ON EXILE AND POSTCOLONIAL NATIONHOOD IN RWANDA AND BURUNDI

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Exile, Edward Said (2002, 137) wrote, is "strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience . . . its essential sadness can never be surmounted." For Said, this sadness begins with the fracture between individuals and their homes. The impossibility of return in the present and the memory of this rift make exile "terrible to experience." In this essay, I ask what happens at the collective level if return becomes actualized. Does the experience of exile have any bearing on the exiled once they have returned? What if this return is not itself totally secure, but repeated across time and generations? What kind of political communities are created under conditions of anticipated flight? These questions constitute the core of my research inquiries. My preoccupations concern not so much geographies of origins (where people are exiled *from*) but postcolonial serialized geographies of exile. That is, sociopolitical landscapes, in the aftermath of European colonialism, predicated on a fundamental tension between the imagined stability of a supposedly native place/land/geography and the fear of losing said place/land/geography.

These questions emerge from ethnographic fieldwork I have been conducting in Rwanda for the past decade, on the memory and narrativization of the genocide against Tutsi in 1994. In July 2019, four years after my initial fieldwork,

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I returned to Rwanda. There were thousands of Burundian refugees scattered throughout the country in cities, towns, and refugee camps. My Rwandan interlocutors repeatedly asked me, "Why are you still talking to us? Talk to them." They reasoned that Rwanda's turmoil lay in the past, but Burundi's was now. Most Rwandans I talked and worked with, however, were also deeply familiar with exile, having experienced it themselves or through family members. Despite the differences between the political histories of Rwanda and Burundi, in both countries, during most of the seven decades since independence, different groups have faced violent expulsion from the political community.

This recurring political violence, often articulated in terms of ethnicity or race, always occurs in conjunction with massive displacement. I focus on these rhythms of displacement and the kinds of political landscapes they produce. Put simply, I approach the question of political violence and its aftermath through the experience and repetitiveness of exile, instead of political identity. Focusing on familiarity with exile reveals understudied dimensions of postcolonial national fashioning. For most of Rwanda and Burundi's postcolonial period, different political groups have organized while in exile for a forceful return, sometimes successfully. Part of what it means to understand oneself as a Burundian or Rwandan political subject today—regardless of ethnic affiliation—entails reckoning with this history and present of past or anticipated displacement. I show this by focusing on the movements of two interlocutors: Muzehe, a Rwandan who returned to Rwanda from exile in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the mid 1990s, and Claude, a Burundian who escaped to Rwanda from Burundi in 2015. Two decades after Muzehe's return to Rwanda, his town neighbored the biggest refugee camp for Burundians (like Claude) fleeing persecution in 2015. Claude and Muzehe's movements are not unique. Thousands of Burundians and Rwandans have for decades followed similar exilic routes. Their paths are analytically useful precisely because they emblematize the constitutive relationship between postcolonial nationhood and the repetition of exile.

The postcolonial here designates a temporality characteristically political and inaugurated by Euro-colonialism, in which subjects have become intimately attuned to collective flight. This political predicament and its corollary movements across time and space highlight an undertheorized question in research about Rwanda and Burundi: How do we understand nationalist imaginaries formed *in* or *around* exile? To comprehend political violence, in my view, we need not only look through the prisms of identity and law but also grapple with political spaces in which exclusion is anticipated and repeated and the political

boundaries of the nation redrawn and contested. Understanding postcolonial nationhood requires considering these movements as significant factors that constitute a political imaginary both haunted and presaged by exile.

This history of displacement indexes a larger "discursive field" between events and memories of them (Scott 1991, 278). This layered field is what is at stake politically and semiotically. It is a field in which collectives have been assigned ethnic and racial categories. These markings—which Franz Fanon called overdeterminations from the outside—point to a larger order that connects both Rwanda and Burundi to the racializing logics of Euro-colonial modernity. "Maman look, a negro; I'm scared," Fanon (2004, 91) famously wrote, recalling a young white French child pointing at him. With his body, "things take on a new *face*," he noted. "Let's face it," Hortense Spillers (1987, 65) would write a few decades later, "I am a marked woman. But not everybody knows my name." Fanon's marking in France, Spillers's marking in the United States, and the ongoing ethnicized racialization of African populations, beginning with colonization, escape the temporalities and geographies of their origins. At stake is the paradoxical gesture of simultaneously being stripped of a (proper) name and being named: native, black, Bantu, African, ethnic, Hutu, Tutsi. This structuring logic—rooted in a historical order that includes the Transatlantic Slave Trade, European colonialism, and postcolonial ethnicization—is why the violence of these names is both instantaneous and immanent to Rwanda and Burundi and part of a *longue durée* that exceeds these geographies.

When commentators take up the question of political violence in Rwanda and Burundi, and in Africa generally, the focus is usually not on these movements in and out of the polis but on political identity and the postcolonial successes or failures to create national cohesiveness. For both countries, the discussion concentrates on the legacy of colonial law and the racialization of the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa ethnic categories. A rich literature delineates the intricacies of these identities, and for good reasons. The violence, after all, appears to be targeted toward ethnicized groups and understood as such by those fleeing (Chrétien and Dupaquier 2007; Dumas 2016). A different strand in this literature has focused on the ways in which ethnicity is mobilized to hide pre-existing individual animosity or to advance the political agendas of threatened elites (Braeckman 1996; Mamdani 2001; Melvern 2004; Newbury 1988; Prunier 1995). Though compelling and certainly salient, one drawback of a focus on political identity is precisely that it misses the commonalities between the antagonistic groups, such as the temporal recurrence of displacement outlined here. My interlocutors always

narrated episodes of political violence in a serialized manner: anti-Tutsi violence in Rwanda in 1959 is connected to 1994; the targeting of Hutu in Burundi in 1972 is narrated alongside displacement in 2015. The historical moments tied to each date were brought together in serial form to explain the past and justify the present. This attunement to *serialization*, I argue, makes for a particular habitation in the social: exile and displacement become normalized and anticipated.

