

**FLEEING, AGAIN:
RETURN MIGRATION AND LOCAL CONFLICT AFTER CIVIL WAR**
Stephanie Schwartz^{*†}

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Conflict between returning and non-migrant populations is a pervasive yet frequently overlooked security issue in post-conflict societies. While scholars have demonstrated how out-migration can exacerbate civil war, the security consequences of return migration are undertheorized. This article advances a novel theory of return migration and conflict: I argue that return migration creates new situational identity divisions based on whether and where individuals were displaced during wartime. These cleavages become new sources of conflict in countries-of-origin when local institutions - like land codes, citizenship regimes, or language laws - yield differential outcomes for individuals based on their geographic location during the hostilities. Using ethnographic evidence gathered in Burundi and Tanzania between 2014 and 2016, I document 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 illuminating the role of reverse population movements in shaping future conflict, this study provides a needed extension to theories of political violence and demonstrates why breaking the cycle of return and repeat migration is essential to conflict prevention.

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1. Introduction

Amid the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees to Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, a song became popular in Sarajevo: “*Sarajevan [people] / While Bosnian cities burned/ You were far away/ When it was difficult/ You left Sarajevo...When you come back one day I shall greet you/ But nothing will ever be the same / Don’t be sad then, it is nobody’s fault/ You saved your head, you stayed alive.*”¹ This sentiment is representative of a climate in Bosnia where “coupled with discrimination and resentment from those who stayed behind, many returnees nurture[d] feelings of marginalization and alienation.”² After a war largely characterized by national ethnic and religious rivalries, the legacy of forced migration and subsequent return had created a new source of conflict in Bosnia between those who fled during the war, and those who remained.

This kind of volatile animosity following return migration is not a phenomenon exclusive to Bosnia. 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. These returning families often faced violent backlash from those who stayed behind, causing many returnees to flee again.³ 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 played out in competition for employment, struggles for land, and youth gang

¹ Ivana Maček, *War within: Everyday Life in Sarajevo under Siege* (Uppsala: cta Universitatis Upsaliensi, 2000), 145.

² Anders H. Stefansson, “Refugee Returns to Sarajevo and Their Challenge to Contemporary Narratives of Mobility,” in *Coming Home?: Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind*, ed. Lynellyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 171.

³ Deborah Isser and Peter van der Auweraert, *Land, Property, and the Challenge of Return for Iraq’s Displaced* (Washington, DC : U.S. Institute of Peace, 2009).

violence in urban centers.⁴ In El Salvador, return migration from the United States changed the nature of violence against the state. In the 1980s and early 1990s, civil war was the primary threat to peace. During this time, roughly two million Salvadorans fled to the United States, alongside thousands of other Central Americans also fleeing civil war violence.⁵ However, in the past 10 to 15 years, transnational criminal organizations have become the main source of insecurity in the region. The rise of this gang activity has been directly linked to increases in U.S. deportation of Central American migrants to their countries-of-origin.⁶ *Why does return migration so often lead to conflict?*

The prevalence of insecurity related to return is especially puzzling considering that political actors frequently see repatriation as both the solution and endpoint to migration crises.⁷ Peace agreements have even called for the facilitation of return migration as a way to “undo” the negative impact of war, and international observers have used refugee repatriation as an indicator of post-war stability.⁸ Scholars and practitioners alike have pushed back against this conception of return as the most natural and pragmatic solution to forced migration crises – pointing to the political nature of repatriation promotion,⁹ documenting cases in which return migration disrupted local power

⁴ See Marc Sommers and Stephanie Schwartz, “Dowry and Division Youth and State Building in South Sudan,” Special Report (Washington, DC : U.S. Institute of Peace, 2011); Gabriella McMichael, “Rethinking Access to Land and Violence in Post-War Cities: Reflections from Juba, Southern Sudan,” *Environment and Urbanization* 26, no. 2 (October 2014): 389–400.

⁵ Micaela Sviatschi, “By Deporting 200,000 Salvadorans, Trump May Be Boosting Gang Recruitment,” *The Washington Post*, February 12, 2018..

⁶ Ana Arana, “How the Street Gangs Took Central America,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 3 (2005): 98.

⁷ On the history of repatriation as the preferred policy solution see Katy Long, *The Point of No Return: Refugees, Rights, and Repatriation* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁸ See Gerard McHugh, “Integrating Internal Displacement in Peace Processes and Agreements” (The Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, September 2007), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/addressing-internal-displacement-in-peace-processes-peace-agreements-and-peace-building/>; Marita Eastmond, “Transnational Returns and Reconstruction in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina,” *International Migration* 44, no. 3 (August 2006): 141–66; Brad K. Blitz, Rosemary Sales, and Lisa Marzano, “Non-Voluntary Return? The Politics of Return to Afghanistan,” *Political Studies* 53, no. 1 (March 2005): 182–200.

