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## NARRATIVES OF ETHNIC AND POLITICAL CONFLICT IN BURUNDIAN SITES OF PERSUASION

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Since Burundi's independence from Belgium in 1962, the country has suffered greatly from ethnic violence. The mass violence of the 1990s between the Hutu and Tutsi was especially brutal and all-encompassing, touching the lives of nearly every Burundian, shattering the institutions and economy of the country, and escalating conflicts in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and across the African Great Lakes region.<sup>1</sup> Burundi, however, is unlike most other countries that have experienced mass violence—from Cambodia to Argentina to Rwanda—which, after the fact, established official histories and memories of conflicts. In neighboring Rwanda, for example, genocide memorials and museums express an extreme hegemonic state narrative of official memorialization that presents a clear vision of Hutu perpetrators and Tutsi victims, while legitimizing the current ruling government as the creators and guarantors of the current peace (Sodaro 2018). By contrast, in Burundi, there is no official, state-sanctioned narrative or museum of the past, nor is there a particular coherence to government-supported memorials. Instead, the memorials built by the Burundian government since independence have reflected narratives about the conflict espoused by the party in power at the time the memorial was built, but have not advocated for a particular national historical memory of past violence. Burundian sites of persuasion reflect local partisan and sectarian narratives, not national-level narratives, and are the result of highly contradictory local efforts to commemorate and memorialize genocide and ethnic violence. These sites of persuasion, moreover, are not positioned for an international audience to promote tourism (such as in Rwanda), but are built for a national and local audience in this small but densely populated country of 11.2 million people.

It is tempting to look at these clashing and contentious narratives as escalating factors in an ethnic conflict that raise the risk of violence in Burundi, and it is even more tempting to suggest that Burundi's failure to memorialize past episodes of mass violence has left the door open for denial, ethnic resentment, and

collective group vilification. Much of the literature on genocide prevention, after all, suggests that memorialization efforts through public monuments, education, and museums are necessary for preventing future genocides (Hamburg 2015). And, across a wide range of cases, scholars have argued that a commitment among state leaders to promote messages of support for ethnically plural, tolerant societies is one of the greatest bulwarks against ethnic or group-selective violence (Strauss 2015). In Burundi, therefore, scholars often lament the absence of museums and memorials that communicate messages of national unity and reconciliation (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 28; Moore 2012, 298; Novelli 2015).

These arguments, which suggest that Burundi is at greater risk of ethnic violence because it lacks coherent, national-level memorialization processes, take three things for granted. First, such positions imply that Burundian society has not undertaken memorialization efforts. To complicate these commonly held positions, this chapter considers two sites of persuasion in Burundi: the Kibimba Memorial which opened in 1999, and the National Monument in Memory of All the Victims of Burundian Conflicts erected in 2005 and called the “Monument to Weapons” by locals. The chapter also considers two memorials built earlier that were important precursors: the Mausoleum of Prince Rwagasore built in 1967 and the Cemetery of Melchior Ndadaye built in 1993. All of these monuments were built in the midst of ethnic conflict, and were often re-imagined and re-interpreted as the conflict changed over time. Therefore, we present each site of persuasion chronologically, placing each within the context of the changing landscape of Burundian political history in order to understand how different sites of persuasion attempt to memorialize violence, to persuade, and to convey history.

Second, public memorials and sites of persuasion are usually physical spaces. These sites, because they resulted from efforts among neighboring communities or national-level partisan political actors, are closely connected to politicized, contentious public demonstrations and rallies at the local level. The rallies and demonstrations have played an important role in the ever-changing conflict dynamics in Burundi and, in many ways, these local demonstrations and rallies at the local level serve a similar purpose to the physical sites of persuasion. These rallies and demonstrations, often held to memorialize suffering or violence that occurred at a particular location, express a moral message, and position particular groups as historic victims of the other group’s violence.

Third, it is often assumed that sites that memorialize past conflict and violence will support future peace. War museums and sites of suffering, however, are less about documenting facts than collecting and telling stories of a given people, as a people—where they have come from and where they are going (Apsel 2016, 2). There is nothing about telling such a story that, *a priori*, makes the story a source of education for reconciliation and peace. In fact, sites of suffering or memorials can glorify the kinds of violence they are memorializing, or create narratives of the past that dehumanize entire groups as perpetrator groups, recreating the same kinds of group essentialism that can propel violence and genocide (Gutman and Rieff 1999).

This chapter seeks to show how past memory wars over these sites of persuasion reverberate in today's society and politics in Burundi. The current conflict, set off following President Pierre Nkurunziza's announcement in 2015 that he would seek another term, which the opposition argues was in contradiction to the Arusha peace settlement, is connected to the dynamics of ethnic violence over the last three decades. Nkurunziza's party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy—Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), rose to power after the civil war of the 1990s on a slogan that they were a multi-ethnic party. The CNDD-FDD depicts the two other prominent parties—Union for National Progress (UPRONA), a primarily Tutsi party, and Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), which is primarily Hutu—as dragging the country through decades of ethnic civil war. Proclaiming that the CNDD-FDD is a multi-ethnic party means that the CNDD-FDD's politics are steeped in Burundi's history of ethnic political conflict. The memorials constructed since 2005 communicate messages of ethnic unity and attempt to de-legitimize ethnocentric memorials and politics as inherently violence inducing. But, because the CNDD-FDD positions itself as the only legitimate multi-ethnic party in the country, the memorials built across Burundi since 2005 are interpreted by many as sites seeking to persuade Burundians that the CNDD-FDD is the only party capable of preventing inter-ethnic violence.

