Homeward Bound: Return Migration and Conflict Dynamics in Burundi
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**DRAFT**

Conflict between returning and non-migrant populations in countries-of-origin is a nearly ubiquitous issue for post-conflict societies from Bosnia, to Iraq, and South Sudan. Yet, while scholars have demonstrated how out-migration can exacerbate civil war, little is understood about what happens when these populations return home. This article advances a novel theory of return migration and conflict: I argue that return migration creates new social divisions based on whether and where individuals were displaced during armed conflict. These cleavages become new sources of conflict in countries-of-origin when local institutions - like land codes, citizenship regimes, or language laws - provide differential outcomes to individuals based on their geographic location during the hostilities. Using ethnographic evidence gathered in Burundi and Tanzania from 2014-2016, I show how return migration after Burundi’s civil war created violent rivalries between returning and non-migrant populations. Consequently, when Burundi faced a national-level political crisis in 2015, prior experiences of return shaped both the character and timing of out-migration from Burundi. By providing an explanation for how an often-ignored but ubiquitous consequence of civil war – the return of displaced populations – affects post-conflict environments the project advances both the study and the practice of post-conflict peacebuilding.

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1. Introduction

The connections between population flight and conflict are readily apparent, and well studied, in civil war dynamics over the past twenty years: Refugee camps in the Democratic Republic of Congo served as staging grounds for Rwandan and Congolese rebels to regroup and rearm;¹ Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic used the threat of refugee outflows to coerce more favorable outcomes against NATO and the Kosovo Liberation Army;² and ethno-nationalist diaspora from Sri Lanka to Israel have used multiple sources of leverage to bolster homeland insurgencies.³ Lessons from these episodes are even integrated into operational protocols for refugee crisis response.⁴ Yet there has been little systematic study of the potential security issues posed when these same populations return home. Instead, the tendency to see repatriation to ‘homelands’ as both a solution and endpoint to protracted migration crises precludes scholars and policymakers from examining if there is a similar spectrum of conflict dynamics generated by return-migration.⁵

In fact, conflict between returning and non-migrant populations after civil war is a nearly ubiquitous issue for post-conflict societies. In Iraq after years of displacement, the government urged refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to come home. Yet returning families often

faced violent backlash from those who stayed behind, causing many returnees to flee again. In South Sudan, as tens of thousands of refugees and IDPs returned in anticipation of independence in 2011, tension emerged between individuals who had lived as IDPs in Khartoum, those who had been refugees in East Africa, and those who had stayed in southern Sudan during the war. Hostility between these groups manifested in competition for employment, struggles for land, and youth gang violence in urban centers. Why does return-migration—viewed as a marker of increased peace and stability—so often lead to conflict?

This question’s importance is underscored by the fact that violent conflict displaces millions of people across the world every year. UNHCR estimates the number of refugees globally has nearly doubled from 8.66 million in 2005 to 16.21 million in 2015. The vast majority these refugees reside in neighboring developing countries. While some may garner resettlement to countries in the global North, many are faced with the choice of returning to their countries of origin or remaining stuck in the limbo of seeking asylum for decades. The UN estimates that were 2.51 million returnees out of

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16 million refugees worldwide in 2015. This annual stock of returnees globally fluctuates with world events: as conflicts subside, peace treaties are signed, or wars worsen, documented return increases or decreases accordingly.

Still the potential security issues posed by reverse population flows tend to be overlooked in a literature instead focused on out-migration and the spread of civil war or the connection between migration and transnational violence. The extant scholarship on migration and civil war has demonstrated that outward population flight can externalize conflict to the region, that migration to refugee camps may prolong wars by providing safe haven for rebels, that elite political actors can manipulate migration patterns to achieve discrete political goals, and that diaspora congregating abroad may exacerbate civil wars by lobbying for, organizing, and financing conflicts at home. Other recent research zeroes in on links between globalization, population movement, and radicalization of migrants in western countries. The motivation to examine outward migration and issues of regionalization or transnational conflict is perhaps driven by policy concerns about the

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10 UNHCR, “The World In Numbers.” These data include only returnees who had previously been granted official refugee status. Therefore, it likely underestimates the actual proportion of displaced populations returning to their countries of origin.

11 Salehyan and Gleditsch, “Refugees and the Spread of Civil War.”

12 Lischer, Dangerous Sanctuaries.

13 Greenhill, Weapons of Mass Migration.


spread of violence to Western countries through migration.\textsuperscript{16} While important in its own right, the focus on externalization of violence misses two critical issues. First, population movement between countries in the global south is an equally important trend as south-north migration.\textsuperscript{17} This is especially true when it comes to conflict-induced migration: As of 2014 86\% of the world’s refugees lived in neighboring and/or developing countries, not high-income countries in the global North.\textsuperscript{18} Second, the focus on transference of violence beyond often precludes inquiry into how the same processes of migration may alter conflict dynamics in sending-countries.

Understanding how social legacies of civil war, like those wrought by forced migration, may change conflict dynamics in home-countries after hostilities end is especially important for post-conflict peacebuilding.\textsuperscript{19} Repatriated populations enter a fluid environment in their countries of origins, as those in power (often alongside international interveners) attempt to reform governing institutions in an effort to restructure political and economic competition. Without acknowledging how migration may have changed underlying community structures, these state-building processes may inadvertently, or intentionally, favor returnees or non-migrants. This can exacerbate tensions over property rights, access to public goods, or citizenship rights, and potentially create new sources of insecurity. Yet, with notable exceptions,\textsuperscript{20} much of the extant theory on post-conflict state-

\textsuperscript{16} For discussion of the realities of the threat of foreign fighters see Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shapiro, “Be Afraid: Be A Little Afraid: The Threat of Terrorism from Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq,” Foreign Policy at Brookings, November 2014.
\textsuperscript{17} See United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, “International Migration 2013: Migrants by Origin and Destination”; Bakewell, “South-South Migration and Human Development: Reflections on African Experiences.”
building implicitly assume that causes of violence do not change over the course of the war and therefore focus on how to build institutions to contain these issues. By failing to take into account how migration may affect the operation and legitimacy of government institutions after wartime, institutions designed to build peace are likely to miss – or worse, exacerbate – new sources of conflict.

In this article I offer a theory of return-migration and conflict to explain both the prevalence and character of returnee-stayee divisions as a phenomenon in post-conflict societies. I argue that, first, return-migration creates new social cleavages based on where individuals lived during the war. Second, these divisions may become politically salient, or not, through interaction with local institutions such as property rights, land rights, language laws, and citizenship regimes. I then present qualitative evidence tracing the impact of return migration in a single case, Burundi, to illustrate the theory’s dynamics. I demonstrate how mass return after the country’s 1993-2005 civil war created a culture of hostility between returnees and non-migrants, manifest and reified through land conflict. Consequently, when a new national level political conflict arose in 2015, the so called ‘Third Mandate Crisis’, many returnees were already primed to leave. Fearing the Third Mandate Crisis might provide cover for returnee-stayee antagonism to become more violent, many Burundian returnees took the opportunity to flee, again, as soon as the 2015 crisis broke. Thus, conflict between returning and non-migrant populations was so salient that these divisions shaped both the character and timing of renewed population flight in 2015.

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22 Notable exceptions include anthropological studies of return migration such as Laura Hammond, This Place Will Become Home: Refugee Repatriation to Ethiopia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Lynel Lyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld, eds., Coming Home?: Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed behind (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
2. Theory & Empirical Approach

2a. A theory of return migration and social change

Conflicts between returning and non-migrant populations after civil war can appear to be idiosyncratic, rooted in the particular histories of each case, largely tangential to greater post-conflict peacebuilding concerns. Power struggles over changing the national language seem to have little to do with rivalries for apartment ownership or competition to win government jobs. However, these conflicts between returning and non-migrant populations are intrinsically linked as manifestations of the legacy of forced migration on communities recovering from civil war. I argue that, globally, the experience of forced migration and return creates new social categorizations in countries-of-origin according to where individuals were geographically located during wartime. These divisions crystalize and can lead to violence, or not, when post-conflict institutions intentionally or unintentionally provide differential dividends to individuals based on their migration history. This theory explains both the prevalence of migration related rivalries across post-conflict contexts and their variation in duration and intensity.

