties or armed political movements. UPRONA in particular seems to have lost many young militants disillusioned with the party to MSD.[5] This is exemplified in one of the party's slogans, which calls on people to vote for 'those who have clean hands', meaning politicians who were not involved in the war.

For Eric, an MSD militant of the first hour living in Bujumbura, the 'urban youth' and 'Tutsi' aura around the party is not correct:

'CNDD-FDD tries to represent us as a Tutsi party, or a party for the urban youth. But that is not true. In Kayanza province alone, we have more

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[5] Some of the MSD members we spoke to stated they come from families who have always supported UPRONA. An Uprona representative confirmed that his party had lost numerous supporters and young members to Sinduhije's party.

members than in Bujumbura and in the countryside, we have many Hutus among the party's cadres.'

It is difficult to make any quantified statements about the prevailing perception that MSD is a party that is composed essentially of urban Tutsi youth. We can safely assume that this demographic group constitutes the hard core of the party's membership base, but in the few years that the party has been able to operate more or less in the open, Sinduhije has managed to attract a broader and diverse group of militants among whom academics, businesspeople, as well as ex-combatants of both CNDD-FDD and FNL, and educated youth in the towns and hills of rural Burundi.

Almost all of our MSD interlocutors indicated that the MSD has a particular 'style' which can be summarized as cosmopolitan and assertive. Outsiders to the party and some sympathizers have qualified it as 'aggressive'. The party's founder and leader Alexis Sinduhije epitomizes an image of non-conformism, free from the restraints of traditional Rundi conventions of modesty in communication and appearance.

As a Burundian political scientist told us: '*MSD is the party of the Rastas'*. Indeed, MSD is very popular in Bujumbura's relatively modest urban sub-culture scene, among youth whose political imagination is often expressed through references to cultural icons of Third World resistance such as Che Guevara, Thomas Sankara and Bob Marley, and contemporary African and local reggae stars and hiphop artists. The party's rhetoric style is that of an underdog, ready to confront hegemony and injustice, not very unlike the PALIPEHUTU discourse of the 1980s. The following excerpt from our fieldnotes illustrates this well:

'It is late in the morning. We sit at an outside table in a popular lakeside hangout in downtown Bujumbura with David, whom we just picked up in the city center. David, a freshly graduated student, is the local leader of the MSD in Bujumbura's '*quartiers populaires*' where the MSD party is at that time well-embedded. After the usual introductory exchanges, it becomes clear that David is eager to discuss his activism for the MSD party with us, and has come well prepared. He pulls a laptop out of his backpack and indicates that he wants to show us a video. He turns the screen to an angle so it would only be visible to us, and sets the volume just loud enough for us to hear the audio, without carrying over to other tables near us. The video, which he co-produced, consisted of edited private media footage of the March 2014 violent standoff between MSD militants and the police in Bujumbura center, during which MSD militants held two police officers hostage for a while, and which led to the imprisonment of dozens of MSD supporters. Images of chanting and rioting MSD militants, dodging teargas canisters and live rounds in the streets around the party's compound, are shown against the backdrop of Ivorian reggae singer Tiken Jah Fakoly's "*Le pays va mal*". During the clip, party leader Alexis Sinduhije, inside the compound

surrounded by the police force, is seen interviewed by local journalists. He states: "I will resist until the end. I will not stop resisting before I'm free or dead"'(Bujumbura, March 2015).

It is through the combination of its distinctive assertive and militant style with an emancipatory discourse that MSD seems to have been able to best capture the political capital that lies at the intersection of the generational fault line and urban neglect. What its constituency also seemed to have in common is a political imagination which is more shaped by the ideas of liberal peacebuilding than by the experience of armed struggle or ethnic conflict. Whereas CNDD-FDD nurtures the memory of the liberation struggle and the maquis, and FNL the memory of Gahutu's ideology and prophecies, in its programs and slogans, MSD showcases itself – rather successfully – as the party which incarnates the post-Arusha order and the values promoted by liberal peacebuilding. Despite the fact that this project has not been very successful and has, by focusing on stability rather than democratic deepening, reproduced pre-war modes of governance (Curtis 2013), its rhetoric of 'good governance' provides a readily available language to the post-Arusha generation. Much like in other Africa contexts which have seen protest (Branch & Mampilly 2015: 82), it is through this language that claims for political change are often made.

However much both the party's official rhetoric and the framing of its ideology by members and sympathizers are discursively indebted to the liberal peace agenda and the ideals of good governance, this doesn't mean MSD leadership and members have renounced the idea of violent struggle. This becomes clear in the glorified way MSD propaganda has portrayed its contestation of the regime as legitimate resistance, as the above-mentioned video illustrates. Some of the MSD militants we met were eager to prove that the party's assertiveness is not only discursive, as the March 2014 events already made clear. In the aftermath of the 2010 elections, Sinduhije had already been linked to efforts to mobilize for rebellion. During our fieldwork before the 2015 elections, the resistance that militants deemed crucial to achieve political change was mainly thought of in terms of confrontational civic protest. In the run-up to the 2015 elections, MSD was clearly preparing for heated contestation. It is no surprise then, that in several of the 'insurgent' neighborhoods of Bujumbura, networks of local MSD militants played an important role in organizing the protests and the resistance to state repression. This image of the underdog party that doesn't shy away from fighting back is something that most of the members we encountered consider part of the party's appeal. Indeed, the glorification of resistance continues to be an important trope in conversations with hard-core members in exile after the 2015 repression, but for several among them, the modality has now shifted to armed struggle.