One could tell the story of my two interlocutors, Muzehe and Claude, using the familiar prism of ethnicity. Although neither Claude nor Muzehe ever explicitly shared this information. Claude, the Burundian, reads as Tutsi, and Muzehe as Rwandan Hutu. From this angle, the story becomes one in which they are both placed within a constellation of political events unfolding in the past six to seven decades that overdetermines their stories: Hutu and Tutsi are antagonistic racialized groups caught in a contested web of competing narratives about the genesis of their schisms and the responsibility for decades of political violence (Lemarchand 1996; Péan 2005; Reyntjens 2004). My contention here, however, is that emphasizing the links between political identities, violence, and power assumes the boundaries of the political community as stable. What needs repair is only a matter for governance and/or electoral politics. Yet the recurrent experience with exile shows us that the nation is in fact not a stable entity. At stake is not how to govern but who can. Seven decades after gaining political sovereignty, a crucial determining question remains what constitutes the political community.

Many in postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and political anthropology have taken up the question of sovereignty and self-determination, especially regarding the years leading up to and following decolonization in Africa and elsewhere. (Chatterjee 2019; Getachew 2019). Except we live in the wake of the failures and romanticism of that era and the aftermath of the devastating effects of structural adjustment programs, Bandung solidarity, and the end of Cold War politics (Scott 2014). Our political world is one in which horrible crimes are committed in the name of humanity and planetary care and the political sovereignty so central to the decolonization era is disavowed again and again (Meister 2011; Moyn 2010; Ticktin 2019). I am convinced of the centrality of this earlier question of who and what constitutes the political community, even decades after the repeated failures to cement, in whatever form, the "imagined community" dreamed up during decolonization (Anderson 1983, 1). In other words, I aim to take seriously what it means to return to sovereignty today and to bring up the semiotic and political contours of the political community not in terms of

a failure to achieve abstract citizenship and national cohesiveness or as a failure of governance, but rather that of nationhood as still an open fragmented sign and thus not a resolved question of yesteryears.

This essay is divided in two: part 1 concerns time and part 2 concerns space. The first section reflects on the anticipatory logic resulting from repeated flight by paying attention to narrations of political violence as serialized. Claude's escape to Rwanda from Burundi in 2015 is tied to an earlier moment in 1972, and Muzehe's escape and return to Rwanda is linked to an earlier episode in 1959. These two different historical events resulted in the first large waves of displacement in both countries. I discuss them together to highlight this attunement to serialization. Both moments produce communities in exile who subsequently contest the meaning and boundaries of the originary nations from exile. The second part returns to present-day Rwanda and the world that Muzehe and Claude now share to think about the political space that this history of ejection from the political community makes. This is a space where thousands of Burundians like Claude fled after the latest iteration of political persecution in Burundi in 2015. The Burundian refugees now share the same political landscape with people like Muzehe and countless other Rwandans who also fled decades ago beginning in 1959 and returned. The Rwandans once in exile have come back and are now re-narrativizing the past and making new moral claims on the country they were once exiled from. My central arguments are, first, that what is at stake within the geographies of Rwanda and Burundi and at their borders is a claim on the moral contours of the political community and its rightful inhabitants. Second, this claim on the national imaginary has been, since the early years of independence, often articulated in exile, making exile a crucial constitutive aspect of postcolonial life. The rhythms of recurrent displacements signal collective political imaginaries haunted by *originary fragmentation*.

PART 1: THE PAST AS PROLOGUE

Rwanda and Burundi both formed part of German East Africa beginning in 1885. With Germany's loss in World War I, both countries were partitioned and put under Belgian control by a League of Nations mandate beginning in 1916. Among the transformations instituted by colonial rule was the classification of both countries' populations into three racial identities: Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. These categories, however, predate European arrival. Scholars have explained them as transforming through time and shifting between kinship, economic, and political categories. With Euro-colonial rule, racialization became primarily

enforced through education, taxation, censuses, forced labor, and the organization of power and juridical categories (Kimonyo 2015; Lemarchand 1970; Mamdani 2001; Newbury 1988). During the five decades of Belgian colonial rule, the three groups were homogenized and hierarchized according to Euro-colonial governing racial logics and changing political preoccupations. They were also pitted against each other, especially the Hutu and Tutsi (Fujii 2009; Strauss 2006; Taylor 1999). For this reason, most experts on the region agree that postcolonial violence, regardless of the historical and political nuances in both countries, decidedly takes the form of racialized-ethnic violence, in large part because of this history of colonial racialization (Chrétien and Kabanda 2013; Muvunyi Sebagabo 2017; Nahimana 2007; Ndahiro, Nkusi, and Rwagatare 2015; Vansina 2005).

The arch of this colonial story and its political consequences is well known and largely follows the oft-cited classic divide-and-rule archetype. The overarching structure goes something like this: Rwanda and Burundi are either idyllic pre-colonial ancestral paradises or tyrannical enclaves of monarchical rule by a small group. Euro-colonial rule radically transforms existing social hierarchies by granting proximity to power to one numerically minor group. With this structure, the postcolonial period marks a revolutionary one in which the demos finally comes to power by radically altering relations of power, that is, the marginalized majority takes the reign. Or the postcolonial period remains fraught with contestations for power and control of the government along the same racializing logics implemented during colonial rule (Mamdani 2001). To maintain this telling of the postcolonial story, key actors or acting agencies are important. First comes the centrality of the state and the ideological interpellation of the purported masses by threatened elites. Thus, as the historian René Lemarchand (1996, xxvi) writes, political violence in Burundi is, for example, "a mode of discourse and political action," where "ethnicity" is transformed and "ultimately incorporated into the horrors and irrationality of genocidal violence." Though commentators sometimes acknowledge that more complex social interactions and group dynamic (Fujii 2009) and actors exist on the ground, these nuances seem to often get eclipsed by an insistence on the manipulation of the population by threatened political elites (Reyntjens 2011).