Indeed, it would seem that Burundi has done a comparatively poor job of dealing with the past, with what looks to be a failure to come to a nation-wide, shared understanding of the mass violence in the 1970s and 1990s. Not only has Burundi not seen a national-level plan of reconciliation, memorialization, or commemoration of the genocidal violence that afflicted the country—but, notably, the Burundian government has been notoriously slow to establish the human rights and truth and reconciliation provisions of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi.<sup>2</sup> However, we argue that even though Burundi has suffered political violence and the government has committed severe human rights abuses against political opponents, there has not been a return of large-scale ethnic violence and genocide. Burundi's experience and history of memorialization and sites of persuasion, we suggest, has played a role in preventing such large-scale ethnic violence. These sites of persuasion convey competing narratives of the past that have been allowed to circulate in the public sphere, helping prevent a climate where ethnic identities become officially sanctioned political categories attached to the concepts of victims and perpetrators, good and bad, innocent and evil.

### **The Mausoleum of Rwagasore and the Monument to the Unknown Soldier: commemorating ethnic violence of the 1960s and 70s**

The majority of Burundi, roughly 80%, is Hutu. The Tutsi minority represent about 15% of the population, while the remainder is ethnic Twa, or Lingala- and Swahili-speaking immigrants from Tanzania and DRC. Pre-colonial traditions depicted Hutu as a farming people, and Tutsi as a herding people and

the monarchical ruling class. German and Belgian colonial administrators exploited these divisions to empower the Tutsi as their ruling proxies. After independence, Tutsi were in control of the army, made up the vast majority of professional administration, and were in control of most of the economy.

Ethnic affiliation in Burundian society is not understood in the same way that ethnicity is understood in most other parts of the world, where the concept of ethnicity implies clear and sharp identity boundaries between groups. It is hard to define Hutu and Tutsi as ethnic groups. There are no cultural differences between the two groups. Both speak Kirundi, practice the same religions (a Catholic majority, a large Protestant minority, and a small Sunni Muslim minority), live in inter-ethnic communities, and intermarry and share family lineages. In Burundi, therefore, Hutu and Tutsi are not distinct ethnic categories, but identity markers for social groups that are largely defined in opposition to each other—in the sense that they are categories that are part ethnic group, part social status, part economic caste, even as individuals can move between groups depending on their changing economic and social fortunes (Lemarchand 1996).

These conflict dynamics between Hutu and Tutsi were present in Burundian sites of persuasion beginning with the first site built after colonial independence, the Mausoleum of Prince Louis Rwagasore. This big monument is located in Kiriri, next to the street leading to the national university of Burundi. It is surrounded by a wall with three entrances. The top of the monument displays the Burundian motto “Unité, Travail, Progres,” or “Unity, Work, Progress.” Behind the tall wall is the tomb of Rwagasore, the leader of Burundi’s independence movement. He was assassinated in 1961 by a Greek national in a plot that included members of the pro-Belgium Christian Democratic Party, with the suspected involvement of the Belgian government (Lemarchand 1996, 52–56). When the mausoleum was erected in 1967 to honor Rwagasore, an ethnic Tutsi and member of the Unity for National Progress (UPRONA) party, it was largely understood as a memorial to colonial independence. But, as competition between Hutu and Tutsi intensified in the first decade after independence, the memorial began to be viewed by Tutsi groups and by UPRONA party members as a representation of the fact that it was Tutsi and UPRONA who delivered independence for the country. This shift in narrative over the meaning of the site had the effect of delegitimizing political claims by Hutu and non-UPRONA political parties. The most notorious episode of mass violence began in April 1972, when Hutu members of the gendarmerie in the lakeside provinces of Bururi and Makamba in southwest Burundi declared an independent republic (Lemarchand 1996, 89). Hutu militias began to massacre Tutsi in an attempt to eradicate them, as well as kill Hutu who were believed to oppose the rebellion (Lemarchand 2004). In response, President Michel Micombero, a Tutsi and UPRONA politician, and the country’s first post-independence president, began a campaign to eliminate Hutu from the country (United States Institute for Peace 2004, §85). Micombero targeted Hutu intellectuals, business leaders, religious leaders, and Hutu with military training and government

experience. The Tutsi-dominated army expanded the violence to target Hutu civilians (Lemarchand 1996). By some estimates, up to 200,000 Hutu died in the massacres, with hundreds of thousands fleeing to Zaire, Rwanda, and Tanzania (Lemarchand 2008, 6). By the end of April, Hutu rebels formed an alliance with militias in Zaire and attacked UPRONA positions in Gitega and Bujumbura, and began a campaign to eradicate Tutsi. Jacques Sémelin has described the reciprocal cycles of genocidal violence as mutual attempts to “purify and destroy,” to cleanse society of internal threats posed by the group targeted for eradication (Sémelin 2007, 349).

