

Epilogue

The Forgotten People

The years since the end of the fieldwork period for this book (mid-1992) have been unusually tumultuous and unforgiving for Burundians. Yet the immediate signs for the future in 1992 were almost entirely positive. The government-endorsed constitution in March of 1992, which had set the stage for attempts to persuade Burundi refugees to repatriate (described in the previous chapter), were followed by the rise to prominence of an opposition party called Frodebu (Front pour la démocratie au Burundi). Formed by a cadre of Hutu intellectuals who had been refugees following the 1972 genocide, and “against all odds” (Lemarchand 1996b: 178), Frodebu swept into power following the general election of June 1993. Stunningly, after three decades of Tutsi hegemony, the last two of which were marked by severe state repression against Hutu civilians, Burundi had held a multiparty election that was widely thought to be free and fair. The election had produced Burundi’s first Hutu President, an engineer-turned-politician named Melchior Ndadaye.

The democratic miracle proved a mirage. Soon after the election, on July 2, 1993, forty Tutsi soldiers attempted to overthrow Ndadaye even before he had officially assumed power. They failed, and Ndadaye charged ahead with a distinctly multi-ethnic government and plans for expanding democratic reforms. Tragically, former President Pierre Buyoya’s four and a half years of preparations for a multiparty democracy in Burundi had failed to adequately heed the non-elite Burundi refugee refrain that “the army is the government.” In this particular refugee view, democracy in Burundi is considered

dangerous if dramatic national army reforms do not take place first. The non-elite refugees maintained that only a truly multi-ethnic army could pave the way for lasting peace and democracy in Burundi. They were right. On October 20, 1993, members of the armed forces again staged a coup, and this time they succeeded.

News of Ndadaye's assassination further demonstrated the power, pervasiveness, and lasting influence of the 1972 genocide over Burundians. Memories of those terrible times inspired pre-emptive strikes by Hutu civilians against Tutsi neighbors and authority figures across the country, something that also took place on a smaller scale in northern Burundi in 1988, when, as one Hutu survivor noted, "Everyone was saying '1972! 1972!'" when army soldiers advanced (Watson 1989: 53). Lemarchand characterized the 1988 violence as marked by, for Hutu civilians at least, "a sudden outburst of rage, followed by intense fears of an impending reenactment of the 1972 carnage" (Lemarchand 1996b: 128). Five years later, in the wake of Ndadaye's fall, Lemarchand similarly described the immediate and violent reactions of Hutu civilians against their Tutsi compatriots: as a "spontaneous outburst of rage fueled by memories of 1972" (Lemarchand 1996a: 8).

There was one very significant difference, however, between the violence that exploded in Burundi in 1988 and 1993. In 1988, massacres carried out by Hutu civilians were followed by swift and extensive reprisals against them by the armed forces, leaving the estimated death toll at several thousand Tutsi and twenty thousand Hutu (Human Rights Watch 1998: 13). But within a few weeks the violence essentially ended. The violence starting late in 1993, on the other hand, has yet to end. It started with a similar spasm of Hutu massacres and Tutsi reprisals, though the violence stretched across a much larger geographic area of Burundi and left larger numbers of Burundians dead. One source estimated there were up to fifty thousand deaths, the casualties appearing to be equally divided between the two ethnic groups (*ibid.*: 15), while a second source thought the final figure was double that amount (Economist Intelligence Unit 1999: 46). Yet unlike the 1988 violence, the 1993 events have been followed by a spiral of destruction that has enveloped the entire Burundian population in a combination of despair, terror, and violence whose end, as of this writing, still seems distant.

This post-democracy period has witnessed a dramatic expansion of ethnically based parties and militias in Burundi. The Hutu side has been especially active in this regard. Though coalitions continue to form, ebb, and flow, their general disunity recalls the dismay

Burundi refugee elite men in Dar es Salaam regularly expressed to me about the inability of Hutu refugees to unite against their Tutsi enemies. Among those parties still involved is Palipehutu, though it has lost its standing as the dominant Burundi refugee party to the Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD). Still around, too, is Joseph Karumba, now based in southern Burundi and head of Frolina (Front de Libération National) (Africa Confidential 1999b: 2). Whether the current Frolina has fully absorbed the membership from Karumba's earlier, Imbo refugee-based party, which was mainly known as Ubumwe, is uncertain.

Locating, identifying, and assisting forcibly displaced Burundians has become a constant challenge for humanitarian and human rights groups. Since armed groups rarely battle each other directly, Hutu attacks on Tutsi civilians are inevitably followed by Tutsi attacks on Hutu civilians, and vice versa. This has caused massive displacements, internal and external, of Burundians over different periods of the conflict. The U.S. Committee for Refugees estimates that more than 500,000 Burundians (more than 8 percent of the total population) are internally displaced. Since the outbreak of violence in October 1993, a number of sources have approximated that two hundred thousand Burundians have been killed.