For Rwanda, state institutions and the governing political party rhetoric also occupy a central role in explaining political violence. The "perfect storm" that ultimately leads to the genocide against Tutsi in 1994 is a combination of party politics and the state's genocidal ideology (Kimonyo 2015; Nahimana 2007; Muvunyi Sebagabo 2017). In short, political violence results from postcolonial

states' failure to transcend the colonial legacy of racialization (Mamdani 2001) or from a set of competing factors that sometimes include more localized power dynamics (Fujii 2009; Lemarchand 1996). Though we see, in other words, a recognition that ethnicity in this context is neither transhistorical nor the only factor for ideological interpellation, in the final instance, some version of the past is the element evoked to mobilize Hutu versus Tutsi. So, in the case of the 2015 influx of Burundian refugees into Rwanda, ethnic antagonisms eventually also resurfaced, even if not overtly as part of the political crisis at hand. This version of the postcolonial story where the past serves as prologue is also how Claude, the Burundian, narrated the political crisis in Burundi that prompted him to flee to Rwanda. Violence in the past is a sort of ghost haunting the present, threatening repetition.

Burundi 2015/1972

The crisis began after the president of Burundi, the late Pierre Nkurunziza, decided to run for a third term. Segments of the population contested this choice, particularly in the capital city of Bujumbura, where Claude lived. Nkurunziza had come to power in 2005 by parliamentary nomination, with the Burundian parliament acting as an electoral college. He was the nominee of the Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie, the political party that gained a majority in the national elections of the same year. According to protesters like Claude, by running a third time in 2015, the president violated the two-term presidency clause in the civil war's 2010 peace agreement that had brought him to power. This agreement stipulated presidential terms be limited to two five-year terms. Nkurunziza justified his 2015 run by exploiting a loophole, stating that his first term had in fact not resulted from a national election, but from parliamentary nomination.[1] This argument, compounded by documented targeted attacks on journalists and radio channels, the manipulation of election results, and general discord about the management of the country, did not sit well with the civilian population, particularly in Bujumbura, and people took to the streets. For a little over a month, the streets of the capital filled with demonstrators against the president's campaign, using the slogans "Sindumuja" (I am not a slave) and "NonAu3emeMandat" (No to the 3rd term).[2] The government responded violently to the protests by jailing and kidnapping the perceived dissenters.

Claude, however, insisted that the situation in Burundi was in fact "revenge from the past . . . 1972, that is what they like to say often," he remarked in one

of our encounters. "Hutus were killed; all [Tutsi] governments always discriminate against Hutus" was the constant refrain hurled at people like him. I asked him who said this—*all* Hutus? "Not all," he answered, "only those in power; the others we don't know, they don't have a way of showing it yet." I first met Claude in Rwanda in July 2019 on my way to the eastern town of Nyamata. We were seated next to each other on the bus, and I asked Claude if he was going to Nyamata. He didn't hear my question and responded, "*sa*?" I repeated the question but also asked if he was Burundian. He was indeed going to Nyamata and yes, he was Burundian and asked how I knew. "Your use of *sa* gave it away," I told him jokingly. This word, a shortened version of *sabwe* and generally used by Kirundi speakers, can be used to signal presence or to signal incomprehension, as in the expression *pardon me?* Claude was following a lead on a potential job. Intrigued, I told him who I was and my reason for being in Rwanda (doing research on post-1994 Rwanda), and asked about a potential collaboration. He agreed, but with caveats. We opted for semi-structured interviews at Claude's request. I delineated possible ways of collaborating: formal interviews with predetermined questions, semi-structured interviews, or regular ethnography, given that I already lived close to his neighborhood of Gikondo in Kigali city. Claude, unlike Muzehe, refused the classic format of the ethnographer following him around. We would meet regularly over a period of three months after our initial encounter. Our meetings, one-on-one in quiet restaurants, lasted several hours. In these meetings, we agreed that Claude would update me on his job hunt and news of political meetings about the situation in Burundi. He would share what he deemed sensitive information only under these circumstances. His life felt precarious enough as it was. I respected this request and took what he told me, his own narration of his life in Rwanda and his nostalgia for home in Burundi, at face value, but with the recognition that his retelling was exactly that, a retelling, and thus in part mediated through his own interpretation of the events in his life.

"I didn't say goodbye to anyone or pack anything," Claude explained. In March 2016, he took a bus from Bujumbura for the southern border with Rwanda and never looked back. Claude would later reveal that he had in fact also fled to Rwanda in 1998 and again in 2003. His first stop in 2015 was Kigali, where he stayed with a Rwandan childhood friend. The friend in question was born in Burundi to Rwandan parents. This friend had returned to Rwanda in the mid 1990s. Claude's network in Kigali was constituted, in other words, by individuals also familiar with having to flee. Rwandan families who had fled to

Burundi at some point starting with the first wave of political violence in Rwanda in 1959. "Why did you go to Rwanda?" I asked him. There was a network of "old friends and political allies in Rwanda," he said, and in Kigali in particular, that he could plug into precisely because of this postcolonial history of displacement. Claude's other network comprised Burundian refugees like him, who arrived in Rwanda beginning in 2015.