In constructing this theory, I draw on two key findings from the political-anthropological and sociological literatures on political violence: The first is that the experience of forced migration may alter conceptions of identity and nationalism, as well as social networks and individuals’ priorities.23 The second is that the majority of violence during civil war actually occurs at the local-level and is related to rivalries like land rights, power-brokering, clan-competition and inequality, which often differ significantly from the primary national cleavage viewed as the broader cause of

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the war, such as religion, ethnicity, or national political grievances. However, in contrast to theories which emphasize that local rivalries exist exogenous to conflict, I argue that exposure to migration during war creates new cleavages that may interact with national issues in a similar fashion, but which are endogenous to conflict.

Starting from these premises, I offer the following theory of return-migration and conflict: First, I argue that return migration after civil war creates new local divisions based on where individuals were during the war. This may be as simple as ‘those who stayed in country’ and ‘those who left’, or can be further delineated by the type of displacement (internal verses international), host country (region, political relationship to country-of-origin, language, etc.), or time period. Forced migration creates new, often cross-cutting, networks based on where individuals resided during war. Whereas there is a tendency in the forced migration, peacebuilding, and development literatures to focus on the creation and maintenance of multi- and trans-national networks to understand the cross-border flow of goods, ideas, finances, and social capital, we know that local

26 For the purposes of this article I limit the inquiry to groups who were displaced across borders in relation to those that did not cross borders during wartime. Internal displacement may function similar to, though not exactly the same as, international displacement. However, the patterns I describe will be most visible when a group fully exits the country due to the stark differences of experience in different countries, and the opportunity for narratives of competition over nationalism to emerge between those who ‘stayed, suffered, and fought’ and those who ‘left’.
network formation among migrants within host-countries is equally important.\textsuperscript{28} For those individuals living abroad, shared experiences of adapting to new environments, combined with the very act of leaving, help to create new networks and signal group identification in contrast to those who remained in country. Some characteristics that define these networks are discrete and observable – language, accent, way of dress, religion. Others are more nuanced, based on perceptions of differences in national ideology or patriotism, roles in the prior conflict, access to wealth and education, or ‘deservedness’ of peace dividends.

Second, these cleavages become more politically and socially salient when post-conflict institutions create, or exacerbate, differential outcomes for individuals based on their migration history. Institutions may include both formal bodies and regulations, or informal practices at the national, regional, and community level. Perceived differences in outcome for stayees and returnees may have been an intentional policy design, or result from ambiguities in interpretation and implementation of various rules. For example, national level language laws may affect returnees who spent protracted periods of time in host-countries with a different predominant language by impeding access to jobs, education, or even healthcare. Informal land inheritance practices may create new sources of conflict when family members return from exile seeking to resettle in their home areas. Or courts may offer competing interpretations of property laws based on how long someone has been absent from the area. If these institutions seemingly favor returnees over stayees, or vice versa, it can create an endogenous cycle whereby institutional biases shape and reify migration-related divisions: As individuals begin to understand their position in society as connected

to their migration history, their future political and social behavior adjusts accordingly. For example, if national language laws preclude Arabic speaking returnees from pursuing jobs in the government, as they did in South Sudan, and narratives exist about returnees being less patriotic than those who stayed and fought for their country, returnees may interpret their inability to access jobs as the stayees deliberately keeping them from power. These return migrants may adjust their behavior in other aspects of political, economic, and social life accordingly, perhaps only socializing with other repatriates. Additionally, elites may strategically use these divisions to their advantage by enacting policies such as orchestrating demographic shifts or laws to bolster their own power. Societies where institutions do not provide differential dividends to stayees and returnees, or where policy-makers quickly remedy disparities and ambiguities rather than exacerbate them, are less likely to see violent tension between these groups.

Importantly, the theory does not predict that divisions between returnees and stayees will be stagnant, but allows for change and gradation depending on interaction with institutions and elites over time. Tensions between returnees and stayees are therefore best understood on a scale from absence, to delineation without conflict, hostility, and finally violence. Widespread tensions between returning and non-migrant populations after civil war can prime the ground for future large-scale conflict, should additional issues arise at the national level. Thus, the actual manifestation of violence during a renewed crisis may occur along migration-related lines, as individuals use the cover of national politics, or ally with elite actors, to follow through on the local returnee-stayee rivalries.

2b. Perception Matters: Framing Loss & Belonging

At the micro-level, understanding how migration may alter how individuals’ perception of belonging and ownership helps to explain why returnees and stayees are willing to engage in violent behavior. Prospect theory explains that people’s willingness to take risk is conditional on perceptions of
relative losses or gains from the status quo. Political scientists have applied this concept to understand the psychology of decision-making in international systems, the behavior of international organizations, and design of international policies. Yet, surprisingly prospect theory has scarcely been applied to understanding migration. Those that have engaged prospect theory have applied it to understand individuals’ decisions whether or not to migrate. But little consideration has been given to how migration may change perceptions of the status quo more broadly and affect future behavior.

I argue that the experience of migration can create competing perceptions of what constitutes the status quo, particularly when it comes to conceptions of ownership: When refugees are forced to flee their homes, some may still view land and property left behind as theirs in a status quo condition while in exile. Yet, in the years that these individuals are abroad, events are still unfolding in-country, including the occupation or cooptation of land and property. Upon return, this can create competing conceptions of the status quo, with both returnees and stayees claiming a certain parcel belongs – at present – to them. When forced to resolve this conflict, both parties may operate from the frame of a potential loss from the status quo, which can trigger riskier, and in these contexts potentially violent, behavior. This frame is not limited to property rights, but may equally apply to conceptions of one’s relationship to the state.

2c. Research Design


The theory presented here was developed inductively based on observations in South Sudan during the years just before and after the country’s independence (2011-2013). I then use an in depth ethnographic case study of return-migration after Burundi’s 1993-2005 civil war as a plausibility probe of the theory’s dynamics in a second case. Both the case selection and methodology offer a number of advantages. Single qualitative cases studies and thick description are effective tools for assessing the plausibility of a theory based on generated expectations and eliminating alternative explanations.\(^{\text{32}}\) This type of inquiry is especially suited to evaluating complex meso- and micro-level dynamics,\(^{\text{33}}\) such as the intricate interactions between return migration, community identity, institutions, and violence over time. In using a case study approach, theory construction and theory development are often intertwined, this project being no exception.\(^{\text{34}}\) However, by developing theoretical expectations in South Sudan first, and then conducting the study in a different context, I am able to get better analytical leverage to analyze the theoretical expectations outside the conditions in which they were was originally developed. For example, in South Sudan ethnicity was not a primary determinant of country of asylum during the war, whereas in Burundi refugees from the two primary ethnic groups tended to congregate in different host-countries, presenting a harder environment for the development of migration related divisions to cut across ethnicity in the post-war context.


The use of ethnographic data to construct the case study has further advantages. Whereas survey work often requires researchers to impose external categorizations to develop instruments, by using an ethnographic approach I am able to gather data on the meaning-making process themselves and explore how individuals’ ideas, beliefs, values, and preferences are embedded in power relationships in their communities without externally framing the narratives at the outset. Additionally, ethnography is a particularly appropriate tool to identify and apprehend why behaviors which may seemingly deviate from cost-benefit analyses make sense given certain historical and cultural contexts. Ethnographic approaches also permit the flexibility to capture meta-data in a conflict affect environments. Communities which have recently experienced the type of violence that leads to mass forced migration are likely to be tense and skeptical of outsiders, even after the war is over. And the key informants will likely have participated in or witnessed violence. In such an environment, ethnography allows researchers to progressively build trust with their informants, thereby “gaining access to insider perspectives, experiences and mean-making practices” they may otherwise be unwilling to share. It allows researchers to capture meta data, such as dissimulation or non-verbal communication like silences, gestures, and tone of voice – which can reveal useful information about how the current social and political dynamics inform what interviewees are willing to say openly, or may alter how respondents choose to portray themselves to an outsider. Therefore, the methodological approach allows for consideration of why informants might have dissimulated alongside their verbalized views.