Given its recent origins, rather undeveloped structures and the repressive environment it had to operate in, MSD's relative success in mobilizing militants and inspiring protest in 2015 is remarkable. In line with Adrienne Lebas' findings on success and internal cohesion among opposition parties in Africa (Lebas 2011: 245), we can argue that the clear confrontational strategy vis-à-vis the CNDD-FDD and the 'high risk activism' the party promotes have produced a strong sense of shared identity. It sets the MSD apart from other opposition parties who have a longer pedigree in Burundian politics (such as UPRONA), but who seem to have more trouble in appealing to the imagination of the younger generations.

4. Partisan identity politics from citizen perspectives

4.1. Identity, agency and strategy

In Burundi, partisan identification has become a key element in people's relations with state power in general and with their immediate social environment. It informs many aspects of everyday life, from doing business to raising families. As mentioned in the introduction, partisan (self)-identification and identity politics do not necessarily produce rigid identities, even if they can produce lifelong loyalties. Obviously, there are many gradations and underlying motivations of party-political involvement and identification and in all three parties, we have encountered disjunctures between the collective identities as they are being conceived by the parties and the personal, individual experiences of members.

One of the most important ways in which partisan identification plays a role in post-war Burundi is in processes of socio-economic exclusion. Other structural factors also (continue to) matter – ethnicity, kinship, religious affiliation, origin, existing patronage relations – but there is no doubt that partisan affiliation has become key in determining access to state resources, employment and services. While also acknowledging the role of ideological motivations, in her study of the everyday maneuverings of youth from Bujumbura's northern suburbs, Berckmoes (2015) argues that partisan political participation is a way of '*chercher la vie*'– an avenue of access to patronage networks and perspectives for employment – and that strategic displays of political allegiance among these youth is subject to conjunctural dynamics related to the electoral cycle. It is clear that in the case of CNDD-FDD, which more or less controls all access to state resources and employment, people's motivation for joining the party is in many cases a matter of rational choice, if not self-preservation. We have met several people who publicly go through life as CNDD-FDD supporters, but whose political sympathies lie elsewhere, or who are not particularly loyal to the party. One particular anecdote narrated by one of our interlocutors illustrates

the extent to which people make strategic use of partisan identification in everyday situations:

> 'Once, a friend who was looking for employment was invited for a job interview. Before going there, he asked us for a favor: we should call him while he was doing the interview. He had put one of the election campaign songs of the CNDD-FDD as a ringtone on his cellphone. It is a way to make a good first impression with his employer, a party man' (Bujumbura 2012).

We have encountered several examples of similar behavior, where people said they publicly displayed CNDD-FDD paraphernalia (umbrellas, t-shirts) on certain occasions where it was deemed beneficial. Likewise, being associated with an opposition party, especially a party which is locally considered a threat to CNDD-FDD hegemony, is something to avoid, especially in dealings with local administrative services, state employers or educational institutions. More drastically, we have heard several examples of opposition members or influential community leaders under pressure to join the ruling party who have effectively become CNDD-FDD members as a measure of self-preservation, often in concertation with their original party.

However, rational choice perspectives on partisan activism are just one side of the coin. They tend to obscure the importance of ideological and emotive motivations to identify with a party and thus depoliticize the agency of many Burundians. In all three parties, we have encountered people whose often selfless commitment and strong beliefs in shaping the future of Burundi through their activism for the party testify to the inherent political nature of partisan allegiance. This resonates strongly with Lebas' (2015: 47) observations about how her informants framed their involvement in opposition parties in moral terms. In Burundi, this is not only the case for opposition activists, who actually had a lot to lose by displaying their allegiance, but also among regular CNDD-FDD members; partisan activism is often driven by longstanding, strong convictions.

4.2. Ethnicity and the end of partisan identity politics?

We started this article with the observation that partisan affiliation has become a more important political fault line than ethnicity in post-war Burundi. In our fieldwork, including during the most violent period of the 2015 crisis, numerous party activists affirmed this.

> 'I consider myself an *imbonerakure*, more than I am a Hutu. Many people are Hutu, but not all Hutu can claim our [CNDD-FDD] sacrifices and accomplishments' (Cléophas, CNDD-FDD youth leader, Bujumbura Rural, 2014).

> 'For me, the ethnic conflict is a thing from the past, the real reason behind current tensions are the vested interests which divide us. And today, the way

to have access to the spoils, is through affiliation with a political party'(Egide, *imbonerakure*, Bujumbura, December 2015).