Haunted Presents

Ikiza (a grand calamity) is the 1972 event in Burundi that Claude referenced as the historical antecedent to his escape. Historians are divided on what exactly transpired in 1972. To some, this event constituted a "selective genocide" that targeted an educated Hutu class and was motivated by decades of repression perpetrated by a predominantly Tutsi elite. Others, perhaps mindful of the legalities of a morally and politically loaded term, speak of "proximity to genocide" or simply retain the Kirundi word, *ikiza* (Chrétien and Dupaquier 2007). What is certain is that on April 29, 1972, an insurgency against the regime of then president Michel Micombero, who had been in power since independence in 1962, started in Nyanza-Lac and Rumonge near Bujumbura and rapidly escalated to other parts of the country. "Roving bands of Hutu attacked civilians," Lemarchand writes, and "countless atrocities were reported by eyewitnesses" (Lemarchand 1996, 4). The decisive factor behind the insurgency was President Micombero's "rigid discriminatory policies" against Hutus (Lemarchand 1996, 4). The government met these attacks with a powerful suppression of the civilian population. Within three months, between 100,000 and 200,000 Burundian Hutus had been murdered. Thousands fled the country for refugee camps and cities in neighboring countries—"no sector of society was left untouched" (Lemarchand 1996, 6). President Nkurunziza, the key protagonist of the 2015 crisis, also lost his father to armed repression in 1972. He later, in the early 1990s, fled during yet another civil war, and returned in the 2000s.[3]

The 1972 massacres and their consequences have haunted Burundian politics ever since. Like Claude in 2015, decades before, thousands of families found themselves in the same situation. Liisa Malkki's *Purity and Exile* tells the tale of some of these families in the refugee camp of Mishamo and the town of Kigoma in neighboring Tanzania in the 1990s. In Malkki's account, Burundian refugees apprehend the reality of exile differently depending on whether they live in the camp or town. In the camp, the history of Hutu exclusion in Burundi was extended beyond politics to create what Malkki (1995a) calls a "mythico-history"

and a cosmological order in which Tutsi signify moral corruption and Hutu-ness is synonymous with "purity." The camp served as a "place of purification," transforming its residents from servants of Tutsi in Burundi to refugees in a foreign land, to final ascension into a collective free Hutu people. For those in town, the past, present, or future were not "firmly localized in Burundi or anywhere." This "challenging cosmopolitanism" suited the interests of the refuges in Kigoma town. They juggled multiple identities, preferring to be Burundians rather than simply Hutu (Malkki 1995a, 161). For this reason, Malkki insists, the town refugees did not find themselves in a "state of exile" per se, because their narratives did not insist on collective return to a "homeland, an origin or a proper place." The "mythico-history" in the camp was "replaced by a partial, potential immigrant mythology" (Malkki 1995a, 193). Though both groups share "the fact of exile," the cosmopolitan town refugees denied this history and past. The rooting in Burundi signaled a kind of "parochialism" (Malkki 1995a, 233).

While Malkki emphasizes the differences between those in the camp and those in the town, I would like to underscore their shared expulsion from nationalist citizenry. Though resulting in different "mythologies," both groups share a fundamental and significant factor in their life as political subjects: because of what they are perceived to be (Hutu), they have been targeted and expelled from their political community and in exile must cope repeatedly with what this means as political subjects. Political violence erupted again in Burundi in 1988, 1993, 2001, and finally in 2015, when Claude fled. Moreover, as Malkki's (1995a, 277) postscript to the book illustrates, in 1987, the Tanzanian government re-signified the cosmopolitan town refugees as "illegal immigrants," targeting them for "repatriation" to Burundi. A few years later, in 1992, the Tanzanian government gave the Burundian exiled "three months" to choose between two options: repatriate to Burundi or naturalize in Tanzania. That is, it demanded them to anchor into one place, naturalizing here or there, but in one place. This choice resulted from political negotiations between the governments of Burundi and Tanzania (Malkki 1995a, 277).

This political landscape that insists on the fact of exclusion and its corollary nationalist citizenry makes it difficult if not impossible to maintain an "immigrant mythology." The nation (its meaning and content) remains the hovering overarching narrative with each episode of violence and exclusion. The camp site and the town share a history of repeated marking of belonging and exclusion from it. Both groups of exiled may appear to live "the consequences differently" (Malkki 1995a, 234), but they can just as simultaneously be interpellated back

into the "national order of things" despite their individual desires. The cosmopolitan path is contingent on larger political structures and the state's attempts at capturing and claiming national stability by reinscribing a rootedness into one place. Both town and camp eventually became locations from which both groups were marked as political subjects "out of place," with an "ultimatum" to repatriate or naturalize (Malkki 1995a, 277). Once more, the people in exile were reminded of the nationalist logic precisely because the state logic in Burundi and Tanzania insisted on rooting them in one place, whatever immigrant mythology they desired.

Originary Fragmentation

These movements to and from the postcolonial nation merely ten years after political independence from colonial Belgium make exile a constitutive aspect of postcolonial political life. Exile for the refugees in the camp marks one step toward their ascension into a collective Hutu people and the regaining of their "homeland" as free political subjects. For the people in Kigoma town, the experience of exile makes them itinerant Burundian migrants, rather than simply Hutu subjects, perhaps for a fleeting moment until they become re-signified again as Burundians—in exile, out of place.

Nationhood here is shaped through and by the experience or memory of repeated flight. The idea of a homeland is somewhat paradoxical. There is at once an attachment to autochthony and a cosmology that remains invested in the existence of a purportedly authentic geography, but this supposed homeland is also constituted since the history of its inception by fragmentation. The postcolonial homeland is here scarred by a repeating caesura, constantly threatening to unmake it, and thus requiring repeated re-imaginings of collective boundaries. These are the terms under which nationhood and belonging are navigated. Malkki's interlocutors in Mishamo camp and Kigoma town, as well as my interlocutor Claude four decades later—despite their different geographical and temporal locations—share this postcolonial historical reality of *originary fragmentation*. The nation itself is not a stable political entity but fragmented since/with colonization. That is, there exists an idea of what it is and perhaps was in the past as formulated through political struggles and mythico-history, but each political contestation puts this idea itself at stake. This is what the formulation of *originary fragmentation* entails. It is not only membership in the political community that is fought over but also the content of what constitutes the nation itself: politically, semiotically, and morally.