In 1973, the Monument to the Unknown Soldier was built to commemorate the genocidal violence committed by Hutu against Tutsi, by memorializing a soldier who died defending the Tutsi president Micombero against a Hutu attack. The monument looms large over the Burundian political imagination to this day, and it is possible to use the building of this monument to date the starting point of the “memory wars” over all the country’s sites of persuasion. Micombero, a Tutsi and UPRONA politician, is widely regarded as making Burundi into a one-party state during the 1972 massacres, and forging Tutsi dominance with the ruling UPRONA party. The site is therefore taken as legitimating and honoring the Tutsi side in the conflict while de-legitimizing the Hutu side.

The fact that the Hutu rebels targeted the country’s first president, Micombero, and proclaimed an independent republic in break-away regions imbued the narrative communicated by the Monument to the Unknown Soldier with a sense that it was Hutu who were opposed to the principles of a united Burundi. Yet, over the next decades, as Hutu began to refer to the genocide of Hutu in 1972 as the starting point for the country’s political dynamics, Hutu narratives of the conflict came to present the Monument to the Unknown Soldier as symbolizing Tutsi arrogance. That Micombero’s personal guard was honored in this monument in the capital city after being killed by a Hutu—while the thousands of Hutu who were massacred the year before did not get a memorial—politicized the Monument to the Unknown Soldier. For many Hutu, it signaled that Tutsi lives and deaths mattered to the regime in power, and Hutu’s did not (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 18–19). The monument, to this day, resonates for the majority of Burundian society as memorializing Tutsi and UPRONA victims of Hutu ethnic violence, and continues to attract rallies, mourners, and ceremonial visits by UPRONA political leaders.

This escalation of ethnic violence was not because of ancestral enmities between the two groups, but because “the ethnic identities have acquired a moral dimension—whether as a martyred community or a threatened minority” in close conversation with the oscillating dynamics of power and opportunity between the two groups (Lemarchand 1996, xii). According to Lemarchand, what lies behind the murder of political opponents in Burundi, the ethnic cleansing of urban and rural neighborhoods, the attacks on refugees, and the killing of civilians going about their daily lives was a sense that mutual retribution

is the only way to prevent one group's plan to annihilate the other. The "reciprocal demonization" is therefore "a social construct rooted in the impending threat of genocide" (Lemarchand 1996, xii). It is this ability to contemplate the annihilation of one's own group, and to contemplate the other as desiring to annihilate your own, Lemarchand writes, that sets the stage for public contestations between Hutu and Tutsi in Burundi over the memory of reciprocal cycles of genocidal violence in later decades.

### **The Cemetery of Melchior Ndadaye: the early 1990s and the decade of genocides**

As Burundian society attempted to come to terms with the extreme violence of 1972 and its aftermath, the meaning of the Mausoleum of Rwagasore began to change. In 1987, the third president of Burundi, Pierre Buyoya, came to power after a military coup against Burundi's second president, Jean-Baptiste Bagaza. While Bagaza and Buyoya were both Tutsi and UPRONA party members, Buyoya's platform included restoring the relationship between Hutu and Tutsi. However, Buyoya could not get the Tutsi-dominated military to carry out meaningful reforms, provoking a Hutu uprising in August 1988. By the end of the year, Buyoya sought ways to mitigate ethnic conflicts, and established a national foundation, the Rwagasore Institute, which promoted the building of Rwagasore monuments in almost every province of the country as a symbol of national unity. While Rwagasore today has regained his status as a hero to both Hutu and Tutsi groups, the memorial to Rwagasore in the two decades after 1972 was recognized as a memorial for Tutsi victims of Hutu violence in Bujumbura, the capital city where the majority of the population was Tutsi in the aftermath of the 1972 genocide against Hutu.

Buyoya's military junta ruled until the country's first democratic elections in 1993, when he lost the presidential election to Melchior Ndadaye from the newly formed Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU) party. Ndadaye, the first democratically elected president and the first Hutu president in the country's history, was killed in a coup before the end of the year by members of the Tutsi-dominated army. Ndadaye's cemetery, erected in 1993 as a site of persuasion in Bujumbura, contains an adjacent monument to honor his close collaborators who were killed along with him in the coup (Krueger and Krueger 2009).

When Ndadaye's cemetery was erected in the midst of the civil war in 1993, it was largely intended to be a response to the Mausoleum of Rwagasore. Indeed, Rwagasore's mausoleum proclaims a unified ethnic narrative, but is interpreted by Tutsi to be a symbol of how Hutu betrayed the promise of an ethnically tolerant society, and by Hutu to be a symbol of Tutsi disregard for Hutu life. By contrast, the Ndadaye cemetery proclaims a message of ethnic unity but is taken by Hutu to be a site dedicated to Hutu victims of Tutsi,

while presenting Tutsi as those who betrayed the promise of an ethnically inclusive state. In this sense, the burial sites of both presidents are used to convey a message that it is the “other” group that is not committed to a multi-ethnic Burundi.