36 Parkinson, “Organizing Rebellion.”, p 420

Burundi is a particularly valuable case to study return migration. It has had repeated forced-migration outflows, in 1972 and 1993, which allows for the investigation of my theoretical expectations about differentiation of group identity and/or competition among sub-sets of return migrants who fled to different destinations, at different times, or to different types of host countries. Second, the timing was such in Burundi that return migration had been completed no more than ten, but no less than two years from when I was beginning data collection. This allowed time for migration-related divisions to develop, peter off, or persist, and thus provided the opportunity to explore change over time. Finally, the 2015 electoral crisis in Burundi provided a unique opportunity to evaluate the impact of the experience of return-migration on future behavior. Faced with political uncertainty, many Burundians were forced (again) to make a decision whether or not to flee the country. I was thus able to explore whether prior experiences of return affected individuals’ decision-making in a particularly high-stakes context.

If my theory holds, I would expect to see new group categorizations emerge in Burundi between returning and non-migrant populations, potentially cutting across pre-existing divisions, such as ethnicity. Because there were two distinct waves of out migration, and markedly different characteristics between host countries, I would also expect additional delineation of the returnee group according to which time-period they fled or which country they fled to. Further, if there is an institution that provides, or is perceived to provide, differential outcomes to those who returned and those who stayed, I would expect these divisions to be especially salient. If my theory does not fit the Burundian context, respondents would be more likely to focus on general malaises of the community (poverty, health) or to highlight preexisting divisions, like ethnicity, religion, or exogenous local-level rivalries as the primary cleavages in their community. Evidence that that returnee-resident labels were simply used as way to couch references to pre-existing divisions, like ethnicity, would also suggest migration-related divisions were less important.
I use the 2015 crisis to further interrogate the relevance of return-related divisions in society. If return-migration related cleavages were particularly consequential in Burundian communities, I would expect that some individuals fleeing Burundi would cite local level competition between returnees and stayees, a sense of discrimination based on their migration history, or other perceived economic or security threat that emerged as a result of return population movement to their community, as among their reasons for fleeing. This may be in addition to the national political crisis. If returnee-stayee divisions were highly salient, to the point of violence or severe economic duress, I would also expect that some individuals in the group that felt disadvantaged would have tried to exit Burundi before the opening of the borders following the 2015 conflict. An absence of such migration, or attempted migration, would provide evidence that return-related rivalries may not have been as important to the everyday lives of Burundians. Similarly, if return-migration issues were less salient in Burundi, I would expect that newly minted Burundian refugees would exclusively cite push-factors related to the national level political conflict (fighting between political parties, targeting for recruitment into armed groups, repression of perceived opposition voices) or general fear as their primary, or perhaps only, reasons for fleeing.

2c. Data Collection

Data for this project was gathered over the course of nine months of research on both sides of the Burundi-Tanzania border. This includes two month-long trips to Burundi prior to the 2015 conflict (August 2014, February 2015), as well as six months in Tanzania and one month in Burundi after the Third-Mandate crisis began (November 2015-June 2016). Overall, I conducted 258 semi-structured interviews with Burundian civilians, international humanitarian organization staff, Tanzanian and Burundian government officials, and Tanzanian villagers, in addition to countless hours of
participant and field observation. Interviews were conducted with the aid of interpreters who spoke English, French, Kirundi, and Swahili.

The research was conducted primarily in three areas: (1) Nyarugusu Refugee camp (Tanzania); (2) villages in the Makamba province of Burundi; and (3) Ilagala village, a small farming town in Tanzania’s Kigoma region. Nyarugusu was the primary camp receiving refugees from Burundi in Tanzania when conflict in Burundi broke out in 2015. As refugees were confined to the camp, and living in extremely close proximity, interview subjects were readily available, easily approached, and often eager to talk. To ensure that I was able to gather data camp-wide, I devised a random walk mechanism by zone, and conducted both randomly selected and non-random informant interviews in all the Burundian zones open at the time.38

In addition to the refugee camp, I included a non-camp field site in Tanzania to explore the nature of migration after the Burundian civil war, but prior to the third mandate conflict. I chose the village of Ilagala because of its reputation as a destination for Burundians wishing to live under-the-radar in Tanzania, and because it was the site of a recent IOM pilot program to register Burundian ‘irregular migrants’. Through the program, Burundians living illegally in Ilagala, who could prove they were refugees from the 1993 civil war, were given a type of Tanzanian identity card that allowed them to live legally in the area for two years. This was important because without official residence papers, individuals outing as illegal migrants could face imprisonment or deportation, and would be wary of publicly identifying as Burundian or speaking to outsiders. By choosing a village that had

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38 For the randomized interviews in the refugee camps, in each zone I conducted an estimated census of shelters by counting the shelters in one block of the zone. I then used the count to extrapolate an approximate number of houses and total population of each zone. I then used a random number generated guide based on the approximate number of shelters to the closest hundred to select the houses which I would approach for an interview. However, not all interviews were randomized, others were conducted with the elected leaders of the blocks, with individuals who approached me directly, and with Burundian and Tanzanian staff of NGOs in the camps among others.
already experienced a registration program, I was more likely to be able to find Burundians willing to
speak with me, and my presence was less likely to jeopardize their safety in the community.

My approach in Burundi changed in 2016. On previous visits I traveled by NGO or private
vehicle to villages where I conducted random walks, observation, and snow-ball referred interviews.
However, after the Third-Mandate crisis, due to the heightened political tensions, I did not travel
into the villages as the presence of a foreigner could have been dangerous to informants and
research staff. Instead, to meet with villagers, I worked with the International Rescue Committee
(IRC), who had initiatives supporting farmers in several villages to recruit participants, often from
the same villages I had visited on previous trips. These participants would travel, alone or in small
groups, to the IRC office and I would compensate them for the cost of transport. I would then use
snowball sampling for other referrals. I also used referrals from previously established informants to
recruit new interviewees in the privacy of the IRC office. For certain interviews, such as those with
Burundian government representatives, NGO staff, or local community service organizations, I
went to their offices in Makamba town.

3. Overview of Conflict and Forced Migration in Burundi

While there have been many iterations of out-migration from Burundi since independence, I
focus on three primary movements: In 1972, a selective genocide\[^39\] in Burundi, in which the
predominantly Tutsi government organized the killing of an estimated 200,000-300,000\[^40\] Hutu
civilians, sent at least 217,000\[^41\] Burundians across the border to refugee camps in Tanzania.

\[^39\] René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, National and Ethnic Conflict in the Twenty-

\[^40\] Ibid., p 129.

\[^41\] UNHCR, “Repatriation of 1972 Burundian Refugees Hits 50,000 Mark,” September 16, 2009,
50000-mark.html. This does not include urban refugees. For discussion of urban refugees in Tanzania see

Policymakers refer to this group as ‘the 1972 caseload’. The second mass movement began in 1993 with the assassination of President Melchoir Ndadaye and continued through the subsequent start of the civil war in 1996/7. Again, hundreds of thousands of Burundians took up residence in Tanzanian refugee camps and villages – the so called ‘the 1993 caseload’. Some had only spent a handful of years back in Burundi, having fled for the first time in 1972. Finally, with the emergence of the 2015 political crisis in Burundi, more than 413,000 have fled to neighboring countries, of which 237,000 are registered in refugee camps in Tanzania as of April 2017.

**Figure 1: Timeline of Mass Migrations, Burundi**

Importantly, between 1972 and the end of the Burundian civil war in 2005, civilians still in country as well as government agents, both legally and illegally, occupied land left behind by Burundians in exile.

42 Others migrated to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda. For the purpose of this article I focus on Tanzania.
In the early 2000s, as the civil war was concluding, many refugees began returning of their own volition from abroad. Voluntary returnees, anticipating peace might soon be coming, reported coming back to Burundi as early as 2002. Others arrived, either by choice or force, as late as December 2012. However, tens of thousands of the Burundians in camps in Tanzania did not want to go back to Burundi. Many feared their land had been taken and they would have no place to which to return. In 2007, just two years after the leading rebel group, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), signed on to the Arusha Peace Accords, Tanzania began looking into how to close down refugee camps housing the “1993 caseload” refugees. Some of the Burundians remaining in these camps found ways to remain in Tanzania illegally rather than repatriating, often living in small towns in the same region, like Ilagala, and farming for Tanzanian villagers. In 2012, in light of the ‘positive developments’ in Burundi, Tanzania revoked the prima facie refugee status awarded to the 1993 caseload Burundians, allowing only some 2700 to remain as individual asylum seekers. The Tanzanian government with the help of the international community worked to return the remaining 37,000 1993-caseload refugees to Burundi through a course of action they termed ‘Orderly Repatriation’. There has been little official documentation of the process, as it took place largely under the radar of the international humanitarian advocacy community. But both refugees and NGO staff familiar with the situation report that numerous human rights violations occurred in the process, including burning down refugees’ residences and beating them on to buses.