The way out of *originary fragmentation* is political, Mahmood Mamdani (2022) has suggested for decades now, though most emphatically in his latest publication, *Neither Settler nor Native*. Radical postcolonial reform, he writes, requires "decoupling the nation from the state" (Mamdani 2022, 329). For him, to decolonize the political requires "stripping away the nation, or the tribe as nation," and replacing it with "the mere state," that is, a "legal sovereign, with equal treatment of citizens" (Mamdani 2022, 328, 330). This is so because "power in nation-states lies always with those who identify with the nation, not with coalitions that assemble through a political process" (Mamdani 2022, 329). Postcolonial states in Africa inherited a legal system both racialized and ethnicized. Decolonial reform, Mamdani writes, succeeded in "deracializing" the civic sphere by applying civil law, once the domain of the colonizers, to decolonized Africans, but it failed to de-ethnicize. This fact constitutes the core of the "crisis of postcolonial citizenship" (Mamdani 2001, 14).

A consequence of this crisis is precisely what Malkki crystallizes in describing the mythico-history of the Mishamo camp as cosmological ordering. Exile becomes essential in this repeated exercise of reordering the cosmological and political boundaries of the nation. From Tanzania, these exiles will, for decades, renegotiate their relationships to nationhood and citizenship vis-à-vis both Burundi and Tanzania. Some will return to Burundi peacefully as individuals and sometimes flee again. Others will attempt to return forcefully with rebel groups formed in exile. And others yet will return generations later in the 2000s because of a peace negotiation treaty organized with the help of the Tanzanian government (Burihabwa and Curtis 2019). This reordering of the nation does not just happen in individual minds and narrations of the displaced. It finds support not just in people who return but also in political parties and movements formed in exile. The Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People in Burundi (PALIPEHUTU) emerged in 1980 in the same Mishamo camp Malkki discusses. The Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), the party that brought to power the first Hutu president in Burundi after democratic elections in 1993, was created in Butare, a southern Rwandan town at the border with Burundi in 1980. Key leaders of the main political party in Burundi today, the CNDD-FDD, have also organized for forceful return while in exile (Burihabwa and Curtis 2019).

Thirty years after Mishamo and Kigoma in Tanzania, through yet another wave of displacement, Claude arrived in Rwanda. "I am lucky; this gray beard saved me," he noted. "It makes me look older." The primary targets of 2015 were young adult males, the people in the streets of Bujumbura who most ardently

protested Nkurunziza's third presidential run. But, Claude remarked, "Nkurunziza is trying hard to turn this into an ethnic problem. A large majority of the people disappearing are young Tutsi men between twenty and forty years old." I asked why. "Revenge from the past," he responded, reiterating the narrative of serialization vis-à-vis political violence. This seriality, as we shall see, also reverberates in narrations of violence in Rwanda.

Rwanda 1994/1959

The 1994 Rwandan genocide against Tutsi is also narrated as having antecedents in earlier episodes of violence against Tutsi, beginning in 1959. As with the events of 1972 in Burundi, those in 1959 Rwanda also remain contested (Onana 2002; Péan 2005). By the late 1950s, the country offered a tense political scene, with different political parties demanding independence from Belgium. Political independence finally became a reality in July 1962. A few years earlier, in November 1959, a wave of anti-Tutsi violence had engulfed the country, targeting primarily the Tutsi local administrative chiefs favored by the Belgians. Thousands of Tutsi fled the country and decades later some of their descendants began preparing for a forceful return under the umbrella of a guerilla army: the Rwandan Patriotic Front, or RPF. Thus, beginning with the first agitations for political sovereignty, the boundaries of the new nation were contested by people inside and outside of it. Fast-forward to 1994: the RPF—the guerilla army formed in exile by descendants of the exiled '59ers—ended the genocide against the Tutsi after a four year civil war.

In power since 1994, the RPF-led government and its state institutions have been centrally preoccupied with the narration of the genocide and the country's history. In 2011, the National Commission for Unity and Reconciliation (NURC) brought together researchers and historians from the national university to rewrite the history of Rwanda since its inception. The resulting volume describes the genocide against Tutsi in 1994 as the "result of a culture of institutionalized crime based on ethnic racism beginning in 1959."[4] In this rewriting, the past also serves as prologue, and the violence of 1959 proves key as the moment of expulsion and the beginning of the project of return. Many state celebrations express this conception of the past. On July 1, 2012, as Rwanda celebrated fifty years of independence from Belgium, thousands lined up before sunrise to enter Amahoro Stadium in Kigali for festivities. The official end of the genocide, when RPF troops took over Kigali in 1994, took place on July 4, and on this day in 2012, the two historical moments were joined. People had gathered to celebrate *Imyaka*

50 Y'Ubwigenge (fifty years of independence) and *Imyaka 18 yo Kwibohora* (eighteen years of collective self-liberation). *Kwibohora* loosely translates as "untying oneself," in the sense of freeing oneself politically; July 4 is hence liberation day. *Ubwigenge* means "independence." *Ubwigenge* is a noun, and it is passive vis-à-vis *Kwigenga* (to be independent), the active formulation. At the semiotic level, the choice of these two words indicates the different levels of significance accorded to both events. *Kwibohora*, or self-liberation, is agentive. The word *kwibohora* denotes a purposeful action by the self and the collective to escape bondage. July 4, 1994, is marked as the true decolonial moment that creates a new moral order—unlike 1962.

Another formulation was *Imyaka 18 Twibohoye* (eighteen years since liberating ourselves). Independence from Belgium is inserted into a past prior to real liberation. All events before July 1994, still rife with "ethnic divisions," do not make for "real independence," but are rather prologue to genocide.[5] Today, outside the country, other political groups are yet again contesting the meaning of these resignifications and redrawing the political and moral contours of what Rwanda 1959 and 1994 mean.