⁹ See B. S. Chimni, “From Resettlement to Involuntary Repatriation: Towards a Critical History of Durable Solutions to Refugee Problems,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (October 1, 2004): 55–73, <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/23.3.55>; R. Hamlin, “Illegal Refugees: Competing Policy Ideas and the Rise of the Regime of Deterrence in American Asylum Politics,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 33–53.

structures,¹⁰ and demonstrating that many migrants do not have a home into which they can reintegrate. Still, repatriation remains the *de facto* preferred solution to refugee crises.¹¹

Yet, with notable exceptions,¹² the security and peacebuilding implications of return migration are largely under theorized in political science. This is a stark contrast to the myriad connections established between out-migration and security. For example, we know that outward population flight can regionalize conflict and open channels to transnational violence;¹³ refugee camps can prolong wars in sending-countries by providing safe haven for rebels;¹⁴ diaspora congregating abroad can influence conflict outcomes in their countries-of-origin by lobbying for, organizing, and financing conflicts at home,¹⁵ and elite political actors can manipulate outward population flows to gain strategic leverage in war.¹⁶ While important in its own right, this focus on out-migration often obscures the historic context of displacement cycles, as out-migration often cannot be fully understood without reference to previous instances of out, return, and repeat

¹⁰ Disruption of power-structures may include creating insecurity as well as peacebuilding. For case studies see Tim Allen and Hubert Morsink, eds., *When Refugees Go Home: African Experiences*, 1st American ed (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1994); Richard Black and Khalid Koser, eds., *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*, Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, v. 4 (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999); Lynellyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld, eds., *Coming Home?: Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

¹¹ On voluntary repatriation as the preferred solution see UNSG Ban Ki Moon, “Decisions of the Secretary-General -- 4 October Meeting of the Policy Committee Re Decision No. 2011/20 - Durable Solutions: Follow up to the Secretary-General’s 2009 Report on Peacebuilding.” October 4, 2011.

¹² Mathijs Van Leeuwen and Gemma Van der Haar, “Theorizing the Land-Violent Conflict Nexus,” *World Development* 78 (February 2016): 94–104; Marieke Van Houte, *Return Migration to Afghanistan: Moving Back or Moving Forward?* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, Springer, 2016).

¹³ Idean Salehyan and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Refugees and the Spread of Civil War,” *International Organization* 60, no. 02 (April 2006); Fiona B. Adamson, “Crossing Borders: International Migration and National Security,” *International Security* 31, no. 1 (July 2006): 165–99. Claire L. Adida, David D. Laitin, and Marie-Anne Valfort, *Why Muslim Integration Fails in Christian-Heritage Societies* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2016); Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, “Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 9 (August 16, 2010): 797–814; Tamar Mitts, “From Isolation to Radicalization: Anti-Muslim Hostility and Support for ISIS in the West,” *Forthcoming*, April 2017, http://tamarmitts.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/From_isolation_to_radicalization_apr2017.pdf.

¹⁴ Sarah Kenyon Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 1st ed (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007); Sarah Wayland, “Ethnonationalist Networks and Transnational Opportunities: The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora,” *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 03 (July 2004); Paul Hockenos, *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism and the Balkan Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Kelly M Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

migration. Studies which the repatriation side of this cycle primarily focus on the impact of elites returning from asylum in the Global North.¹⁷ But the vast majority of refugees (85%) live in the developing countries in the Global South near their countries-of-origin.¹⁸ To fill this lacuna in scholarship and better reflect the reality of forced migration trends, this article examines the connections between mass refugee return and security in countries-of-origin.

Understanding how mass return migration can change conflict dynamics in home-countries after civil war is particularly important for post-conflict peacebuilding. 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. Their return may aggravate old rivalries or even change the nature of social divisions.¹⁹ 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,²⁰ much of the existing theory on post-conflict state-building implicitly assumes that causes of violence do not change over the course of the war, and therefore focuses on how to build institutions to contain

¹⁷ See for example Marieke Van Houte, *Return Migration to Afghanistan*; Yuk Wah Chan and Thi Le Thu Tran, “Recycling Migration and Changing Nationalisms: The Vietnamese Return Diaspora and Reconstruction of Vietnamese Nationhood,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 7 (August 2011): 1101–17; Robert B. Potter, “Young, Gifted and Back?: Second-Generation Transnational Return Migrants to the Caribbean,” *Progress in Development Studies* 5, no. 3 (July 2005): 213–36. Though imperfect, I use the term Global North to refer to wealthier, developed, and often more democratic countries. Global South refers to less wealthy, developed, and often less democratic countries

¹⁸ UNHCR, “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017,” June 19, 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/statistics/unhcrstats/5b27be547/unhcr-global-trends-2017.html>. On the over emphasis on the spread of violence to the Global North 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, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Be-Afraid-web.pdf>.