The chaotic instability emanating from Burundi's ongoing civil war make all figures necessarily unreliable. Statistics alone also cannot reflect the breadth of Burundi's forced displacement because tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of civilians have returned to their homes only to be displaced from them again. On the Hutu side, insurgent groups, Palipehutu and Frolina among them, are thought to have killed or displaced relatively few Tutsi, due to a number of factors, among them the fact that they are generally poorly equipped and have comparatively few targets—Tutsi civilians—to attack, since the Tutsi comprise a fairly small part of the Burundian population. Most Tutsi now live in areas well defended by the national army (Human Rights Watch 1998: 2).

Burundi's armed forces, on the other hand, have been employing a series of tactics to variously control, terrorize, and kill members of the Hutu majority. Perhaps their most notorious tactic was the creation of "regroupment" camps, wherein as many as seven hundred thousand Hutu civilians (out of a total population of approximately six million Burundians) were removed from their homes and ordered into specific locales under army control (Economist Intelligence Unit 1999). Among the Hutu civilians that the army has targeted for violence includes the chronically malnourished. The

Burundian army reportedly believes that “malnutrition is evidence of having lived in rebel-controlled areas where food is scarce” (Human Rights Watch 1998: 1–2). Together with the government, the army has been able largely to control the access of international humanitarian organizations to internally displaced Burundians. As a result, many members of the humanitarian community have accepted government and army restrictions while tens, and perhaps even hundreds, of thousands of displaced civilians remain unable to access their services.

As in 1972, the lion’s share of the recent Burundi refugee population resides in Tanzania. Current population estimates hover around 300,000, nearly all of whom are in camps in Western Tanzania, though lately new influxes have steadily enlarged that figure. Significantly, current refugee statistics count only those Burundians who have become refugees since Ndadaye’s assassination in 1993. Refugees from the 1972 genocide are not included. This is a new development, and it deserves some consideration. “Some 100,000 Burundians who settled in Tanzania in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s,” the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) states, “are not included in [USCR’s] refugee total” for Tanzania (USCR 1997: 63). These Burundians, a mixture of immigrants and refugees that included “the people of ’72” among them, “appear to be socially and economically integrated into Tanzania and are largely self-sufficient. Although they are no longer considered to be refugees in need of protection or assistance, they live a ‘refugee-like’ existence” (*ibid.*). A UNHCR sub-office head interviewed in 1998 in western Tanzania further refined USCR’s definition. The official explained that UNHCR now considered all Burundi refugees who had arrived in Tanzania before 1995 as “old caseload” refugees who “have not legalized their status and can look after themselves.” Accordingly, UNHCR would “only look after the newcomers,” providing “protection and support to them based on our mandate.”

To be sure, the circumstances of the Burundi refugees who arrived in Tanzania following the 1972 genocide had not changed since the end of my fieldwork period in mid-1992. Most of them still lived in Katumba, Mishamo, and Ulyankulu settlements, while others resided in Dar es Salaam and a few other towns. Still others continued to live in Kigoma and in Tanzanian villages near the Burundian border. But the civil war in Burundi had dramatically altered how these refugees were perceived. The huge new influx of Burundi refugees had relegated “the people of ’72” to the background. Their relative success at economic self-sufficiency, and

their lengthy stay in Tanzania, had reduced their standing, in the eyes of international observers, as refugees. This had occurred even as the “old caseload” refugees’ “fear of being persecuted” for returning to Burundi appeared to have become more “well-founded” after Ndadaye’s death in 1993 than at any time since their original flight in 1972. The 1972 refugees have become a truly forgotten people.

The lack of adequate provisions for protecting these “old caseload” Burundi refugees in Tanzania was exposed in 1997–98 when the Tanzanian government embarked on a “round-up” of all Burundian nationals living in western Tanzania (Burundi refugees and migrants in other areas of Tanzania were not targeted). Despite its prior determination, following the outbreak of war in Burundi late in 1993, that all Burundian nationals in Tanzania “qualified for prima facie refugee status” (Human Rights Watch 1999: 9), the Tanzanian government nonetheless forcibly deposited nearly 100,000 Burundians into Burundian refugee camps near the Burundi border (Sommers 1998a).