PART 2: ON THE RUN

This question of haunting and movements in and out of nations came sharply into view in the summer of 2019 while I was doing fieldwork in Kirehe in Rwanda, near Tanzania. I was there to spend time with Muzehe, a seventy-four-year-old accused of participation in the genocide in 1994 and imprisoned for eight years beginning in 1996. I had last seen him in 2014 in a rehabilitation camp, or *Travaux d'Intérêts Général* (TIG), for perpetrators sentenced through Gacaca courts. These courts were active from 2005 to 2012, trying close to 2 million genocide cases (Brehm, Uggen, and Gasanabo 2014). The courts offered sentence reductions in exchange for a guilty plea confession and a public apology (Clark 2010). Sentencing varied between prison, time already served, community service, and a combination of the three. Perpetrators were classified into three categories. Category 1 comprised leaders and planners—that is, individuals with political and administrative power. The second category included those who killed in groups or "aided" in committing offenses. Category 3 concerned offenses against property (Brehm, Uggen, and Gasanabo 2014). Muzehe fell into categories 2 and 3; the Gacaca courts sentenced him to eight years of community service.

Our first interview took place in August 2014. Though first hesitant, Muzehe gradually warmed up and agreed to a recorded interview. This approval, I suspect, came partly because of my continued presence in the camp over an intermittent period in the summer of 2014, but most probably because I was legally allowed to be in the camp. Though I have no sure way of knowing, I doubt he would have spoken to me about his case otherwise, especially while in the camp. Through a long, complicated bureaucratic process that took many months and multiple presentations to various state institutions I had managed to secure first a research permit for fieldwork in the country and then a permit to visit the TIG camps from the Rwandan Correction Services (RCS), the institution in charge of them. Muzehe's camp held 110 *tigistes* (in reference to TIG) serving their sentences and 5 RCS staff to manage the camp. Four of the staff were men, the other a woman. Staff and *tigistes* living quarters were separate. The *tigistes* lived in a dormitory-style, makeshift tent. The staff had their own living quarters: an individual house with two small rooms (a bedroom fitting a little more than a single bed and a smaller room for a shower). When in the camp, I roomed with the woman staff.

Muzehe stood out to me because he was older than most of the other *tigistes*. Though he was clearly in excellent shape, with no visible signs of mobility issues, for example, the work hours in the camp were grueling. Work fell into two categories: 1) activities necessary for the functioning of the camp, such as cooking, cleaning, and any form of repair work; and 2) the specific work required for this camp, in this case brickmaking for the RCS. Inmates worked Monday to Friday from 6:00 AM to 2:00 PM, and Saturdays from 6:00 AM to 11:00 AM. When we met in the camp in 2014, Muzehe had spent six and a half years of his sentence in various camps around the country. He finally came home in October 2014 and, given the mark of his active role in the 1994 genocide, the septuagenarian faced extremely thin job prospects in his largely rural agricultural community. After a long battle between his family and the local authorities to reclaim his small house (consisting of a living room, a bedroom, and an outdoor kitchen), which had served as a military base for the RPF soldiers in 1994, he breathed a small sigh of relief at the thought of being rent-free. His family won the battle because of a plasticized deed title Muzehe carried in his pocket every time he left the house. The other plastic-covered document always on him was his official release form. Without it, Muzehe ran the risk of being sent back to camp at the will of someone in power. Since being released at the end of September 2014, after serving his prison and TIG sentences, he had spent

two weeks in jail when mistakenly accused of not finishing his time in the camp by one of the people who had accused him during his Gacaca trial in 2007.

Like Claude, Muzehe locates a sentiment of revenge among those in power and capable of acting on it. Though he was now free and supposedly rehabilitated because of his time in the TIG camp, Muzehe's return to his hometown was not totally secure. He anticipated having to prove his innocence at any time. He lived with his wife, who by the time of my next visit the following year had passed away from illness. He had four sons and two daughters. One son had escaped "somewhere in Congo" in 1994. Muzehe and his wife also owned a plot of land two kilometers from the family home, where another small house, destroyed in 1994, used to stand. Given his age and reduced mobility, Muzehe enlisted a younger neighbor to tend to the beans he planted on the plot, and they divided the crops. Burundian refugees also did these kinds of odd jobs for the Kirehe residents, he told me, but they preferred to be remunerated in cash, which he did not have.

Kirehe is located near Mahama, the biggest Burundian refugee camp in Rwanda. As of November 2019, there were 72,927 Burundian refugees in the country, the majority of them having arrived after April 2015. Rwanda had taken in the second-highest number of Burundian refugees in the region, behind Tanzania. Most of the refugees—more than 60,000, or about 85 percent—live in Mahama camp, and around 11,000 have been resettled in the cities of Kigali and Huye.[6] Mahama camp, opened in April 2015, began with temporary structures such as tents and communal hangars. By 2016, however, Mahama had already developed into what the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees likened to a "small city."[7] It had established two health centers, a school, a bus line, and small business centers. Semi-permanent structures made of mudbrick and aluminum sheeting were constructed in 2016, funded by the UNHCR and other donors. By 2019, refugee children had been integrated into the Rwandan school system and attended the primary and secondary schools close to the camp.[8]

Securing a research permit for the camp site itself required incredible bureaucratic gymnastics and proved impossible. Still, the sheer size of the camp and its population were clearly visible throughout the district as I walked in the area. Muzehe's neighbor was a Burundian refugee, he told me. "What do they do to survive?" I asked him. Odd jobs, such as cultivating for Muzehe, for example. If he had the money, he would pay them in cash or crops to work on his plot. His neighbor paid rent weekly, 4,000 Rwandan francs per month. The refugees also sometimes bought green bananas to sell in the camp.

In Muzehe's current social world and family configuration are juxtaposed two exiled groups: his son in the Democratic Republic of Congo, fearing persecution for crimes committed during the 1994 genocide, and the Burundian refugees next door, fleeing because of political antagonisms linked to political violence against Burundian Hutu in 1972. Muzehe's world, his family story, and the current population makeup of Kirehe district provide an excellent illustration of the kinds of movements that I am suggesting constitute postcolonial political life. Muzehe's son is in neighboring DRC, perhaps in a refugee camp or perhaps among the groups plotting to overthrow those in power in Rwanda. All Muzehe could say was that his son was probably scared of coming back and being jailed for committing genocide. Muzehe himself also fled to Congo following the end of the genocide in 1994. He constantly anticipates having to justify his membership in the new Rwanda, hence the constant carrying of his release form. The situation in Kirehe offers another good illustration of exile as a constitutive aspect of postcolonial life. People are repeatedly in and out of national ordering: ejected, returning, ejected again.