Exact data on how many Burundians fled in which period, where they fled, and if and where they returned do not exist. However, estimates suggest, that in 1972 at least 217,000 Burundians fled

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44 Author Interviews 2015-2016


Between 2002 and 2012 hundreds of thousands of Burundians living abroad returned to Burundi, most looking to (re)settle into a life of subsistence farming. By 2008 Makamba Province (Burundi’s southernmost district which shares a border with Tanzania) had the largest concentration of refugee returns.\footnote{UNHCR, “Map of Burundi: Number of Returnees per Province in 2008, as of 31 August 2008,” 2008, accessed July 25, 2017, http://www.refworld.org/docid/48ce516c2.html.} In this section, I explore how return migration affected Burundian communities after the civil war. I outline how divisions emerged between returnees and stayees, including a
hierarchy between returnees identified as ‘72s’ as opposed to ‘93s’. In many cases, returnee-stayee divisions even cut across family lines. I argue that nascent divisions between returning refugees and non-migrants were exacerbated by both formal and informal land governing institutions. These rivalries frequently manifested through violent land conflict, which in turn hardened divisions between returnees and stayees in non-economic realms, such as patterns of social interaction and local municipality politics.

4a. Presence of Returnee-Non Migrant Divisions

In 2014, several years after the initial return of refugees to Burundi, villagers in Makamba province still identified groups in their community by their previous migration history. Informants described two primary groups: first the ‘Abahunguste’ (Kirundi for ‘those who came back’), frequently called by the French term ‘les rapatriés’ (the repatriates). Second was ‘Abasangwa’ (Kirundi for ‘those who were here and welcomed others’), or ‘les résidents’ (the residents) in French.50 Within the rapatrié group, there were further subdivisions according to the era that returnees initially fled (1972 or in the 1990s), and in some cases by country of asylum (Tanzania, Congo, and Rwanda). International actors contributed to solidifying the time-related subdivisions, as they would treat the two ‘caseloads’ differently, and held strongly to the narrative that while 1972 population needed more aid reintegrating because they had been away for so long, that the 1993 caseload did not really have a hard time coming back, as they had only been living outside Burundi for a short time (just 20 plus years!). This labeling not only indicated the existence of return-migration related categories, but certain names were interpreted as pejorative. For example, Burundians frequently used the term “Sabini na mbili” which is Swahili (the Tanzanian national language) for “The 1972s” to derogatorily refer to returnees, sometimes regardless of whether they were actually in the 1972 group. Individuals

50 For convenience, in this article I use the French terms.
might also use the terms “Tanzanian” or “Congolese” as a way to describe returnees as abroad as different than Burundians. While not necessarily derogatory, the use of returnees' host-country as an identifier implies that return-migrants’ perceived belonging as citizens of Burundi was less legitimate than those who stayed behind.

The *rapatrié-résident* groups were also thought to be distinguishable by certain key characteristics. Having lived for decades abroad, some *rapatriés* spoke only Swahili, as opposed to Kirundi, the national language of Burundi. Others spoke a mix of Kirundi and Swahili, or spoke Kirundi with an alleged ‘Swahili accent’. Many Burundians also claimed that they could tell if someone was a returnee by sight – saying that returnees and stayees dressed differently. Returnee women were said to cover their hair in a different style than those in Burundi and to carry their babies “like the Tanzanians” - wrapped in a cloth diagonally across their backs rather than horizontally as is done in the Burundi. It was also common to hear people comment that only a returnee woman rode bicycles, something women in Burundi had never done. Moreover, narratives emerged around individuals’ claims to national authenticity based on these characteristics. For example, as one respondent said “I thought when I came to Burundi I would face many problems due to loss of culture. We don’t speak Kirundi. They say people who don’t speak Kirundi are not Burundian. They call us not Burundian.”

Importantly, the *résident-rapatrié* division was not simply another way to talk about prior ethnic relations. The two categories overlap significantly, as returnees were primarily Hutu and residents thought to be primarily Tutsi. So, in some cases individuals would use these stereotypes to invoke prior ethnic rivalries to their own advantage. However, in actuality while returnees from Tanzania were primarily Hutu, residents were Hutu, Tutsi or Twa – they just had to be in Burundi to ‘receive’ those returning from abroad. In fact, the returnee-stayee divisions not only cut across

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51 Author Interview 02/10/2015
ethnicity, but frequently divided families where members had lived on either side of the border during the war. So, while not always clear-cut, migration-related categorizations existed independent of, though sometimes associated with, ethnic categorizations. As one respondent put it, “The problem of ethnicity can accentuate the problem of returnees.”

Thus return-migration to Burundi had created a new set of community divisions based on where individuals were during the war. These delineations, by migration history and alleged visible or auditory characteristics are indicative of the creation social categorizations. As one respondent, a returnee from the 90s put it, among the main groups living in his community were “us, the residents, and the 72s.”

**Figure 2: Migration Related Divisions in Burundi**

**Les Rapatriés**

*aka: Samimi na mbili Abahunguste*

**Les Résidents**

*aka: Abasangwa*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative Status</th>
<th>The 1972s</th>
<th>The 1993s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-Group Narrative:</strong></td>
<td>Land illegally taken starting in 1972 genocide</td>
<td>Land occupied illegally or illegally claimed by 1972s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Out-Group Narrative:</strong></td>
<td>‘Transitional justice’ requires full restitution of property</td>
<td>Discriminated against by others, called not really Burundian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- OutMigration Narrative:
  - Least favored because have no political or economic resources
  - Coming to claim land
  - Do not face problems because were not gone long
  - Occasionally claim that those who came back ‘later’ are in opposition party (FNL)

- InMigration Narrative:
  - Welcomed those returning from abroad, after having suffered in-country during the war
  - Invested time and capital into land, which is now rightfully theirs
  - Have no other ‘home’ to which they can go

- OutMigration Narrative:
  - Better off economically because had it easy on land during war rather than in refugee camp or exile
  - Occupiers

52 Author Interview 02/10/2015
53 Author Interview 02/24/2015
While the creation of new identity groups does not automatically entail conflict or differential treatment, many Burundians described social behaviors in their community as being segregated along *rapatrié-résident* lines, or said that they felt discriminated against based on their migration history. A common complaint was that if there was a death in a returnee’s family, only other returnees would participate and come to the family’s home to mourn with them, which is usually a community-wide practice. One woman explained with much derision that when her husband died, the stayees in her neighborhood just went to go drink beer instead.54 Other informants in Burundi reported that often a local administrator would call a meeting, and either not invite or not inform returnees about the gathering. Some returnees claimed, though it was not confirmed, that they could not access health care and that the national identification cards for returnees after 2012 were different than those of other citizens. These discriminatory practices, real or perceived, furthered the returnees’ views that the government (and other Burundians) treated them as lesser class of citizens.

For their part, *résidents* would claim that *rapatriés* would gather in the market to drink coffee in town and discuss current events, but exclude *résidents* from joining. Other *résidents* remarked that the international community and government preferred returnees, providing them with additional aid or favoritism. Said one female resident, “It’s because the government is not fair. They always

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54 Author Interview 12/03/2015.
want to help the people who repatriated and those who remained inside they see as meaningless.”

The trope of government favoritism, in particular, reflected the fact that the ruling CNDD-FDD party was previously a rebel group formed in exile, with many of the leading members having parents who died or were forced to flee during the 1972 genocide. They therefore tended to favor returnees from 1972. These real or perceived practices reinforced the returnee-stayee divide and exacerbated the atmosphere of distrust between parties.