¹⁹ On how social legacies of war, including migration, alter post-conflict social structures see Elisabeth Jean Wood, “The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (June 2008): 539–61; Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

²⁰ Milli Lake, “Building the Rule of War: Postconflict Institutions and the Micro-Dynamics of Conflict in Eastern DR Congo,” *International Organization* 71, no. 02 (2017): 281–315.

these issues.²¹ 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-non-migrant divisions as a phenomenon in post-conflict societies. I argue that return migration creates new, situational identity cleavages based on where individuals lived during the war. Because forced displacement is one of the most common sequelae of civil war, the potential to categorize groups based on collective experiences of staying or fleeing is common across post-conflict settings. I then argue that in each specific context, these latent divisions become salient and antagonistic when post-conflict institutions (such as property rights, cultural traditions, or language laws) intentionally or unintentionally provide differential dividends to individuals based on their migration history.

I use a qualitative case study of forced migration in 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 which manifested in widespread local-level 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 that the crisis might provide cover for existing returnee – non-migrant antagonism to become more violent, many Burundian returnees took the opportunity to flee again as soon as the 2015 crisis broke. Thus, previous experiences of return migration shaped both the character and timing of renewed population flight in 2015.

²¹ See for example Elizabeth M. Cousens and Charles Call, "Ending Wars and Building Peace: International Responses to War-Torn Societies," *International Studies Perspectives* 9, no. 1 (February 2008): 1–21; Caroline Hartzell, Matthew Hoddie, and Donald Rothchild, "Stabilizing the Peace after Civil War: An Investigation of Some Key Variables," *International Organization* 55, no. 1 (2001): 183–208; Cyrus Samii, "Perils or Promise of Ethnic Integration? Evidence from a Hard Case in Burundi," *The American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (2013): 558–73.

2. Theory & Empirical Approach

2.1 A Theory of Return Migration & Conflict

Conflicts between returning and non-migrant populations after civil war can appear to be idiosyncratic, rooted in the particular histories of each case, and largely tangential to broader post-conflict peacebuilding concerns. Power struggles over the national language in Kosovo, seem to have little to do with competition for government jobs in South Sudan or the epidemic of violent land conflict in Burundi. However, I argue that these issues are all related as consequences of return migration. Moreover, they can create serious security complications in countries recovering from civil war.

In this section, I offer a theory to explain the both prevalence of these return migration related divisions and their variation in form and intensity. The theory draws on two key findings from the political-anthropological and sociological literatures on political violence. First, scholars have demonstrated that experiences of forced migration can alter conceptions of identity and nationalism, change individuals' priorities in the post-war period, and create new social networks both within and across borders.²² Second, research shows 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. These local divisions often differ significantly from the primary national

²² On identity and nationalism see Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile*. On post-war priorities see Elisabeth Jean Wood, "The Social Processes of Civil War." On transnational networks see Brinkerhoff, Jennifer, "Diasporas and Development: What Role for Foreign Aid?" in *Foreign Aid and Foreign Policy: Lessons for the next Half-Century*, ed. Louis A. Picard, Robert Groelsema, and Terry F. Buss, Transformational Trends in Governance and Democracy (Armonk, N.Y: M.F. Sharpe, 2008); Yevgeny Kuznetsov, ed., *Diaspora Networks and the International Migration of Skills: How Countries Can Draw on Their Talent Abroad*, WBI Development Studies (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006); Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Alejandro Portes, Luis E. Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt, "The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 2 (January 1999): 217-37; Jeffrey H. Cohen, "Remittance Outcomes and Migration: Theoretical Contests, Real Opportunities," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 40, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 88-112.

cleavage viewed as the broader cause of the war, such as religion, ethnicity, or national political grievances.²³

Starting from these premises, I offer the following theory: 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 versus international),²⁴ host country (region, political relationship to country-of-origin, language, etc.), or time period (e.g. era of flight and/or duration of exile). For 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. Because most civil wars result in some form of forced displacement, the opportunity to categorize individuals according to “those who stayed” and “those who left and returned” is common across post-conflict contexts.