In and Out of National Ordering

Claude had chosen to live far from Muzehe's town and outside the Mahama camp. Kigali offered a wider array of choices given his childhood friends in the city. He missed being in Burundi, however, and often insisted that there was no place like home. He wanted above all to go back to Bujumbura. But he was also clear that "there is no other country we could have fled into," both claiming a collective "we" and marking an affinity to Rwanda, his place in exile. Pressed to define this "we," Claude seemed surprised. I should have understood. He gave me a long-winded explanation on the ethnic composition of groups in the region, their kinship relations, and origins. He insisted that what propelled him and the other Burundians to flee was not an ethnic but "a political problem," an unwanted president taking revenge on his opponents by manipulating pre-existing ethnic antagonisms. The choice of Rwanda, however, was related to what he just told me about kinship relations. Unsurprisingly, Claude's imagined kinship relations mapped onto the racialized colonial ethnic categories. Without saying it explicitly, he indicated that people like him—read Tutsi—felt welcome in Rwanda because "their kin" were now in power. The ascension to power of the predominantly Tutsi RPF, Mahmood Mamdani (2001, 261) writes, has brought forth a "diasporic state" whose main preoccupation is an "overwhelming sense of moral responsibility for the very survival of all remaining Tutsi, globally." This logic is in part what Claude's explanation reveals.

Claude's *we* also illustrates the co-existence of multiple forms of political identification: 1) a *we* that anchors him in a purported homeland and a specific geography (Burundi, like the camp refugees in Tanzania decades prior); 2) a *we* that claims a politic exceeding this same geography, tying him to a political network in Rwanda today (his childhood friends once exiled in Burundi who have returned to Rwanda; 3) and finally a we deeply familiar with exile (like Muzehe and his family, Malkki's interlocutors, and countless others). In other words, there is in Claude's reference to a *we* a collective of political allies in geographies beyond Burundi. The first level of signification for this referent is imagined ancestral kinship certainly. The mythico-history in Malkki's work and Claude's own ethno-historical account of the region indicate this much. This collective is conceived as racial because it maps onto the racialized categories of Hutu and Tutsi. A second layer of this *we* is the diasporic orientation of the state both in Rwanda and in Burundi, as evidenced by the history of political organizing in exile in both countries. This layer secures nation-state interests by insisting on return and state power. But it also simultaneously, in its diasporic inclination, holds onto an ethno-imaginary beyond the nation-state, one rooted in a mix of an attachment to a homeland and this history of recurrent exile as cardinal features of postcolonial history. In all layers—the *we* as kinship and the we as national and diasporic—the experience of exile and exclusion from the postcolonial nation prove central. Home here is connected to movement and emplacement, to destination and return, to ethnos and citizenship. This recurrence of movement complicates the fetishism of rootedness as a cardinal feature of ethnic being.

These attachments in and beyond the nation signal a type of politic insistent on the normative call of nation-ness as linked to a geographically bound, political, and collective self. Yet they also gesture to something exceeding it. The national referent is filled by different ethno-racial passions, internal and diasporic ones that exceed the boundaries of nations. The recurrence of collective flight creates these other kinds of attachment moving alongside nationalist projects. Put differently, Claude is Burundian, and that means either fleeing or growing up in the shadow of prior generations who have done so. But Claude also feels part of a collective tied to Rwanda today. This is so certainly because of imagined ethnic bonds—inheritance of colonial law—but also because those in power now in Rwanda understand exile, having fled themselves and returned forcefully to power. Similarly, the late president Nkurunziza in Burundi was imagined as governing based on residual resentment from the 1972 mass exodus of Burundian Hutus by targeting Tutsi families in 2015 and turning political opposition to his presidency into a Hutu/Tutsi problem.

The academic literature about 1972 or 1994 usually focuses on internal dynamics within one country. That is, the historical and political circumstances within contemporary national boundaries that led to political violence and exile (Chrétien and Dupaquier 2007; Lemarchand 2004). Regional analyses, despite the move beyond national boundaries, also focus on nationalist imaginaries by critiquing what they read as expansionist ethno-nationalism. For Rwanda, for example, it becomes a matter of expanding the power of the current RPF government into the region, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (Prunier 2011). This focus on national boundaries as epistemological units is in some ways trapped in the same logic that critics of methodological nationalism have noted (Getachew 2019; Wilder 2015). For them, to imagine the ultimate outcome of decolonization in 1960s Africa only as national independence and state sovereignty means to miss an important aspect of liberation movements: their "world-making" practices, their aspirations to transform the world after empire into a just world from Africa to the Caribbean (Getachew 2019). To be sure, what is stake in Rwanda and Burundi today is in no way close to ambitions of creating a world of political equals and/or other forms of political communities that exceed the nation-state form. In fact, quite the opposite: there are strong political attachments to nationalist imaginaries. Claude misses his "home," and that is and might always be Burundi, not his place of exile, Rwanda.