Late in 1996, just before this round-up in western Tanzania began, I was able to briefly visit Dar es Salaam. In many ways, not much seemed to have changed. Broken streetlights still kept city streets almost completely dark at night. Augustine Mrema was still dominating the newspaper headlines, only this time as an opposition party leader. Tanzania’s founding President, Julius Nyerere, had figured heavily in Mrema’s break with the ruling CCM party by “following him around the country and making better speeches to the *wananchi*” (citizens) (Africa Confidential 1999a: 1) during the campaign for the CCM presidential nomination in 1995 (Nyerere’s chosen candidate, Benjamin Mkapa won that nomination and was then elected to succeed another of Nyerere’s chosen candidates, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, as Tanzania’s President).

Though there were a number of signs of improvement in Dar es Salaam, such as repaired roads, an improved telephone network and the introduction of both email and television broadcasting (Tanzania was the last country in Africa to make this last move), the press of urban growth was more noticeable than ever. More cars and more kiosks brought increased traffic problems. Urban and peri-urban neighborhoods around the city’s edges had continued to expand.

Dar es Salaam’s garbage removal had also remained as an issue of national debate. In 1996, I arrived in Dar es Salaam during “Dar es Salaam City Cleanliness Week,” a campaign announced by Prime Minister Frederick Sumaye to inspire city residents “to participate in city development programmes morally and materially

instead of relying on donor assistance” (Mbiro 1996: 1). In a front page editorial supporting Sumaye’s initiative (entitled “Yes, let us always keep Dar clean”) the *Daily News* reflected on how “Dar es Salaam has over time been sinking deeper and deeper into an abyss of garbage” (1996: 1). In an almost comic twist, the development potential of garbage had also made the front page of the *Daily News* the month before. Pantaleon Chuwa, a microbiologist at the University of Dar es Salaam, presented a paper estimating that ten to 13 percent of the two thousand tons of solid waste daily produced by Dar es Salaam residents consisted of organic waste arising from marketplaces which “can be used to grow [edible] mushrooms” (Mgusi 1996: 1). Tanzania’s Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education immediately responded by declaring that “the government will put the knowledge into practical application as a tool of economic and social development” (ibid.).

During my visit, I was delighted to find that no amount of garbage on the street—or in stories in the press—could suppress the vibrancy of the urban youth’s *Lugha ya Wahuni*. There had continued to be an outpouring of new words and phrases. Kids had concocted one set for use during their attempts to find employment. Before venturing forth, a youth might tell his friend “*Nakwenda juu*” (I’m going up). If his attempt to secure employment had failed, the youth would explain that “*Nimeteremka chini*” (I’ve come back down). My giving a tie to Marko as a gift revealed another new phrase. Holding the gift in his hands, he thanked me for the *Clinton tie*. A *Clinton tie*, Marko explained, was a wide tie, the same as those worn by U.S. President Bill Clinton. Several youths hawking ties downtown later confirmed that *Clinton ties* had become high fashion in Dar es Salaam.

In my visit to the neighborhood where John, William, James, and Pastor Albert had all lived and worked during my fieldwork period, I saw a number of changes in their lives, some upbeat, others truly tragic. James had previously written to tell me that he had married Pastor Albert’s eldest daughter, but there was more news after arriving at his house. The newlyweds had just had a child and lived together in a rented room across the street from his former tailoring shop. The room was thickly furnished, with a double bed, a full sofa set and a bureau containing dishes and clothes. Sitting there in his room, next to his wife and young daughter, James looked more content and calm than I had ever seen.

James was obviously doing well in Bongoland. He explained that he had finally left Amosi’s shop across the street a year ago and

carried out the plan he had described to me many years before. He had bought two sewing machines, rented a small storefront in another part of the city, hired another tailor, and started his own tailoring business. He still did not know how to make a suitcoat, but explained that another refugee tailor in town was teaching him how to do it.

James had hired a Tanzanian, not a Burundi refugee, to work as his assistant in his tailoring shop, and it proved only one of many signs of his growing separation from many of the other refugees in town. For the first time, James talked with me about refugee politics. “I don’t like segregation, so I stay away from politics,” he explained. James explained that he felt John and William both hated him because they believed he was untrustworthy, and blamed both of them—John the Banyaruguru and William the Imbo—for being involved in the “*ubaguzi*” (segregation), which he clearly despised. He seemed especially bitter about John, his cousin, who “didn’t share his ideas and always stayed separate” from him.

Even so, James wanted to talk about the “segregation” in Imbo and Banyaruguru politics. “Ubumwe is for the Imbo only,” James explained, but since there were only a small number of party members, their leader, Joseph Karumba, “is not powerful.” James also condemned Palipehutu, the leading Banyaruguru party, because “they just want violence.” His preferred politician was Leonard Nyangoma, the CNDD leader, whom he lauded for allowing “all Burundians in: Imbo, Banyaruguru, even Tutsi.”