Second, these cleavages become more salient when post-conflict institutions create real or perceived 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. Differences in outcomes for non-migrants and returnees may result from intentional policy design, or ambiguities in interpretation and implementation. For example, national

²³ Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations 115 (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Stathis N. Kalyvas, “The Ontology of ‘Political Violence’: Action and Identity in Civil Wars,” *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 03 (September 2003): 475–94; Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²⁴ For the purposes of this article I limit the inquiry to groups displaced across borders. 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 and then returns due to the stark differences of experience in different countries, and the opportunity for narratives of competition over nationalism and citizenship.

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, 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 non-migrants, 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, they adjust their future political and social behavior 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 non-migrants deliberately keeping them from power. These return migrants may change their behavior in other aspects of political, economic, and social life accordingly, perhaps only socializing with other repatriates. As with other types of identity divisions, elites may strategically use migration-based cleavages to their advantage. Societies where institutions do not provide differential dividends to non-migrants 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 non-migrants will be stagnant, but allows for change depending on interaction with institutions and elites over time. Tensions between returnees and non-migrants are therefore best understood on a scale from absence, to peaceful delineation of categories, hostility, and 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-non-migrant rivalries.

2.2 Research Design

The theory presented here was developed inductively based on observations in South Sudan between 2011 and 2013. I then use an in-depth ethnographic case study of return-migration following Burundi's 1993-2005 civil war to evaluate the theory against evidence in a second case.²⁵ In a case study approach, theory construction and theory development are often intertwined, and this project is no exception.²⁶ However, by first developing the primary theoretical constructs in South Sudan, and then conducting the ethnographic study in a different context, I am able to get better analytical leverage to assess whether the expected dynamics appear outside the conditions in which they were originally developed.

Both the case selection and methodology offer a number of advantages. Process tracing and thick description using ethnographic data are effective tools for assessing evidence against theory-generated expectations and eliminating alternative explanations.²⁷ This type of inquiry is especially suited to documenting and evaluating complex meso- and micro-level dynamics over time such as the intricate interactions between return migration, community identity, institutions, and violence

²⁵ Stephen Van Evera notes that in a single case study "process tracing often offers strong tests of a theory." Understanding the antecedent conditions necessary for the theory to operate then requires examining other cases. Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methodology for Students of Political Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Defense and Arms Control Studies Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996). pp 65-66.

²⁶ James Mahoney, "Process Tracing and Historical Explanation," *Security Studies* 24, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 200-218.

²⁷ On case studies see Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methodology for Students of Political Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Defense and Arms Control Studies Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996); James Mahoney, "The Logic of Process Tracing Tests in the Social Sciences," *Sociological Methods & Research* 41, no. 4 (November 2012): 570-97; Alexander I. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, BCSIA Studies in International Security (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005).

On thick description see David Collier, Henry E. Brady, and Jason Seawright, "Sources of Leverage in Causal Inference: Toward an Alternative View of Methodology," in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, ed. Henry E. Brady and David Collier, 2nd ed (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

over time which are central to my theory.²⁸ 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 processes 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.²⁹ Additionally, the semi-structured interviews, repeat interactions, and metadata allow the researchers to identify and apprehend why behaviors which may seemingly deviate from cost-benefit analyses make sense given certain historical and cultural contexts.

This metadata is especially important when working with communities which have recently experienced the type of violence that leads to mass forced migration. Individuals in these areas are likely to be skeptical of outsiders, even after the war is over, and key informants will likely have participated in or witnessed violence. Analyzing metadata, such as dissimulation or non-verbal communication like silences, gestures, and tone of voice, can reveal useful information about how social and political dynamics inform what interviewees are willing to say and how they prefer to portray themselves to an outsider.³⁰

Burundi is a particularly valuable case to study return migration. The country has experienced repeated cycles of forced migration which allows for the investigation of my theoretical expectations about differentiation among subsets of return migrants who fled to different destinations, at different times, or to different types of host countries. The timing was such that

²⁸ Sarah Parkinson, "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 03 (August 2013): 420.

²⁹ Yanow, "Dear Author, Dear Reader: The Third Hermeneutic in Writing and Reviewing Ethnography," in *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, ed. Edward Schatz (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson, "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 03 (August 2013): 418–32; Lorraine Bayard de Volo and Edward Schatz, "From the Inside out: Ethnographic Methods in Political Research," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 2 (2004): 267–71; Lisa Wedeen, "Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (May 2010): 255–72.

³⁰ Lee Ann Fujii, "Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 2 (February 16, 2010): 231–41.

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.

Importantly, Burundi is also a hard case for my theory. Unlike in South Sudan, migration from Burundi was highly correlated with pre-existing ethnic cleavages: Burundian Hutus were more likely to flee to Tanzania and Burundian Tutsi were more likely to stay in-country or flee to Rwanda. Therefore, in expectation return-migration of refugees would be more likely to exacerbate these pre-existing ethnic divisions rather than produce new, cross cutting, migration-related divisions.