For Tutsi in Burundi, Ndadaye’s assassination was not a day for mourning the death of the country’s first democratically elected president, but the beginning of a genocide when, immediately after the assassination of Ndadaye, Hutu militias began country-wide massacres of Tutsi as reprisals for the assassination of the Hutu president. According to Lemarchand, “the sudden eruption of anti-Tutsi violence only hours after the news of Ndadaye’s death, resulting in countless atrocities and random killings of Tutsi civilians, was the triggering factor behind an equally devastating display of anti-Hutu violence by the army,” as both groups began to consider the complete annihilation of the other as necessary for preserving their own group security (Lemarchand 2012, 146). Ndadaye’s cemetery, as a memorial to his death, was subsequently claimed by Hutu as a monument to Hutu victimization. In contrast, Tutsi (especially hardline UPRONA party members) claimed the site as a monument that Hutu built to honor the FRODEBU president, whose name they evoked to justify their attempt to exterminate the Tutsi.

### **The Kibimba Memorial: the late 1990s and the emergence of genocide memorials**

When Buyoya seized power again in 1996—in a coup during the civil war that began in 1993 and formally ended in 2006—one of his first orders of business was to erect the Kibimba Memorial in honor of Tutsi victims of Hutu violence in 1993. The Kibimba Memorial became the first in a growing number of memorials created specifically as genocide memorials, reflecting a new global consciousness around the word “genocide” that emerged in the 1990s partially as a reaction to the 1994 mass killings in Rwanda. The Tutsi organization, AC Génocide-Cirimoso (Association for the Fight Against Genocide), was founded in 1993 with the purpose of recognizing the 1993 massacres of Tutsi as genocide, to counter the narrative of the 1972 genocide of Hutu by asserting that there was also a genocide of Tutsi that same year, and to counter the denial of Tutsi genocides through public protests and mobilization campaigns (Kieh 2007, 76; *cf.* Reyntjens 2008, 54).<sup>3</sup> Members of AC Génocide-Cirimoso were against a national monument for all Burundians who lost their lives because of the ethnic conflicts, and raised funds and lobbied for national funds to be directed toward memorials they supported (Manirakiza 2010, 10). In 1996, with the return of Buyoya and UPRONA to power, AC Génocide-Cirimoso and other groups who sought to establish a narrative of Tutsi victimization in genocides committed by Hutu were granted official recognition, and took up the mantle of honoring and decorating the Monument to the Unknown Soldier. It was around this time that the CNDD-FDD—a Hutu power militia that later

evolved into a political party—began its armed rebellion. In 1996, the groups commemorating the constellation of Tutsi and UPRONA sites of memory also began commemorating the massacres committed by the CNDD-FDD (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 18–19).

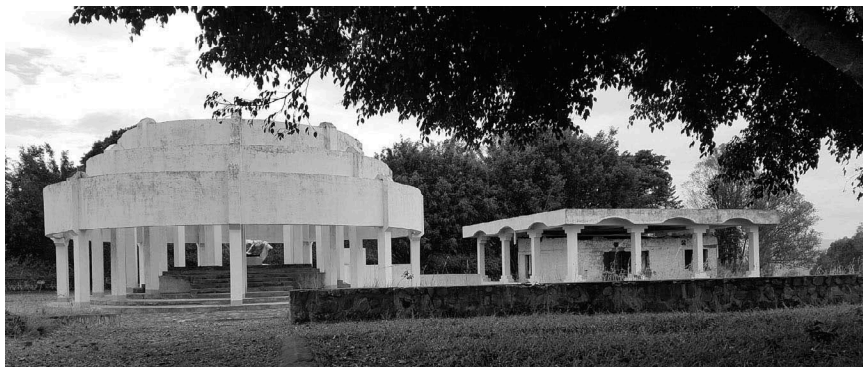
The Kibimba Memorial is perhaps Burundi's most famous site of persuasion. Bold letters spell out "Plus Jamais Ça!" across the memorial, the French translation of "Never Again!", borrowed from Holocaust memorialization (Figure 9.1). Built between 1997 and 1999 with funding from the Burundi government, the monument is about 15 kilometers outside of the city of Gitega, and 100 kilometers from Bujumbura. The site commemorates a 1993 massacre when, a few hours after the assassination of Ndadaye, Hutu militias barricaded Tutsi children in their school and burned them alive. The charred structure of a gas station sits next to the monument, framing the complex, evoking the burning school. A cross in a garden off to the side reads, "to the child victims of genocide, October 21, 1993." The Kibimba Memorial is thus the first memorial that explicitly names the violence as genocide, and it was the first to commemorate ethnic group-specific suffering of civilians instead of the death of a political leader. Since its creation, the site has been important for efforts to shape public narratives of ethnic conflict in Burundi, vis-à-vis the victimhood of the Tutsi and the inhumanity of the Hutu. The Kibimba Memorial, therefore, has been used as a location for gatherings, protests, and speeches by Tutsi extremists under the leadership of AC Génocide-Cirimoso. Most importantly, as Manirakiza has argued, the political speeches held at the site each year demonstrate the divisive character of the site in Burundian politics (Manirakiza 2010).

By October 1998, after Buyoya and the Parliament agreed to institute a transitional government and officially install him as president, Buyoya paid homage at President Ndadaye's cemetery. The next day in Kibimba, he stood before the unfinished Kibimba Memorial to Tutsi children he commissioned. Even though Buyoya had visited Ndadaye's cemetery and the Monument to Unknown Martyrs, his appearance at the Kibimba Memorial set off waves of protests from FRODEBU partisans—not in the least because so many believed, rightly or wrongly, that Buyoya was behind the coup that killed Ndadaye. The protestors accused the UPRONA president of building an UPRONA monument instead of an inclusive monument to all the victims of 1993, such as the monument to the Unknown Martyrs in Bujumbura—which was hardly inclusive according to UPRONA or Tutsi narratives (International Crisis Group 1999).