As I will discuss further in the following section, tensions between residents and rapatriés were most evident in land conflict. The primary objective for the majority of returnees upon arrival in Burundi was to (re)claim to provide themselves with the means to support their families. But because land in the inter-war years had been occupied, bought, or sold, both rapatriés and résidents often claimed the same land as rightfully theirs. As such, simply by showing up in villages - even if not directly claiming a plot - returnees presented a potential threat to non-migrants. An estimated 90% of Burundians depend on small-holder agriculture for a living. Combined with rapid population growth, a strong culture of patrilineal land inheritance, and divisive post-conflict governing institutions, the mass population return put immense pressure on the tiny country’s most desired resource. This bred distrust, conflict, and violence between returning populations and non-migrants. Conflict between résidents and rapatriés over land manifested in everything from harassment, to destruction of crops, threats of future violence, physical assault, and murder. However, relations did not have to be this bad. As I will demonstrate in the following section, conflict between rapatriés and résidents became as severe as widespread as they did in part because institutions governing land and property rights provided different dividends depending on one’s migration history. I argue that

55 Interview 02/10/2015
perception of bias created an endogenous cycle whereby individuals would understand their position in society in other aspects of their lives as related to their migration history, further reifying the returnee-stayee divides.

4b. Interaction with Institutions

Mass return migration created the opportunity to categorize people according to where they were during wartime. However, the salience and staying power of these divisions emerged through an endogenous process of interactions with local institutions, namely the formal and informal processes governing land conflict. An informal tradition of patrilineal inheritance of land without written titles set the stage for competition for ownership. Consequently, land conflict was frequently between male members of the same family (and ethnicity) who had different migration histories – brothers or uncles who fled during the war, and those who stayed behind. Considered alongside conflicts between returnees and stayees who were not related, returnee-stayee divisions that crossed kinship lines show how powerful return-migration’s impact was on Burundian communities. Each side perceived the land as rightfully theirs – returnees from the perspective of what they had rights to when they fled, and stayees from the perspective of what they had established on the land to date. These competing visions of status-quo ownership frequently led actors to use violent means to protect against losses.

If informal inheritance practices created a permissive environment for inter-familial résident-rapatrié conflict, the formal institutions governing land and property rights, including a newly created federal land commission, had an even greater impact. The National Commission for Land and Other Goods (CNTB) emerged directly from the Arusha Accords. The peace agreement stipulated that the Burundian government encourage the repatriation and reintegration of refugees, create a commission to adjudicate land disputes arising from return - specifically those from ‘old caseload’
returnees - and take the requisite measures, including revising the country’s Land Act, to prevent future conflict. The first iteration of the CNTB was as a relatively independent commission, led by a Tutsi clergyman, Father Astère Kana. This early CNTB promoted a policy of sharing land between the current occupant and returnee. While this wasn’t fully satisfactory to either party, some villagers were satisfied with the policy.

However, even this sharing policy was not universally upheld. People could appeal CNTB rulings through the courts, which often reversed the CNTB’s decisions. In other cases, returnees, especially those from the nineties who had less political and economic capital generally, were too scared to take their claims to court for fear of retribution. Moreover, it was generally easier to maintain residence than to enforce an eviction. So résidents, having earned livelihoods from the land for decades, tended to have more resources that allowed them to get by in a stand-off of sharing the land or buy off officials. This opacity in implementation precluded the CNTB from assuaging the hostility between the two groups.

When Father Astère Kana died, the CNTB was placed under the presidency and a party loyalist, Sérapion Bambonanire, was appointed as head of the commission. Under Bambonanire, the CNTB revised their policy to require full restitution of all land and property to returnees, particularly those from 1972. The CNTB justified this policy as a form of transitional justice: the land was wrongly taken as a result of the 1972 genocide and mass exodus, therefore it was only right that all property be returned. While true in part, this was an oversimplification of the issue, as occupants on the land may not have illegally appropriated the land themselves, but bought the plots from the government, or inherited them indirectly. While the government’s line was that the ‘occupants’ had other land to which they could return if kicked off the disputed property, residents disputed this, saying that having lived for decades in the area, they maintained no other home. Taking matters to
the extreme, the CNTB applied this policy retroactively and re-opened some cases where disputants had already resolved to share the land..

The new approach worsened relations between returnees and stayees, and exacerbated violence between the community and against the CNTB itself. As many villages describe it, hostility between residents and rapatriés centered around issues of land, and this worsened with the new institutional design. As one resident claimed, “The CNTB is the one that has killed everything. Because before these [people] would share fifty-fifty… But now [the CNTB] gives all.” Where previous policies were less detrimental to returnee-stayee hostilities, the decision to have the government clearly favor one group over the other fueled animosity and contributed to the continued crystallization of the groups’ separation within the communities. As one respondent explained with the new policy relationships between stayee and returnee neighbors suffered: “Before we used to share the land. Back then we used to live together, could go to neighbor and ask for fire (for cooking). Now there is no sharing.”

Individuals assigned this narrative of discrimination based on migration history to other interactions, without necessarily the same concrete evidence of clear patterns of differential treatment. For example, Bonifax—a returnee—had completed some university education while in Tanzania, but struggled to get Burundi to recognize his certificates of program completion so he could pursue a job in Burundi. It is possible that in this specific instance Bonifax’s qualifications earned in Tanzania differed in some substantive way from diplomas offered. But according to Bonifax and others, discrimination against returnees was to blame: “I think it’s because we are repatriates.”

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58 Author Interview 02/24/2015  
59 Author Interview 02/23/2015  
60 All names were changed to protect confidentiality of informants.  
61 Author Interview 02/23/2015
in his community because they were still having land conflicts, and in some cases having to give back land.  

With the CNTB exacerbating already volatile land conflicts, communities began rebelling against the commission. Villagers would attempt to prevent CNTB vehicles from entering town, wielding machetes and other farming tools, so the officials could not measure plots or implement rulings. In March 2015, about one month before the Third Mandate protests in Bujumbura would shake the nation, thousands of citizens in Makamba reportedly took to the streets protesting the land commission. The governor of Makamba responded by halting the implementation of CNTB rulings in the province “to avoid a blood bath,” and President Nkurunziza soon announced a nationwide suspension of CNTB activity.

Beyond the violent conflict, the consequences of restricted access to land were dire. Because the vast majority of villagers are subsistence farmers, without property they were left in a desperate economic situation. Forced to ‘farm for others’ and use wages to rent houses, Burundians who were most disadvantaged in accessing land, were often unable provide adequate food, clothes or care for their families.

One could argue that this is a story, therefore, of simple resource competition. Land in Burundi is scarce yet extremely valuable. So, regardless of institutions, one would expect competition for property rights. Resource competition is certainly contributing factor. However, this argument is not sufficient to explain the emergence and persistence of returnee-stayee conflict in Burundi. First, the content of the land governance regime appears to have played a role. Under the initial policy of sharing land between residents and repatriates, some amount of resentment between

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62 Ibid.
the two groups was contained as compared to under the CNTB’s revised practices. This lends plausibility, in the Burundian case, to the theory that institutions which provide differential dividends (real or perceived) based on individuals’ migration history reify and exacerbate displacement-related cleavages. Future comparative cases could provide additional evidence to elucidate whether the mechanism at play is exclusively institutional design, or related to shocks to expectations based on changes in policy. Second, while the violence in Burundi between migrants and non-migrants most frequently centered on property rights, the narratives around these group identities existed outside the realm of land conflict, or even economic competition. The divisions were evident in cultural domains and perceptions of legitimacy as Burundian citizens. This appears to support the theory’s proposition of an endogenous cycle where new local divisions are spurred by population return and aggravated by institutions such that individuals continue to interpret various community interactions through the résidents-rapatriés frame.

Return-migration after the 1993-2005 civil war had thus created new social categories and sources of conflict in local communities. These divisions were exacerbated and reified as communities perceived the commission governing land rights to be providing differential benefits to returnees, especially those from 1972, over the others. Given the violent conflict over land and extreme poverty, there was a significant population in Makamba – especially among the 1993-caseload returnees -- who expressed a desire to leave Burundi. There were already reports of returnees trying to go back to Tanzania. Some rapatriés interviewed in Burundi before the Third Mandate crisis even reported that their neighbors had threatened them by saying that if war came back to Burundi, the rapatriés would be the first killed. As one returnee stated in 2014 “Those who didn’t run away (the résidents), they are trying to scare us that if the fighting starts up during the
elections that they will come and kill us. But really [I] think this this their way of trying to scare us, chase us off the land.”