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.

2.3 Confirming and Disconfirming Evidence

Having developed the core aspects of my theory in South Sudan, I outlined a set of indicators for evaluating how well the argument held in other environments. A month-long exploratory trip to Burundi allowed for both preliminary deductive evaluation of the theory and additional inductive refinement. In particular, on this preliminary trip I observed that land governance was the likely intervening institution at play reifying identity categories as opposed to my observations about language laws in South Sudan. I then returned to Burundi (and later Tanzania) to conduct the primary data collection for the ethnographic case study. Below, I outline the indicators I used to evaluate data on both the preliminary and primary data collection trips that would further confirm or

disconfirm my theory against alternatives. Outlining these expectations was important in guarding against my own potential confirmation-biases while collecting and analyzing the ethnographic data.

Based on my theory, I expected to see new group categorizations 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, there could be additional delineation of the returnee group according to which time-period they fled or which country they fled to. Further, if these divisions were particularly strong, I expected that competition between these groups would converge around institutions that were perceived to provide different outcomes to migrants and non-migrants.

If my theory did 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, political party, or other local-level rivalries as the primary cleavages in their community. Evidence that that returnee-resident labels were simply used as a way to couch references to pre-existing divisions, like ethnicity, would also suggest that migration-related divisions were less important.

I then used the 2015 national electoral crisis to further interrogate the *salience* of return-related divisions in society. Evidence from my two trips to Burundi prior to the crisis established that tension along the return migration based cleavage centered on land ownership. Therefore, if these divisions were particularly salient I expected Burundian refugees to cite land conflict between returnees and non-migrants or other consequences of their previous return as among their reasons for flight. I also anticipated that some Burundians would have tried to exit Burundi before the opening of the borders following the 2015 conflict. If the return-migration cleavage was less salient, I expected Burundian refugees to 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 of war as their primary reason for fleeing as opposed to issues related to their prior return. An absence of migration, or attempted migration, prior to 2015 would also indicate that the local-level issues related to migration were less important as compared to the national political party divisions.

2.4 Data Collection

Data for this project were gathered over the course of nine months of research on both sides of the Burundi-Tanzania border including 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).³¹ 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.

I conducted the research in three primary area: (1) Nyarugusu Refugee camp in 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 first camp to receive refugees from Burundi in Tanzania when conflict in Burundi broke out in 2015. As refugees were confined to the camp, and living in close proximity, interview subjects were readily available and often eager to talk. To ensure

³¹ This project was conducted under Columbia University IRB protocol AAAN7454. In Burundi, I obtained approval from the Ministry of the Interior. In Tanzania, I conducted research with a permit from the Ministry of Home Affairs to enter the refugee camps, re-approved monthly in 2015 and 2016. Normally international research is approved by Tanzania's Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH). However, because of upcoming elections, the COSTECH review board was not meeting and I was advised that the government may suppress research on refugee issues. Instead, my local partner organization advised that they take the research project under their umbrella, which did not require COSTECH approval. While this sufficed in practice, I wanted to ensure the Tanzanian government approved of the project, so upon returning to Tanzania to conduct follow-up interviews in 2017, I applied and received COSTECH approval (No. 2017-287-NA-2017-139). On the difficulties and ethical considerations in obtaining local research approvals see [Kate Cronin-Furman and Milli Lake, "Ethics Abroad: Fieldwork in Fragile and Violent Contexts," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51, no. 03 \(July 2018\): 607-14.](#)

that I was able to gather data camp-wide, I devised a random walk procedure, stratified by residential zone, and conducted both randomly selected and non-random informant interviews in all the Burundian zones open at the time.³²

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 outed 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 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.

2.5 Positionality & Bias

The primary aspect of my positionality which could have biased the data was that as a young, white, American, female many interviewees assumed that I was humanitarian aid worker.³³ While traveling in NGO vehicles could certainly exacerbate this issue, I took a number of precautions to combat

³² For the randomized interviews in the refugee camps, in each zone I conducted an estimated census of shelters: I counted the shelters in one block of the zone, and 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, snowball referred informants, and with Burundian and Tanzanian staff of NGOs in the camps among others.