An imposing, white, temple-like structure, the Kibimba Memorial is made up of concentric circles, one higher than the other, pushing the structure up into the sky. At its center, beneath the open roof, a platform rises up, forming a series of circular steps in proportion to the rising arch of the structure above. Looking at the monument from a distance, the steps connote a kind of tomb or altar—a fitting symbol that brings to mind images of reverence and sacrifice.

When we visited the Kibimba Memorial, school children were playing around the monument. It sits in an open space, tucked safely away from roads with passing cars, and away from plots of land that adults would not want





**FIGURE 9.1** Kibimba “Plus Jamais Ça!” Memorial. Photo credit: Sixte Vigny Nimuraba.

children to disturb. Here they were free to run and tumble. As our car approached, some of the children ran away, afraid of the kind of car we were driving—a rental car unlike the cars they usually see. Some stayed and greeted us. After introducing ourselves and talking to them a little bit, we asked them what this building was. One said it was a tomb, a grave; some agreed, and immediately another child said that it was a “Tutsi memorial.” We asked the children what “a Tutsi memorial” is, and they spoke to us about why it was built. They knew the story of the school children who were burned alive, and they knew these were Tutsi victims of Hutu militias. But they did not believe the memorial was intended to preserve the memory of the gruesome atrocity. No, according to a six-year-old child, this was a Tutsi memorial. When we asked him what he meant, he responded that the Kibimba Memorial is for Tutsi people so they can remember the Tutsi who were the victims of the civil war.

Why were we here, another asked? Because when Ndadaye was assassinated in 1993, we explained, one of the co-authors of this chapter was in school that day in Giheta commune not far away—the same killings came to the seminary in Giheta where he was studying.

Is there a monument for Hutu victims, we asked? They first said that there was no Hutu monument, and then another child jumped in and said loudly that the Hutu monument was in Bujumbura. This statement betrayed a child’s perspective on the conflict—a window into what his family and neighbors might be thinking in the moment, innocently ahistorical. In 1973, a prominent foreign correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times* had marveled that trying to find a Hutu in Bujumbura after the 1972 genocide was like trying to find a Jew in Warsaw after World War II (Meisler 1973). The social fabric of the city had been violently engineered in an attempt to remove ethnic Hutu from positions of social and political privilege (Uvin 1999). The genocide of Hutu by Tutsi was preceded, and followed, by a genocide of Tutsi by Hutu. Since 1972 Bujumbura has generally been thought of as a Tutsi-majority city with Hutu districts on the

outskirts pushing up against a predominantly Hutu countryside. But, for this child, Bujumbura would be the rightful place for the nation's memorial for the memory of the Hutu who were victims of civil war. Why? Was it because the capital city Bujumbura was where Ndadaye, a Hutu, was assassinated, setting in motion the massacre of the children at Kibimba and the civil war? Was it because the current president of Burundi is a Hutu? Did the child know that, in 1972, there were Hutu massacres in Bujumbura?

There is nothing at the Kibimba Memorial site that announces the victims were Tutsi—no placards or inscriptions that state the ethnicity of the child victims. What remains are the charred gas station wall that recalls the burned school nearby, the local rumors that Hutu from the neighborhood were the ones who killed the Tutsi children, and the local knowledge of what happened that day in 1993. While the site does not announce itself as a memorial to Tutsi, the children themselves revealed the meaning the site has taken on for those who live by it—commemorating one group's suffering at the hands of the other. On another level, it serves as a reminder of the extent of hatred and violence in targeting and destroying children because they are Tutsi. In its most contentious state, it is seen as a monument to the group-specific suffering of Tutsi—memorializing the victims not in their capacity as individual children, but in their capacity as members of the group. The ethnicization of the monument does not occur because of any writings, inscriptions, or depictions at the monument, or because of the presentation of the physical building, but rather within the social contexts of when and where it was erected, and the persistence of local narratives through the passage of time. The monument becomes a site of persuasion because of social acts carried out at the site, the recurrence of annual remembrances, and the speeches of elites, and through stories told by those who gather.

Not only is the site contentious in ethnic terms, but it is also a point of contention between rival political parties. In part, the UPRONA putsch against Ndadaye in 1993 was a self-defensive posture by ethnic Tutsi who felt the need to remove a Hutu president from power. It was also a UPRONA rebellion against a FRODEBU government (Uvin 1999). The Hutu reprisal killings of Tutsi, in turn, were very much FRODEBU reprisals against those associated with UPRONA. The result was that many ethnic Hutu lost their lives in the Hutu revenge killings, and Tutsi partisans massacred many Tutsi who were aligned in the opposing political camp. As the cycles of retributive political violence that followed in the wake of the coup increasingly took on ethnic dimensions, the ethnic fault lines of the violence concretized; but they never lost their political party significance within the context of the civil war. The monuments never lost their party significance, either. Like sites of persuasion around the world, whose construction and interpretations are often based on personal memories and politics, the Burundian monuments thus reproduce versions of history and ethnic conflicts that are passed on to future generations.