5. Flight During the 2015 Third Mandate Crisis: Who, When and Why?

At the same time that résidents-rapatriés land competition became rampant in Makamba, Burundi was approaching another nationwide conflict. The country was scheduled for a presidential election, the first in which a sitting president would face the constitutional two-term limit envisioned by the Arusha peace accords. When, in April 2015, sitting President Pierre Nkurunziza announced that he would seek a third term in office, or ‘Third Mandate’, the country became embroiled in a violent political crisis. The announcement sparked mass protests in Bujumbura, an attempted coup, the formation of an armed rebellion, and government crackdown on anyone perceived to be a member of an opposition party or critical of the regime. The crisis also spurred mass displacement: Between June 26th and June 30th an average of 1,878 Burundians refugees arrived Tanzania daily.

Most observers in the media and international humanitarian community assumed that the refugees were directly fleeing the electoral violence in Bujumbura. Yet, early reports from the Tanzanian camps suggested that the vast majority of Burundians were coming from Makamba, Burundi’s southernmost province, not Bujumbura. Certainly, there was fear throughout the country that there could be renewed civil war. But, the government’s campaign of violence in the first few

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64 Author Interview, 8/4/2014
65 These are the earliest publicly available data via UNHCR, “Burundian Refugees in Tanzania - Daily Statistics” (UNHCR, July 10, 2015), accessed July 25, 2017
months was relatively contained to the capital city, with business as usual continuing ‘upcountry.’\textsuperscript{67} The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the lead organization coordinating aid to Burundian refugees in Tanzania, did not start publishing data on refugees’ area of origin until July 2015, but the first reports show that as of July 10, 2015 64.5\% of the refugees in Tanzania were from Makamba. Only 5.6\% had come from Bujumbura and Bujumbura Rural combined.\textsuperscript{68} International organizations staff also confided that the vast majority of the refugees they met arriving in first few months were repeat migrants – this was their second, third, or even fourth time fleeing Burundi. If the protests, violent crackdown, and fear of civil war were the primary drivers of flight, why did less than 6\% of refugees hail from the areas most affected by the third mandate crisis? It’s certainly plausible that simple geography is the explanation: Makamba shares an easily-crossable border with Tanzania; Bujumbura is farther away. But this does not explain why so many of the refugees arriving in Tanzania in first few months were also repeat-migrants;\textsuperscript{69} why the majority were women and children, as opposed to the men who were the most likely targets of the regime violence;\textsuperscript{70} nor why, if they were fleeing imminent attack, these migrants were arriving with extremely heavy personal property. As the IOM’s director of operations in Kigoma remarked to me, “In May, I could not understand why people fleeing a country of conflict, a country like Burundi,


\textsuperscript{68} UNHCR, “Burundian Refugees in Tanzania - Daily Statistics.”

\textsuperscript{69} There are no publicly available data to confirm the exact proportion of repeat vs. first time migrants. However, estimates for the early arrivals from interviews and news sources ranged from 80-90\%. See Diana Magnay and Brendt Swails, “Burundi’s Refugees Waiting for Boat Ride to Safety,” CNN, May 26, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/21/africa/burundi-refugee-crisis/index.html.

\textsuperscript{70} In camp, I observed (along with many international NGO staff) that areas that housed early arrivals tended to have more women and children, whereas and the camp which opened to receive newer arrivals appeared to house many more men.
were coming with so many luggages. Furniture, sewing machines…” How was it that refugees had time to pack all their belongings and transport heavy furniture if they were facing an immediate threat?

In this section I demonstrate how salient local-level divisions between rapatriés and résidents were in Burundi, by showing how experiences of returnee-stayee conflict shaped both the character and timing of out-migration amid the 2015 Third Mandate crisis. Economically vulnerable and facing security issues due to hostile rapatriés-résidents relations, many Burundian rapatriés were already looking to leave Burundi. This population also saw themselves as especially vulnerable amid the 2015 crisis, worrying that the chaos could provide cover to those who threatening them with violence over land conflicts. With few reasons to stay, these civilians were more likely to leave Burundi at the first available chance. Stayees or return-migrants who (re)gained assets were more likely to wait and see how the conflict would play out before making the risky decision to flee.

5a. Alliances between national and local migration related conflict in 2015

The patterns in refugees’ explanations for what forced them to flee clearly elucidate the interaction of the national level crisis and local conflicts related to previous return migration in forcing migration. The reasons for flight generally fell into three categories: (1) Those who emphasized local level issues, most often related to their previous return such as land insecurity, discrimination, extreme poverty (25.6%); (2) those who fled exclusively because of the national unrest, such fear of recruitment/political targeting, direct experience of torture, etc. (28%); and (3) those who described a combination of the two (46.4%).

For those in the first category (1), while they may have faced a confluence of issues in Burundi, they cited land conflict or related issues as the preponderant threat. For example, on one of

71 Author Interview 12/17/15
my first days in camp I interviewed two older Burundian women living in Zone 8. As we began the interview, immediately, and without my prompting, one of the women told me her husband had died in 2013, “after we returned to Burundi by force. Because of land problems.”\textsuperscript{72} As we continued talking, she explained that she was among those Burundians who had fled in 1972, and then again in 1993. She had not wanted to return to Burundi because she knew that her land was occupied, and there would be problems if she went back. But she was forced to return when Tanzania closed the refugee camps in 2012. According to her, “The ones who had not fled do not want to see us in the country, because they have taken lands. Whenever they see us they feel bitter.”\textsuperscript{73}

Both women went on to tell me about how, when they returned to Burundi, family members who had stayed in-country during the war were now occupying their land. Those on the land now threatened to kill the women and their families if they tried to stay. In the first woman’s case, they had already murdered her husband. This is why they had to leave in 2015. Later I asked what was causing the current crisis in in Burundi, the women referred back to their family and land issues. When I asked them about the \textit{troisième mandate}, the second woman looked at me with an expression completely absent of recognition and said “I do not understand.” I tried again to explain about Peeta (as President Nkurunziza is colloquially known) going for a third term, and she replied “[We have] Nothing to hear about Peeta.”\textsuperscript{74}

These women were exceptional in their absolute rejection of the relevance national-level conflict. Most refugees knew about the Third Mandate Crisis. Still for many, the consequences of their previous return were preponderant in their decisions to flee. As one refugee explained. “We had fled and those who remained on the land said it was theirs. Conflicts followed. [T]hey can kill

\textsuperscript{72} Author Interview 11/26/2015
\textsuperscript{73} Author Interview 11/26/2015
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
each other based on land.”  

Another woman said she left simply because, “We had no lands and nowhere to cultivate.”

Responses in category three (3) cited the local-level issues discussed above as well as the 2015 national-level political conflict as reasons for fleeing. Some respondents expressed these as distinct issues, e.g. they faced land conflict or other adverse consequences of return, but also expressed fear that the country was about to descend into full scale war. More commonly, however respondents saw the two as intertwined, that the current crisis would exacerbate pre-existing land conflicts. Given the elevated political chaos, they felt it would be easier for those with whom they were already fighting to act with impunity. For many refugees, the person they had a land conflict with had a network connecting them to the ruling party. For example, their nephew may have been Imbonerakure and therefore able to use the cover of the CNDD-FDD’s crackdown to access arms and carry out existing vendettas in the name of party allegiance. As one man explained to me “The first reason, our land was taken. [They] tried to kill us… [They] said once this conflict begins (meaning potential renewed war), you would be among those killed, so [they] could take the land permanently.”

In another case two men I interviewed in Nyarugusu told me as we began our conversation that they had fled Burundi repeatedly, first during Ndadaye’s war and “now recently with the Third Mandate because everyone who did not agree, [they are] to kill him.” This was a clear reference to the CNDD-FDD’s repression of opposition voices. As we got further into the interview, one of the men explained that when he returned to Burundi in 2013, he had found that family members had

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75 Author Interview, 12/8/2015  
76 Author Interview, 12/21/2015  
77 Author Interview 12/10/2015  
78 Author Interview 1/19/2016
taken over the family’s land in his home area. He tried, instead, to settle in another town. But the family sent Imbonerakure from the ruling party after him so they could remain in the land.