³³ On positionality see [Dyora Yanow, “Dear Author, Dear Reader: The Third Hermeneutic in Writing and Reviewing Ethnography.”](#) On perceptions of researchers as aid workers or missionaries [Elisabeth Jean Wood, “The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones,”](#) *Qualitative Sociology* 29, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 373–86.

this perception. First, I limited my use of NGO vehicles as much as possible. In Burundi in 2014 and 2015, and Ilagala village in Tanzania, I hired my own driver most days. However, I was required to travel in an NGO vehicle to the refugee camps in Tanzania. In camp I therefore limited my association with the NGOs in other ways: I walked through the camp to conduct interviews rather than use an NGO vehicle; I never wore an NGO badge or shirt with a logo, which all NGO staff were required to do, and I repeatedly emphasized in my informed consent process that I was not with an NGO, nor with a government agency, and that in agreeing to speak with me, I could not offer any aid.³⁴

Still, because most of the white women in the area were aid workers, I am conscious in analyzing interview data that participants may have still have thought that I worked with an NGO, and therefore framed their stories to better elicit aid. I approached narratives that exclusively placed interviewees and their families as victims (for example within the context of a land conflict where they may also have been perpetrators of violence) with a measure of caution. However, what was most important for my theory was not culpability in violence or victimhood, but who interviewees identified as the competing sides in conflicts: did they say they were attacked by other Hutus, by Tutsi, or did they frame the conflict as occurring between returnees and non-migrants? Therefore, even responses intended to establish interviewees' deservedness of humanitarian aid are unlikely to have biased the analysis of the existence and salience of return migration-related situational identities.

3. Overview of Conflict and Forced Migration in Burundi

While there have been many instances of forced migration in Burundi since independence, I focus on three primary cycles: First, in 1972 a selective genocide in Burundi, in which the predominantly

³⁴ On occasion, if respondents in the refugee camp indicated they were facing a specific issue I referred them to the NGO in camp which provided the appropriate care.

Tutsi government organized the killing of an estimated 200,000-300,000 Hutu civilians, sent at least 217,000 Burundians across the border to refugee camps in Tanzania (known as the “Old Settlements”).³⁵ Policymakers refer to this group of refugees as the “1972 caseload.” Some of this population returned to Burundi in the late 1980s, while others remained in Tanzania.

The second mass displacement began in 1993 with the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye, and spiked again in 1996 through 1997 at the start of the civil war. Again, hundreds of thousands of Burundians fled to Tanzanian refugee camps and villages. These refugees were housed in a different set of refugee camps known as the “New Settlements.” The international community and Burundian policy-makers refer to this cohort as the “1993 caseload.” Like in 1972, refugee flight in the late 1990s was ethnic in character: the majority of Burundians fleeing were Hutu and congregated in Tanzania. Tutsi civilians were more likely to stay in-country, though many were displaced internally and some fled to Rwanda. Some of the so-called “1993 caseload” had *also* fled in 1972, spending only a handful of years back in Burundi before fleeing again. The “1993 caseload” label is therefore a misnomer: it more accurately refers to refugees who lived in the “New Settlements.”

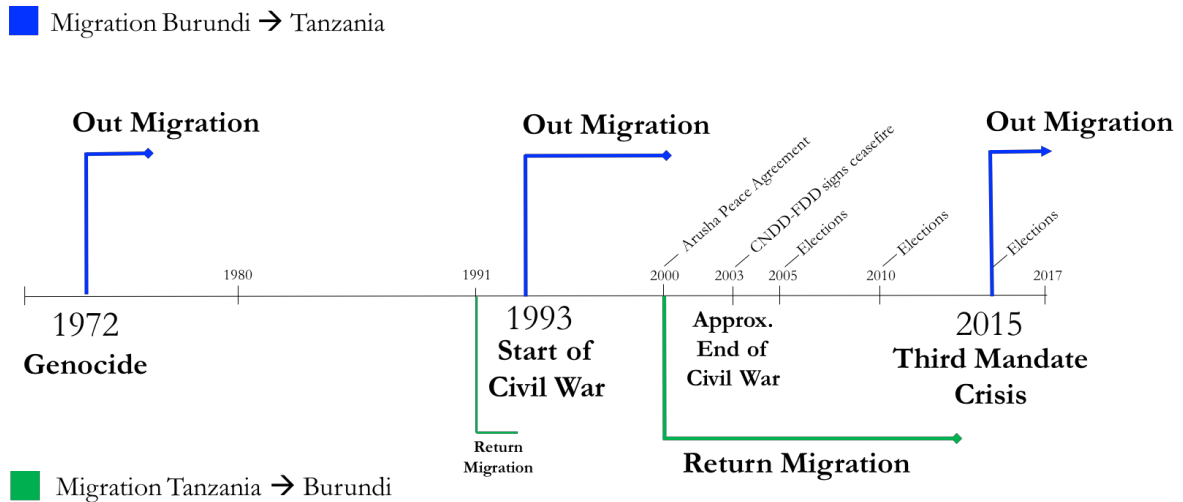
Finally, in 2015, amid a renewed political crisis more than 413,000 Burundians fled to neighboring countries.³⁶ More than half of these refugees fled to Tanzania, while the other half escaped to Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda.