## The “monument to weapons”: the 2000s and memorializing collective ethnic suffering

The final monument this chapter considers is the National Monument in Memory of All the Victims of Burundian Conflicts. The political opponents of the current ruling party, the CNDD-FDD, mockingly call the monument the “Monument to Weapons.” Erected in 2005, and finished in 2010, the monument was built to commemorate the suffering of all ethnic groups between 1993 and 2000, by representing the typical weapons used by each group—a Kalashnikov, machete, bow and arrow, bamboo spear, and a club. The “Monument to Weapons” is steeped in the same contentious dynamics and the elaborate interplay of party politics and ethnic politics that surrounds the other memorials across the country, but is nevertheless an expression of the political ideologies that emerged after the Arusha peace agreement of 2000 that put an end to the civil war begun in 1993 (Uvin 2009).

The Arusha agreement was the culmination of a peace process presided over by Nelson Mandela (International Crisis Group 2000). Mandela’s moral authority is largely credited as leading the negotiations in Arusha to attempt to mitigate the political, social, and economic drivers of ethnic conflicts in the future. The result was a peace agreement that avoided zero-sum accounts of the past and, looking forward, mandated that ethnic quotas be met in government employment, security forces, civil society institutions, and economic opportunities. The goal of the agreements was to prevent the Tutsi minority from wielding near limitless authority and power, but still allow Tutsi parties to maintain enough representation to ease their fear of a Hutu-majority government. However, the Arusha agreement did not put an end to civil war for a number of reasons, including that the two major armed groups—CNDD-FDD and the Forces Nationales de Libération (FNL)—were excluded from the negotiations (Sculier 2008). The CNDD-FDD and FNL kept fighting until a new ceasefire was signed first with CNDD-FDD in 2003, and later another ceasefire was signed between the then government of Burundi and the final rebel group, a faction of the FNL, in 2006.

After signing the ceasefire, the CNDD-FDD leaders and soldiers were integrated into the government (Nindorera 2012). Under Pierre Nkurunziza’s leadership, the rebel group transformed into a *de facto* political party. Nkurunziza managed to reshape the CNDD-FDD’s Hutu defense slogans into messages of ethnic unity and reconciliation, and presented the CNDD-FDD as a national populist party that could represent both ethnic groups and reject the ethnic terror deployed by FRODEBU and UPRONA (Rubli 2011). In 2005, the CNDD-FDD emerged as the victors of democratic election, winning large majorities in all branches of the government, with Nkurunziza winning the presidency. The CNDD-FDD’s party identity was crafted to present FODEBU (as Hutu majority) and UPRONA (as Tutsi majority) as parties ruled by elites who exploited ethnic hatreds for their own ends, and who had lost touch with the living conditions of the masses, especially the rural masses, Hutu and Tutsi alike.

When the CNDD-FDD took power in 2005, the monuments constructed by officials at the local level reflected the priorities of the new ruling party. The first memorial built during the CNDD-FDD's time in power is a site called the Freedom Fighters Memorial. Located on the road between Bubanza and Bujumbura, the site commemorates CNDD-FDD soldiers killed in Kibira in 1997 by a branch of the same party that was led by one of the party's founders (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 21). The Freedom Fighters Memorial bears the slogan in Kirundi, "it is not ethnicity that kills, it is bad leadership" (*ntihica ubwoko, hica ubutegetsu bubu*) (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 21). The memorial was the beginning of a pattern of monuments communicating to audiences the specific message that it was not ethnicity itself but the politics of ethnic political leaders that was always the basis of deadly violence in Burundi's history. The monuments erected later, largely by local government administrators who are part of the CNDD-FDD national political structure, took on explicit symbols of collective Hutu and Tutsi perpetration, where the victims were either individuals who defied ethnic identification or who symbolically represent Burundi itself.

The memorials established by CNDD-FDD leaders at the local and national level seek to convey positive moral messages to their visitors that ethnic violence was not caused by ethnic hatreds, but that ethnic hatreds were fueled by UPRONA and FRODEBU leadership. The moral messages of inclusive leadership and ethnic unity were therefore a provocative shift from the pattern of the previous three decades, when monuments took on explicitly ethno-political meanings because of who built them, and in what contexts they were built. This is a transition from an ethnic-driven perspective to a unity-driven narrative of representing the past, and one that clearly makes an appeal to emotions—*pathos*—that is meant to persuade viewers to alter their ethical position in Burundian society. However, it was not a shift to an apolitical, moral message—but a moral message that served to legitimize CNDD-FDD leadership of post-war Burundi, from the local to the national level, while delegitimizing the two primarily ethnic parties, UPRONA and FRODEBU.

The "Monument to Weapons" is the most visible site of persuasion in Burundi that embodies this tendency (Figure 9.2). Funded and built by the CNDD-FDD-controlled government, the monument presents itself as inclusive of all ethnic groups by including all the kinds of weapons used by all ethnic groups during the civil war. Yet, in presenting itself as inclusive and non-sectarian, it espouses the central ideological message that legitimizes the CNDD-FDD rule: that competing ethnically based political parties caused the whole country to suffer, so peace can only be secured if the whole country—from the local level to the national level—is ruled by a single multi-ethnic party, the CNDD-FDD.