Interviewees further explained that the family members who remained in country during the war often accused returnees of being with the opposition political party/rebel group, the FNL, as a way to leverage the political climate and scare the returnees off the land. In fact, many current Nyarugusu residents described how their neighbors in Burundi would accuse them of being FNL even before the 2015 crisis broke, using the logic that only those loyal to Agathon Rwasa (the leader of the FNL) would have waited so long to come back after the war was over.

This complicated interaction between political and personal conflict is most evident in the following interviewees’ description of the Commission Nationale des Terres et Autres Biens, the government body designated to mediate land disputes between returnees and residents: “There is this organization called CNTB, they came to [allow] people to be back in their land, but [they] were to be killed in that land. Because they [the CNTB] could say ‘the repatriates tak[e] that land,’ and they let you. But then they [the disputing party] come back and kill you with your family and say they were killing murderers and FNL. You are FNL because of the land they want. So they can kill you.”

Finally refugees in category (2) highlighted issues related to the national conflict as their primary reason for flight: political repression, torture, attempted recruitment into government or opposition forces, fear of return to full-scale war, etc. For example, in Nyarugusu camp, a man whose eyes were badly injured after he was tortured by members of the ruling party recounted, “Well first, you see what they’ve done to me (pointing to his eyes). I was told with the insecurity they were coming to finish me. At 22.00hrs that night I made the decision to leave.” He later went on to

79 Author Interview 1/19/2016
describe how the main problems in Burundi were with the ruling party – that he had been asked to
join and had refused.  

Other interviewees in this category responded that, regardless of local level land conflict, they left because they were afraid the protests were a harbinger of full-scale civil war. As one woman stated “The main reason to come here I saw that life was bad since I was a child. I saw that what I fled before comes back. So I thought some members of my family died, even my father, because of war. And even now starting to be the same as it had [been].” Refugees who fell into this group were much more likely to say that they would have remained in Burundi had there been no issue with the election, and that they might be willing to go back to Burundi if there was peace. Though all around, because of the repeated cycles of violence in Burundi, refugees tended to be skeptical that peace now would mean security in the long term.

Refugees’ stories, therefore, reflected patterns of violence that scholars find common across civil wars: Local actors act jointly with national players, appropriating public discourses – like religion, class, or political allegiance – for private or supra-local purposes. In turn, local politics can shape the outlines of contestation in the center. However, in this case, rather than arising exogenous to violence conflict, the ‘local cleavages’ were clearly linked to prior cycles of forced migration and return from the previous civil wars. Moreover, refugees directly cited perceptions of unfair treatment by governing institutions based on their migration history in exacerbating their situation upon return.

5b. The Time Factor

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80 Author Interview 11/27/2015
81 Author Interview 02/26/2016
82 Kalyvas 2003, 2006; Autesserre 2010
In addition to creating the substantive impetus to leave, experiences of return after the 1993-2005 Civil War also influenced the timing of out-migration from Burundi amid the 2015 crisis. Among the refugees interviewed, early arrivals were much more likely to emphasize land conflict as one of their primary reasons for flight, whereas later arrivals (those coming to Tanzania from approximately mid/late July 2015 onward) were more likely to highlight political persecution. These later arrivals were also more likely to be first time migrants, and originate from a more diverse set of locations in Burundi – the percentage of refugee residents from Makamba fell from 65% in July 2015 to 46% in January 2016. By virtue of the Nyarugusu’s layout by zone, this often meant that responses from Zones housing earlier arrivals were different than those zones whose residents tended to come later. Zone 8 tended to house the earliest arrivals from Burundi to Tanzania, whereas those in the Zones constructed later in the crisis, Zones 10, 11 and 12, tended to house later arrivals. In Zone 8, I was constantly confronted by refugees recounting stories of legacies of land conflict, including the two women mentioned above who claimed to know nothing about the Peeta and the Third Mandate Conflict. It was not until I began walking around in Zone 12 when I saw outward signs of heightened political engagement. It was there where I met a refugee who proudly showed me his FNL (opposition party) flag which he had gone to great lengths to keep with him throughout his journey, and where I saw young men playing a local board game which was labeled with four teams - three Champions League football teams and the other one FNL.

Figure 3. Photo of Refugee’s Game board in Nyarugusu

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83 UNHCR Operations Portal: Burundi Situation
This helps to make sense of the initial puzzle of arrivals in Tanzania. Those facing pre-existing issues, many of whom were *rapatriés* living in Makamba province, took the first opportunity to leave Burundi when it became clear that Tanzania would allow Burundians to cross the border and be admitted into the refugee camps. In fact, many of these earlier arrivals had wanted to leave Burundi well before the 2015 crisis, but had not found the means to do so. “The first problem was land. The thought of leaving was there before. Those who had tickets went to Uganda [before]. But I missed because I did not have the means.”

As I will demonstrate in the following subsection, this pattern holds true outside the camps as well, where there are many Burundians living illegally in villages. Among them are repeat migrants who returned to Burundi after the civil war, but could not integrate, and therefore re-migrated from Burundi to Tanzania before the 2015 crisis.

Those who were not involved in a local conflict were more likely to stay in Burundi until the national conflict more directly forced them to leave. They may have been attacked, evaded

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84 Author Interview 12/2/2015
recruitment attempts from both the ruling party and opposition, or felt the balance had tipped and Burundi was heading back into full scale-conflict.

This pattern of flight was also evident in the different reports of security issues refugees would bring to international NGO staff responsible for protection in the Tanzanian camps. As the refugee crisis grew, the international community opened two new camps in addition to Nyarugusu called Nduta and Mtendeli. Nduta tended to house later arrivals who were still arriving from Burundi at the time the camp opened. Mtendeli tended to house earlier arrivals who were directly transferred from Nyarugusu to relieve overcrowding. According to the head of the Danish Refugee Council in Nduta, the lead iNGO managing the camp, refugees in Nyarugusu & Mtendeli would complain of substantively different security risks than those in Nduta: In Nduta refugees more frequently reported that their safety in camp was as risk because of potential cross-border forced recruitment or infiltration of Imbonerakure into Tanzania - in other words political-party related conflict.85 In Nyarugusu and Mtendeli camps, the UN was much more likely to received safety complaints from refugees citing land conflict back in Burundi which emerged during their previous repatriation. These refugees feared that family members or neighbors would send someone to come and ‘hunt’ them so the refugee could not return to Burundi and reclaim the land.

5c. Perspectives from Outside the Camp: Ilagala Village & Pre-2015 Flight

Before the Third Mandate Crisis some Burundians had already crossed the border, preferring to live illegally in Tanzania than remain in Burundi. Primarily composed of repeat-migrants, the character of this flight mirrors that of the early arrivals in camp: These individuals had been in Tanzania during the civil war and were unable to settle in Burundi due to land conflict with résidents. They joined other Burundians who had a long history of living in Tanzanian villages and urban centers

85 Author Observation 5/31/2016.
like Dar es Salaam, both legally and illegally. In the 2015 population movement, the international community has been very careful to bring all arriving migrants to the refugee camps as the Tanzanian government now has a strictly enforced encampment policy. However, there are still an unknown number Burundians living under the radar in villages throughout the region, and Dar es Salaam, including “newcomers”, or those who didn’t simply stay in Tanzania, but returned to Burundi and then re-migrated to Tanzania within the last few years.

One of the villages where the IOM irregular migrant program was piloted is Ilagala. Ilagala is small rural town in the Kigoma region. Workers travel from Ilagala to nearby farming towns or ports to work short-term jobs which can last for weeks or months at a time. Burundians living in Ilagala have diverse migration histories. Some were born in Tanzania, their parents having fled in 1972 or 1993, and then settled in Ilagala when the government began closing the refugee camps. Others had been traveling in and out of Burundi repeatedly, or arrived for the first time in the recent political crisis. Burundians have been among Tanzanians in the area for so long that it can be difficult to tell who is from where without prior knowledge – though frequently people claim that they can. My driver and interpreter would regularly say they could tell if someone was Burundian because of the way a woman was wearing her hair, or their “Kirundi accent,” or even the way they walked.