³⁵ René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa, National and Ethnic Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 129. UNHCR, “Repatriation of 1972 Burundian Refugees Hits 50,000 Mark,” September 16, 2009, 2, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2009/9/4ab0db636/repatriation-1972-burundian-refugees-hits-50000-mark.html>. These estimates do not include urban refugees. For discussion of urban refugees in Tanzania see Marc Sommers, *Fear in Bongoland: Burundi Refugees in Urban Tanzania*, Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, v. 8 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001). On the history of displacement in Burundi see Prisca Mburu Kamungi, Johnstone Summit Oketch, and Chris Huggins, “Land Access and the Return and Resettlement of IDPs and Refugees in Burundi,” in *From the Ground up: Land Rights, Conflict and Peace in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Christopher Huggins and Jenny Clover (Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2005).

³⁶ Reflects peak refugee count in March 2018. UNHCR, “Operations Portal: Burundi Situation,” accessed October 6, 2018, <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/burundi?id=212>.

Figure 1: Timeline of Mass Migrations between Burundi and Tanzania

1972-2016



Importantly, between 1972 and the end of the Burundian civil war in 2005, government agents and civilians who remained in-country occupied and expropriated land left behind by Burundians in exile.³⁷

With the civil war drawing to a close, 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. Some of these refugees returned by choice, others by force. Tens of thousands of the Burundians living in the camps housing the “1993 caseload” refugees did not want to go back. Many feared their land had been taken and they would have no place to which to return.³⁸ However, in 2007, Tanzania announced it would be closing down the “New Settlements” housing these refugees. Some of the Burundians in these camps found ways to remain in Tanzania illegally rather than repatriating, often living in small towns like Ilagala and farming for Tanzanian villagers. In

³⁷ On government expropriation of land and strategic elite land-grabbing see Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka and An Ansoms, “Arène Foncière Au Burundi: Mieux Comprendre Les Rapports de Force,” in *L’Afrique Des Grands Lacs: Annuaire 2011-2012*, ed. Filip Reyntjens, Stef Vandeginste, and Marijke Verpoorten (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2012), 37–58.

³⁸ Author Interviews 2015-2016

2012, Tanzania closed down the last of the New Settlements, forcing the remaining 37,000 refugees to return to Burundi through a process called “Orderly Repatriation.”³⁹

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 to Tanzania. By 2003, ten years after the 1993 civil war began, the UN estimated that a total of 500,000 Burundian refugees were living in official camps in Tanzania from both the 1972 and 1993 out-migrations. The total number of Burundians living in Tanzania was likely much greater as an estimated 300,000 Burundian refugees lived illegally in the Tanzanian countryside and urban centers.⁴⁰ Between 2002 and 2012, the UN has estimated that close to 500,000 refugees returned to Burundi.⁴¹ Though it is not clear exactly how many from each caseload returned, of the 1972 population still living in the Old Settlements approximately 160,000 applied for naturalization in Tanzania and 55,000 ‘expressed desire’ to repatriate. However, this number likely underestimates the total number of 1972 caseload returnees, who may have returned prior to concerted effort to close the camps, or refugees who were not in camps and returned during the two interwar periods.⁴²

4. Return Migration to Burundi: The Making of “*Les Rapatriés*” & “*Les Résidents*”

³⁹ Approximately 2700 Burundians were allowed to remain as individual asylum seekers. “Consolidated Inter-Agency Information Note: On the Closure of the Mtabila Camp in the United Republic of Tanzania and the Return to Burundi of the Former Refugees” (International Organization for Migration (IOM), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP), October 15, 2012), <http://www.unhcr.org/50a5ff63c.pdf>. 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. See Amnesty International, “Burundian Refugees in Tanzania Intimidated into Returning Home,” 2009, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2009/06/burundian-refugees-tanzania-intimidated-returning-home-20090629/>; Rema Ministries, “An Urgent Briefing on the Situation of Burundian Refugees in Mtabila Camp in Tanzania” (International Refugee Rights Initiative, August 10, 2012), <http://www.refugee-rights.org/Assets/PDFs/2012/Mtabila%20FINAL.pdf>.

⁴⁰ International Crisis Group, “Fields of Bitterness (I): Land Reform in Burundi,” 2014, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/burundi/fields-bitterness-i-land-reform-burundi>.