James also mentioned that his parents had returned to Burundi following Ndadaye’s election as President. He said “they were not worried about war because they live near the border.” When civil war eventually reached their home area in Burundi, James’s parents simply returned to Tanzania. James explained that his parents then sent two of his siblings, a younger brother aged twenty-two and a sister aged twenty, to Dar es Salaam. He did not elaborate on where they lived or what they were doing in town.

I asked James for news about other refugees that I had known. John, he said, had shifted to another refugee tailoring shop in Dar es Salaam and married a woman in Katumba settlement. His wife remained in Katumba raising their two children. William had left Dar es Salaam for good in 1993, traveling to Arusha for a job in a refugee tailoring shop that, in the end, did not materialize. James said he’d heard that William was back home in Ulyankulu settlement. James also mentioned Marko, but only said “he’s different.” James’s wife, Pastor Albert’s daughter, explained that they were not

sure why Marko was so troubled, though she said her father knew why. Albert had once told her that “it was important to know about Marko’s past,” but then refused to elaborate.

While John, William, and Marko had retained their refugee identities, James had made another change in his life. Together with five other Burundi refugees in his Pentecostal church congregation, James was applying for Tanzanian citizenship. The example of tens of thousands of “old caseload” Rwandan refugees, who had returned to Rwanda following the 1994 genocide after entering Tanzania beginning in 1959, had made a strong impression on James. Julius Nyerere had awarded these “old caseload” Rwandan refugees Tanzanian citizenship (even if they were not seeking it), yet the refugees returned to Rwanda thirty-five years later, and did so peacefully. This proved to James that he could cross between Tanzania and Burundi as easily as the Rwandans had repatriated to Rwanda or, indeed, as his parents commuted across the Burundi-Tanzania border.

I did not find John in town when I visited his new tailoring shop. Marko was there, however, if only as a visitor, together with one of John’s new tailoring colleagues. He seemed to have aged considerably since I last saw him. He remained hesitant and soft-spoken, with a look of worry deeply etched across his face. Marko said he now worked for a small tailoring shop located just near the ocean. But he had not returned to the ocean shore since he accompanied John and myself there years before.

Marko had much to say about John, with whom he seemed to have patched up his relationship. John now regularly went to church, he said. He said neither he nor John had yet learned to make a suitcoat, but Marko was aware that James was now learning that skill; recognition of James’s relative success compared to John and himself. Marko also said that John would not be returning to Dar es Salaam for another six weeks. This was due to the fact, he explained, that “there are so many people coming to Dar es Salaam these days, including from the refugee camps, that all the trains are booked.” After Marko introduced us, the sole tailor working in the shop whispered that he was from Katumba.

Just before leaving Bongoland, I finally met with Pastor Albert. I had visited his home twice previously, but each time was told that he was working. On the first visit I also entered the same tailoring shop adjoining his house that I had regularly frequented when John, William and Luka worked there. There were four new young men working there (Albert later confirmed that they were all

refugees from the settlements), and the shop's atmosphere seemed as tense as ever. No radio played, the men worked in silence, and they responded to my greetings and questions as John and William used to respond to strangers: by being brief, sullen, and evasive. "Where is Pastor Albert?" I asked. "Out," came the reply. "Where did he go?" I inquired. "He's working." "When might he come back?" I asked again. "I don't know," one of the tailors answered.

I was shocked by Pastor Albert's appearance when I finally met him one evening at his house. He had aged considerably. He looked tired and haggard, his memorable smile replaced with an expression of deep sadness. He was in mourning: Mama had died a few months earlier. She had been standing in line at a petrol station, waiting to fill a container with kerosene. Somehow the kerosene had caught fire. An explosion followed, and Mama was among those who had burned to death. After he told me this, I suddenly realized that I was sitting on the left-hand side of the sofa and beneath a framed photo of Albert and Mama (with Albert grinning and Mama looking, as always, serious), the place in the living room where she had always sat. The room fell into an uncomfortable silence, after which I expressed my shock and condolence.

I was grateful when Pastor Albert changed the subject to mention his delight at having recently become a grandfather. He then shifted our discussion to politics. "Most refugees want their rights as refugees respected while in Tanzania," he said, "but keep their Burundian citizenship, too." He was convinced that, left on their own, Burundian Hutu and Tutsi could not settle the war peacefully. He suggested employing a multinational African military force "to force peace" in Burundi. If this happened, Pastor Albert explained, "then the Hutu and the Tutsi could learn to love each other and live together." Albert concluded his plan for lasting peace for his country of origin, but one he no longer was a citizen of, with a changed, brightened expression. Cultivating love and togetherness between ethnic enemies would require guidance from above. "Only God," he said, gently but confidently, "can heal the Hutu and the Tutsi."