Nonetheless, methodological nationalism misses these simultaneous diasporic and nationalists' aspirations co-existing side by side that result from specific historical conditions and embodied experiences: repeated exile for collectives based on claims to a "national" homeland. This, I have tried to argue, in fact illustrates that the nation is fragmented—and has been since colonization. This originary fragmentation is what the postcolonial governments have repeatedly tried to remediate with rigid enclosures and claims of autochthony. This is another enduring legacy of the worlds engendered by colonialism. The postcolonial evokes autochthony while also being fragmented and exilic. Access to rights for some and exclusion for others are linked to discourses about rightful inhabitants. At the same time, repeated displacements have created forms of political stakes that exceed these same rigid autochthonous boundaries. Malkki's work shows us one side of this: in exile in Tanzania, the camp refugees narrate their return into Burundi as their rightful return to a homeland. As Burundian Hutu, they belong rightfully to Burundi. The nation emanates from them as autochthonous subjects. Claude's exile results from resentment about the 1972 violence, which results in the displacement of Malkki's interlocutors. Burundi for him is also

home, however, a home whose origins he narrates as emanating from people like him first—read Tutsi. Yet—and this is the crucial point—his relocation to Rwanda is made possible by Rwandan friends who, because they were once exiled in Burundi, understand his plight and help.

CONCLUSION: On the Limits of Postcolonial Geographies as Epistemological Units

This diagnosis of collective attachments may read as passé, or perhaps more importantly as a dangerous acquiescence to the discourse of Africa as always already producing derivative and defective forms of universalizable categories, such as *nation*. Instead of democracy, this type of ethno-attachment resembles ethno-democracy or, more precisely, ethno-power (Reyntjens 2013). There are interesting rebuttals to this kind of argument, namely, that the assumption of an abstract demos and its universalization should be historicized and problematized in the first place (Kasimis 2013). My point in highlighting this dance between nationalist projects tethered to geographies and diasporic collective imaginaries is to underscore a kind of postcolonial politic forged via different generations of exiles and beyond official nations. Exile, given its recurrence, may be read as an experience of emanation that creates political subjects and authorizes specific discourses about pasts and futures. To inhabit the postcolonial moment requires constantly having to secure membership in the nation and to re-imagine its political boundaries both within and outside officially designated borders. Exile in this context differs from exile as the experience of a longing, solitary, and alienated individual. It is a political category, a collective making a claim on a contested political community, in this instance, the nation. To posit exile in this way is not to naturalize "the national order of things" as an "ideal habitat . . . the place where one fits in, lives in peace, and has an unproblematic culture and identity" (Malkki 1995b, 509). The "habitat" is far from ideal, given the postcolonial history of displacement outlined here. The nation itself is fragmented and its meaning and content constantly contested with each wave of exiled.

What the movements of Claude, Muzehe, and the thousands of others caught in the web of these postcolonial waves of displacement show is one terrible consequence of the nation as a contested "locus of political identification" inherited from colonial management and reproduced in the post-independence era in both countries (Mamdani 2022, 328). The result of this struggle over membership, I argue, constitutes a postcolonial temporal and spatial imaginary haunted by exile (anticipated exclusion from the political community and contestations about the purported nation from outside its boundaries), thus making exile a constitutive aspect of postcolonial nationhood.

Exile constitutes a crucial component of a form of political activism and political subjectivity, both tethered to the nation-state and exceeding it. The recurrence of exile and its political characteristics activate a form of political potentiality—we can return, we have political allies in exile, we can win, we can regain state power. This political consciousness certainly differs from Fanon's call for a "substitution of one 'species' of mankind by another" transcending the amputating and negating moral universe of racializing colonial tropes, but it does tell us something about life in the post-colony (Fanon 2004, 1). Inhabiting these social and political landscapes in the wake of European colonial domination, much like living under the tropes of a racial polity, entails anticipating dreadful flight. These social scenes—Muzehe's town, the proximity to the semi-permanent mobile camp, Claude's movements—are not unique to this political moment but in fact emblematic of postcolonial life and time. The postcolonial nation—though assumed to have a grounded, definite quality—in fact remains a fragmented, open sign with recurring moments of rigid self-enclosure methodically sought after by postcolonial power as eventful opportunities to purchase a groundedness and remedy the constitutive lack of fragmentation. Muzehe and Claude's displacements must be understood within this historical order—an order in which certain bodies have lost their names, so to speak, and have come to be imagined as things, as ethnic entities, habituated to being on the run.

ABSTRACT

This essay makes an argument about the relationship between political life and the familiarity and repetitiveness of exile in postcolonial Rwanda and Burundi. I argue, first, that the memory, recurrence, and anticipation of displacement constitute central aspects of postcolonial nationhood and life in both countries. With each cycle of forced expulsion, the boundaries of the nation are unmade and remade. Second, this rhythm of repeated collective exile makes for specific forms of political subjectivity and activism that though tethered to the geography of the nation also always exceed it, making exile a constitutive aspect of postcolonial nationhood. [exile; postcolonial nationhood; political sovereignty; Rwanda; Burundi]

NOTES

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1. President Nkurunziza tragically passed away in June 2020. The official cause of death was cardiac arrest.
2. All translations from Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, and French are mine.
3. "Burundi's Born Again Ex-rebel Leader" Charles Bigirimana, BBC World News, 2004. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4162504.stm
4. Commission Nationale pour l'Unité et la Réconciliation (NURC), *Histoire du Rwanda: Des Origines à la fin du XXe siècle* (Université Nationale du Rwanda, 2011), 602. Kigali. Available at https://www.minubumwe.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=62735&token=9020ebe75a9b73d1c4ae4af7eada4acd84cdd00a
5. The press release from the Ministry of Local Affairs (MINILOC), dated June 3, 2012, stipulates that "Independence was achieved through blood and fire, to call that real independence would be a lie." The press release appeared in *Kigali Today*, available at https://www.kigalitoday.com/amakuru/amakuru-mu-rwanda/Kwibohora-bizizihiz-wa-ku-munsi-wibukwaho-Ubwigenge-bw-u-Rwanda
6. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Regional Update: Burundi Situation*. UNHCR, 2019. Available at https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/73422
7. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *Regional Update: Burundi Situation*. UNHCR, 2019. Available at https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/73422
8. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Mahama: Now a Safe Haven for over 50,000 Burundian Refugees*. UNHCR Rwanda, 2016. Available at https://www.unhcr.org/rw/559-559.html

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