However, despite the above statements, it has become strikingly clear that since the 2015 protests and coup, ethnicity has once again become a salient feature in processes of political mobilization. In practice, both in the prevailing popular imaginations of the socio-political field in post-Arusha Burundi as in everyday political practice, there has always been an overlap between partisan identification and ethnic identification. As Berckmoes (2014) has shown in her research among suburban youth in northern Bujumbura, ethnicity continues to be part of a complex socio-political context which young people have to navigate.

CNDD-FDD propaganda, especially since 2015, often refers to the necessity of safeguarding the results of the movement's historical struggle against Tutsi hegemony. Numerous allusions are made to the ethnic background of those involved in the protest movement and the failed putsch, in both official party discourse or – often in less veiled terms – through the party's dedicated army of social media activists. Moreover, in the hills, CNDD-FDD propaganda has increasingly promoted an ethnic interpretation of the recent crisis. As a community leader in one of the mainly Hutu communes of Bujumbura Rural recounts:

> '*Imbonerakure* and senior party leaders came door to door to explain that the conflict now is an attempt of the next generation of Hima[6] putschists to overthrow a democratically elected government. Since they cannot beat us in elections, the children and grandchildren of the former dictators are now conspiring with European countries and the regime in Rwanda to come back to power' (Baptiste, Bujumbura Rural, 2016).

Even when it is not the Tutsi population as a whole which is turned into enemy, according to several accounts, the same kind of unveiled language has been used against Tutsi citizens during security operations and detention.

Ethnic readings of the crisis have also become more pronounced among opponents of the CNDD-FDD. After the deadly repression of the 2015 protests and urban guerilla in the Tutsi dominant neighborhoods, and following a purge against officers with a background in the former FAB (*Forces Armées Burundaises* – the Tutsi-dominated army) who took part in the 13 May coup attempt, numerous reports by local and international human rights organizations have contributed to a narrative in which the post-2015 political crisis was framed as a resurgence of ethnic conflict, and in some cases of a new

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[6] The Hima are the Tutsi clan that dominated politics and controlled the army from 1965 until the end of the war.

genocide against Tutsi in the making.[7] While this narrative underplays both the realities of an ethnically mixed opposition, and of ongoing systematic state violence against Hutu FNL militants since 2004, the trend of inserting ethnicity back into the equation is undeniable. Part of the initial focus of civil society activism on mobilizing Burundians against the third term and for the protection of the Arusha consensus and the constitution, has shifted to lobbying for international intervention to prevent genocide. Although ethnic mobilization has not been observed in official MSD discourse since the 2015 crisis, our conversations with exiled Tutsi MSD activists reveal that some interlocutors have started according more importance to their ethnic identity and the need to protect the Tutsi community in Burundi when discussing political stakes.

It is difficult to evaluate the risks involved with the current re-appearance of more essentialist and instrumentalist views on ethnicity in Burundian politics. As has been observed, also at the height of the 2015 crisis, there are no indications that polarizing ethnic discourses have caught on among the general population on the hills (Alfieri 2016; Reyntjens 2016; Van Acker 2016). Also in exile, some Tutsi MSD youth indicated they were involved alongside Hutu refugees, both in regional attempts to initiate armed resistance, but also in mutual solidarity initiatives. Still, it remains unclear to what extent a comeback of ethnic identity politics will influence partisan mobilization and the dynamics of political competition in the near future. Will the combination of the experience of violence, a lack of justice and prolonged exile, possibly without perspective of a swift return, be able to undo the progress in ethnic reconciliation and put ethnic awareness back at the center of political subjectivities of the thousands of recent Tutsi refugees? Will the planned constitutional revision piloted by the government erode Arusha's tangible achievements in terms of ethnic cohabitation on the hills? And will the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission be able avoid furthering ethnic mistrust in a highly polarized climate?

In addition to the above questions, some interlocutors, mainly urban and peri-urban youth, have expressed their doubts about whether meaningful partisan activism is at all still possible in the current scenario, with the near disappearance of most opposition parties from the field in Burundi itself, and the very tight administrative control of those who remain active in the country. As opponents without a party, they are also disappointed by the fact that opposition politicians have not been able to work together and offer little perspective. They suggest that political change in Burundi should be

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[7] Most notably the 2016 FIDH report 'Repression and genocidal dynamics in Burundi' https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/burundi_report_english-2.pdf and the ensuing social media advocacy campaign 'Genocide in Burundi #stopthismovie' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OsWJtRPumA

systemic, and will only be achieved by civic action and popular pressure. The 2015 urban protest movement was quickly hijacked by a military coup attempt which heralded the militarization of the uprising. Before the putsch, the protests were a unique expression of desire for change in Burundi's recent history. They briefly showed that it is possible to think of inclusive collective political action beyond ethnic identity politics and traditional partisan frameworks. However, after two years of repression and fragmentation of the anti-regime movement, there are few indications that the 2015 uprising has produced a new generation of political leaders. On the contrary, for the time being, existing power imbalances have been reinforced, and much of the vibrant partisan landscape of the post-Arusha 'honeymoon period' has been eroded.

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