Given that so many refugees in camp cited issues that pre-dated the third-mandate crisis as primary factors in their decision to leave, it is unsurprising that many interviewees had arrived in Ilagala in the last 5 years, after unsuccessfully returning to Burundi. For example, a young construction worker, James, in Ilagala initially told me that he had remained in Burundi since his family first fled the 1993 civil war, but that his wife was a recent arrival from 2014. Her mother was living in refugee camp, and the young woman occasionally went back to the camp to maintain their ration card. A few weeks later, James called my interpreter saying he wanted to speak with me again. When we finally were able to meet, he told me he had actually been among those who returned from
Mtabila to Burundi in 2012. When he and his siblings arrived on their parents’ land in Burundi, someone else was occupying it. A dispute ensued, and James’s brother was mysteriously killed after destroying a fence their neighbor had constructed to divide the land. Seeing his brother killed, and worrying for his other siblings, in 2013 James decided to leave with his family, planning to make their way to Kenya. However, the contact who had promised James he would organize bus tickets for the family to Kenya, never followed through, stealing the money James had saved for the tickets and leaving them without further contact in Kigoma. James’ eldest sister married and now lives with their younger sister in another small Tanzanian town. His younger brother works selling water for a Tanzanian in Kigoma town, the regional capital. When I asked why he had not told me this story before, James said that he was worried I going to arrest him and take him back to Burundi.

James’ fears are common among Burundians living in Ilagala, who are desperate not to return to Burundi. Many, like James and others in the refugee camps, were former rapatriés who lived in Burundi for only a year or two before deciding to re-migrate. Like the refugees in Nyarugusu, often land and/or family conflicts upon return were among the primary reasons new arrivals in Ilagala cited as why they left Burundi.

5d. Who Stayed? Views from Outside Bujumbura

On the other side of the border in Burundi, in Makamba Town in February 2016, little appears to have changed from when I visited a year earlier, before the third mandate crisis. Small shops on the side of the street are packed with customers and children walk to and from school freely. Many villagers, and even the Governor, told me that things were peaceful in Makamba. While daily life remained largely the same, there certainly was increased fear and uncertainty regarding if and when the conflict would reach the province. The Governor now traveled in an extended motorcade with soldiers armed with rocket launchers in addition to their usual AKs. Police checkpoints along the
main road out of town were increasingly frequent, and the government’s crackdown on media in the coup had left Burundians living upcountry with little access to information aside from what was presented on the state-run radio.

One of the primary assertions from those still in Makamba was that they remained in-country because there was nothing to fear. The Burundians arriving in Tanzania fled rumors of war, they said, but there was no real insecurity. Of course, those who remained in Burundi are unlikely to report that security issues are prevalent, either because they themselves are participating in inciting violence or for fear of repercussions from the deeply embedded state and party security apparatuses. People would often brush off the issue of current displacement, or speak of those who left with derision, saying that those refugees simply wanted handouts from the UN or thought they might get resettled in America. The truth of the ‘UN dependency’ trope is less important than the fact that its prevalence is a marker of perception between those who stayed and those who left. This attitude makes sense given how refugees described their fears as frequently rooted in a local conflict. If you did not have land conflicts (or had previously gained control of land), were on good terms your neighbors and local CNDD operatives (or were a member of the party yourself), or had particular connections that provided protection, there was less sense of immediate danger. And you could point to the lack of overt violence in the countryside as evidence to deny refugee’s claims of insecurity, and instead they were just seeking handouts or wanting to be resettled abroad. It also paralleled the CNDD-FDD’s rhetoric that Burundians who fled in 2015 were likely to flee at the slightest hiccup, unfaithful to Burundi, or linked to opposition political parties and rebel groups.

Burundians also stayed to protect economic assets, waiting until it was absolutely necessary to leave if they had land or a job. Many of the villagers I spoke to owned or had access to land, or had some sort of business, job, or other economic assistance that allowed them to get by. In line with reports from the refugee camps, households would often leave a male representative behind, to
protect their property until it became too risky to stay, sending women and children ahead to Tanzania. This helps to explain the overwhelming majority of women and children in refugee camps in the early months of the crisis, when in fact men and young men were the most likely targets for political violence.

Finally, the decision as to which risk to take – to stay or to go – favors path dependency. Life in a refugee camp is extremely hard. Those who had already lived as refugees once (rapatriés) were more likely to have some idea of how they would survive under those conditions, whereas stayees feared it could be too difficult to establish lives in camp. NGO staff in Burundi said that many villagers they interacted with who were still in Burundi did not want to leave would say, “If I’m going to die, I’d rather die here.” And those who I spoke to more frequently expressed attachments to Burundi as their home country and/or fear of living as a foreigner. Refugees in Tanzania, on the other hand, often expressed that they would rather ‘die in the bush,’ than return to Burundi and struggled to express their relationship as a citizen to a nation they had spent so few years actually living in. Interestingly, whereas one might argue that because life in a refugee camp is extremely hard, individuals who had experienced those hardships would work to avoid repeating that experience, the opposite seems to hold in this case. I argue that one of the decision-making factors that pushed toward repeat-migration was the relative security threat faced by returnees as opposed to stayees during the post-conflict period.

6. Conclusion

The way policymakers understand local conflict dynamics matters. Yet, all too often peacebuilders misapprehend the context in which they are operating. One conflict dynamic that frequently goes unrecognized is the legacy of forced migration in post-conflict societies. Processes of out-migration and return frequently create new divisions between populations who were
displaced across borders and those who remained in-country. Migration-related group rivalries may harden, and become violent, when post-conflict institutions intentionally or unintentionally favor individuals based on where they were physically located during wartime.

These dynamics were clearly at play in post-war Burundi. Return-migration to Burundi after the 1993-2005 civil war created new community divisions between so called rapatriés and residents, which escalated to widespread, often violent, tension as institutions governing land ownership were perceived to favor one group over the other. Rivalries between returnees and stayees were a powder keg ready to explode if the opportunity presented itself.

That opportunity came in the form of the 2015 Third Mandate crisis. Thousands of Burundians fled the government crackdown on anyone perceived to be in an opposition political party or critical of the regime. However, who left and who stayed did not reflect a simple distinction between ruling-party and opposition supporters. Rather, the third mandate crisis activated divisions at both the local and national level. Rapatriés in particular, who had not yet been able to recover land, worried that the national conflict would allow local actors to carry out personal vendettas with impunity, and therefore were among the first to flee to Tanzania. As the conflict took hold, later arrivals had more direct connections to opposition groups or direct experience being targeted by the CNDD-FDD.

This pattern accords with accounts of the origins of violence during civil war, but also highlights a crucial dimension missing from those explanations: in post-conflict contexts, (1) local conflicts may be have been created by the process of war itself. And (2) there may be common patterns to seemingly idiosyncratic local conflicts globally. Specifically, forced migration, one of the most common sequelae of civil war, is likely to spark local level hostilities across a variety of post-conflict contexts. The differing manifestations may be related to institutional conditions in the
country which exacerbate perceived divisions between those who stayed and those who left and return.

Lessons from the Burundian case have important implications for humanitarian responses to refugee crises. First, in cases of protracted forced migration, plans to orchestrate voluntary return to countries of origin must be treated as a potential source of new conflict. Simply (re)entering home areas creates the opportunity to differentiate groups based on their migration history. And because stayees and returnees are likely to have competing understandings of what is rightfully theirs – both physically in terms of property and normatively in terms of connection to the state – conflict between these two groups is likely to incite risky or violent behavior. In cases of repeat migration, this may mean that individuals who already experienced issues due to their migration history on previous returns will be unwilling to endure that process again, even if national level political processes bring renewed peace. Instead they may seek to stay host-countries or resettle abroad.

Building strong institutions is frequently cast as one of the strongest tools in the peacebuilding arsenal. Yet, as is clear in Burundi, while institutional reform may help to migrate against pre-existing tension, it can also create venues to reify social divisions, and intentionally or unintentionally feed new conflicts in post-war environments. Peacebuilding interveners must balance the line of addressing the distinct needs of different groups in the population, while being wary of institutionalizing new community categories which may create new obstacles to durable peace.