From the beginning, the monument was an explicitly political construction. In 2010, the CNDD-FDD prepared for the second national elections since the end of the civil war. The party won the elections in a landslide, but was widely

accused of electoral fraud to deny UPRONA and FRODEBU votes, and international human rights organizations documented abuses and intimidation against Hutu and Tutsi ethnic leaders who did not back CNDD-FDD's multi-ethnic party. In an attempt to promote narratives of the past that bolstered and legitimized their post-civil war domination of Burundian politics, the CNDD-FDD government broke ground on the "Monument to Weapons" memorial in Gitega. The location of Gitega was symbolic and provocative. It was symbolic because Gitega is the geographical center of the country, and holds a special symbolism as the former capital of the pre-colonial monarchy. The site was provocative because Gitega is the center of political resistance against the CNDD-FDD.

Further politicizing the supposedly non-political monument, the words "Plus Jamais Ça!" were written on the façade. This inscription connected the "Monument to Weapons" to the Kibimba genocide memorial. However, symbolically including the perpetration by all the parties in the conflict places the memorial in stark contrast with the other sites of persuasion that memorialize group-specific victimizations. The "Monument to Weapons" can therefore be interpreted as a counter-monument to the Kibimba Memorial, not only because it was inscribed with the same "never again" slogan yet represents violence committed against every ethnic group, but also because it was built just a few miles from the Kibimba Memorial.



**FIGURE 9.2** National Monument in Memory of All the Victims of Burundian Conflicts, or the "Monument to Weapons." Photo credit: Sixte Vigny Nimuraba.

The monument comes to a dramatic peak, with a structure that consists of the various weapons used by the different groups to commit massacres. The Kalashnikovs in the structure that forms the monument's summit signify the weapons of the Tutsi-dominated army. Later, when rebel groups were created, the Kalashnikov became an important weapon used by the armed groups, the CNDD-FDD and FNL, which ended up becoming political parties following the Arusha peace and reconciliation agreement. The machete symbolizes the weapons that Hutu used across the country to kill Tutsi shortly after President Ndadaye was assassinated. The bamboo spear was used by Tutsi youth wings to kill Hutu in cities and towns that were at the time occupied by Tutsi communities. The bow and arrow was used by members of the Hutu community, mostly when they were fighting against the Tutsi-dominated army which was known to chase after Hutu from 1993 to 2005. The club (*matraque* or *ubuhiri* in Kirundi) was used by both Hutu and Tutsi across the whole country.

While locals often deride the monument as commemorating weapons, there is a purposeful message that is communicated by the absence of any clear victim. The weapons used by each ethnic group bring all perpetrator groups into the memorial, but in doing so the memorial resists identifying the groups that were the victims of such violence. Rather, because each weapon implies a victim, while being arranged in a manner that implies the weapons are conflicting with each other, the collective presence of the weapons of all groups suggests that all groups were each other's victims. This preserves the broader pattern of memorials in Burundi built after the 2000 Arusha peace agreement that dramatize the costs of ethnic violence, but do not memorialize the suffering of a specific victim group.

As Amy Sodaro argues in this volume, there are parallels to this recent trend in Burundian memorials with other memorials around the world that focus on victims, but, in this case, the perpetrators' group identities are absent to emphasize a single national identity and avoid blaming the "ethnic identity" of groups for violence and hence, it is hoped, lessen future ethnic violence. The "Monument to Weapons" memorial in Gitega, moreover, places these symbols of collective victimization at the center of the country—as if it were Burundi, and Burundian history, that bore the burdens of ethnic violence. If the Kibimba Memorial is built on the site of the Tutsi school children victims, memorializing these victims as individuals worthy of remembrance, then the "Monument to Weapons" conveys the nationalist idea that it was all Burundians and their nation who were the victims of ethnic violence. However, the contrast with the other monuments goes one step further. Its implicit reference to the Kibimba Memorial serves to present the current CNDD-FDD government that built it, as a national populist party capable of representing all ethnic groups and uniting the country in contrast to FRODEBU and UPRONA.

## Conclusion

If the Gitega monument symbolizes the victimization and perpetration of all of Burundi's population, there is one monument built during the CNDD-FDD period that stands out for its message of solidarity across sectarian lines. This monument is referred to as the Martyrs of Brotherhood Monument in Buta Seminary, in Bururi province, commemorating the massacre of 40 seminary students by a Hutu rebel group in 1997 (Figure 9.3).<sup>4</sup> The Hutu rebels wanted to divide students into Hutu and Tutsi groups so they could kill the Tutsi. The students refused to be divided, and died together. What makes the monument stand out among other monuments constructed during the years when the CNDD-FDD was in power is that it was CNDD-FDD-aligned fighters that committed the killings.

Commemorations began at the site the year of the killings, and continued until 2008 when a formal association was created, Association Lumière du Monde de Buta. A memorial chapel was erected the following year, where a mass is held every April 30, attended by the clergy, families of the survivors, and often UPRONA representatives (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 19). Besides the yearly mass, building the memorial and chapel provides space for increasing numbers of Burundi victims of violence and others to pay homage to the students. Since 1997, the seminary had been a place of pilgrimage for those who claim the site as an example of Hutu solidarity with Tutsi against Hutu violence (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 19). The monument presents those who refused to divide along ethnic lines as martyrs who refused to abandon their belief in the ideals of human solidarity, and hence died together as victims of ethnic violence.



**FIGURE 9.3** Martyrs of Brotherhood Monument, Buta Seminary massacre site. Photo credit: Sixte Vigny Nimuraba.

It is possible to construe broad patterns in the shifting landscape of Burundian memorials. One is that the memorials shift from commemorating the deaths of political leaders at the hands of ethnically motivated perpetrators to memorializing the deaths of civilians because of political leaders. While Burundian monuments may no longer focus on group-specific violence in an attempt to solidify national identity around a particular ethnic identity and a single political party, the new more inclusive memorials continue to be used to justify particular national political agendas, and to support current power structures in the face of past atrocities, within the parameters of the existing state and its supporters.

Another pattern that emerged is that the absence of national memorialization efforts—up until the “Monument to Weapons”—promoted an outcropping of local mobilizations on a village by village level. These memorializations often took the form of commemorative gatherings. For Hutu families from 1972 until 1993, kinship-based memorialization of family members became especially important because of official prohibitions on commemorating Hutu deaths since Hutu who died were defined as traitorous enemies of the state (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 30). The creation of the monument at Ndadaye’s cemetery for Unknown Martyrs who died in 1993 unleashed a torrent of public protests and public commemorations emphasizing the 1972 genocide of Hutu, in an attempt by political Hutu actors to assert a narrative in which Hutu also suffered genocide from Tutsi.

Because of a variety of factors (including the number and instability of governments and political parties), there is not one official narrative of past violence in Burundi that has dominated the national discourse or succeeded in being institutionalized as the correct, official history in sites of memory and museums. Instead, competing narratives have been allowed to circulate in the public sphere, helping prevent a climate where ethnic identities become officially sanctioned political categories attached to the concepts of victims and perpetrators, good and bad, innocent and evil. The risk of genocidal violence in Burundi rests to a large degree in the potential for these incitements of ethnic chauvinism and inter-ethnic fear for political and economic gains. While the conflict today in Burundi is structurally and politically different than the conflict 15 years ago, or even three years ago, there are certain dynamics that have remained constant. The Burundian political arena and therefore the Burundian economy is still dominated by a single party. And political elites are still attempting to consolidate power within their parties by manipulating the myth of mutual annihilation that Lemarc-hand identified (1996, 2012), to provoke Hutu solidarity with the ruling party by exploiting fears of Tutsi. At the same time, opposition party leaders promote narratives of Hutu victimization of Tutsi to try to pull Tutsi away from lending their support to the current government.

While these clashing, contentious narratives may be viewed as escalating factors in an ongoing, ethnic conflict, they have so far helped people reject



attempts to place collective blame for past violence on any one group as a whole. Given the violence and fluidity within and across borders and throughout the Great Lakes Region, for now the changing narratives and memorialization infused by changing politics in Burundi have worked to allow for different voices and memories of difficult histories to retain sites and spaces. This has prevented a climate from emerging where a single group's narrative emerges as hegemonic, silencing the narratives of other groups and fostering zero-sum accounts of the past that can drive ethnic resentments and conflict. Nevertheless, in the context of the ongoing conflicts in Burundi and regionally, there is no guarantee to what degree and for how long such varied memories will be allowed, especially since the current government is focused on creating a unified Burundian nation and identity. What we have tried to demonstrate, however, is that—in contrast to the notion that memorials should strive to create coherent narratives of the past that look toward a normative goal of promoting reconciliation in the future—the diverse and partisan nature of Burundian sites of persuasion has promoted, up until this point, contentious debates over memorials and narratives of victimization and ethnic violence. By not commemorating past genocides through any one public narrative, these competing narratives of suffering and violence have been allowed to circulate in Burundian society, helping to advance alternative lessons or morals to be remembered or learned, to promote public debate and discourse over the meaning of the past, and, so far, to prevent ethnic identities in Burundi being understood as fixed political categories.

## Notes

- 1 Burundians call the violence *ubwicanyi*, meaning “killings,” or *ikiiza*, meaning literally “it comes from nowhere,” a phrase used to describe catastrophes. In the 1970s, the killings were called *ubwicanyi*, or massacres and killings, but in the 1990s the killings came to be called genocide; the term was picked up in local discourses as part of the influence of genocidal politics in Rwanda and global human rights discourses more generally. To this day, however, the term genocide is usually used in French-language messaging, signage, and narratives and is rarely used in Kirundi-language contexts.
- 2 The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi was signed August 28, 2000. An overview of the provisions and their implementation status is available from the Peace Accords Matrix, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame: <https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/accord/arusha-peace-and-reconciliation-agreement-burundi>. See also the establishing documents of Commission Vérité et Réconciliation, available from: <https://cvrburundi.bi/presentation>.
- 3 *Cirimoso*, in Kirundi, is a concept similar to “dissimulate.” It refers to the practice of knowing something, but pretending that you don't know anything, so you can work for revenge or retribution. ACGenocide's current website is: <http://acgenocide.blogspot.com>. Their original site, <http://acgenocide.com>, is no longer active.
- 4 A description is available from *Dictionnaire Biographique Des Chrétiens D'Afrique*, “Les Martyrs de la Fraternité Chrétienne morts en 1997”: [www.dacb.org/stories/burundi/f-martyrs\\_burundi.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/burundi/f-martyrs_burundi.html).

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