⁴¹ Sonja Fransen and Katie Kuschminder, “Back to the Land: The Long-Term Challenges of Refugee Return and Reintegration in Burundi,” New Issues in Refugee Research (UNHCR, 2012), <http://www.unhcr.org/5040ad9e9.pdf>; UNHCR, “UNHCR Burundi Country Briefing,” 2009, http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/_assets/files/field_protection_clusters/Burundi/files/UNHCR_BDI_Country%20briefing_EN_AUGUST09-EN.pdf.

⁴² Sonja Fransen and Katie Kuschminder, “Back to the Land”.

After the 1993-2005 civil war, experts worried that the mass return of Hutu refugees from Tanzania to Burundi would provoke ethnic tensions and destabilize the peacebuilding process.⁴³ Return migration did indeed incite widespread local-level violence in Burundi, but these conflicts were not simply the result of reignited ethnic rivalries. Rather, return migration also created new cross-cutting divisions in Burundi between returnees and non-migrants. In section 4.1, I use ethnographic evidence of group labeling, attribution of group characteristics, and narratives of group competition to show how these displacement-related divisions were distinct from, though often operated in alliance with, pre-existing ethnic cleavages. I then demonstrate in section 4.2 how institutions, namely those governing land, reified and exacerbated these migration-based divisions.

4.1 Presence of Migration-Based Divisions

Group Labeling: By 2008 Makamba Province (Burundi's southernmost district which shares a border with Tanzania) housed the largest concentration of refugee returnees in the country.⁴⁴ In 2014, several years after the return had completed, villagers in Makamba still identified groups in their community by their previous migration history. Informants described two primary groups: first there were the '*Ababunguste*' (Kirundi for 'those who came back'), also known by the French term '*les rapatriés*' (the repatriates). Second were the '*Abasangwa*' (Kirundi for 'those who were here and welcomed others'), or '*les résidents*' (the residents) in French.⁴⁵ 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

⁴³ International Crisis Group, "Réfugiés et Déplacés Au Burundi: Désamorcer La Bombe Foncière," October 7, 2003, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/central-africa/burundi/refugees-and-displaced-persons-burundi-defusing-land-time-bomb>; Mathijs Van Leeuwen, "Crisis or Continuity?": Judith Vorrath, "From Refugee Crisis to Reintegration Crisis? The Consequences of Repatriation to (Post-) Transition Burundi," *L'Afrique Des Grands Lacs Annuaire 2007-2008* (March 2008): 109-217.

⁴⁴ UNHCR, *Map of Burundi: Number of Returnees per Province in 2008*, 31 August 2008, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/48ce516c2.html>.

⁴⁵ For convenience, in this article I use the French terms.

to solidifying the time-related subdivisions, as they treated the two “caseloads” differently, and held strongly to the narrative that the “1972 caseload” needed more aid reintegrating because they had been away for so long, whereas the “1993 caseload” did not have a hard time coming back, as they had 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 Swahili term “Sabini na mbili” meaning “1972” to derogatorily refer to returnees as Tanzanian (Swahili is the Tanzanian national language). This term was often applied regardless of whether the returnees in question actually fled in 1972. Individuals also called returnees “Tanzanians” or “Congolese” to imply that returnees were not legitimately “Burundian.”

Attribution of group characteristics: Respondents also distinguished *rapatriés* from *résidents* by certain key characteristics. Having lived for abroad decades 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 non-migrants 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. Narratives also 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."⁴⁶

Importantly, the *résident-rapatrié* division was not simply another way to talk about prior ethnic relations. The two categories certainly overlapped, as *rapatriés* were primarily Hutu and *résidents* were thought to be primarily Tutsi. So, in some cases politicians used these stereotypes of refugees as Hutu and internally displaced persons or residents as Tutsi to provoke prior ethnic rivalries to their own advantage.⁴⁷ However, in actuality while returnees from Tanzania were primarily Hutu, there were Hutu, Tutsi and Twa *résidents* – they just had to be in Burundi to “receive” those returning from abroad. Many of the violent conflicts between *résidents* and *rapatriés* pitted Hutu against Hutu. In fact, migration-related divisions not only cut across ethnicity, but frequently divided families where members had lived on either side of the border during the war. As such, 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.”⁴⁸

Thus, return-migration to Burundi had created a new set of community divisions based on where individuals were during the war. These delineations by label and alleged visible, auditory and cultural characteristics are indicative of the creation new migration-based situational identities. As one respondent (a returnee from the 1990s) put it: “[It is] us, the residents, and the 72s.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Author Interview 02/10/2015

⁴⁷ This was more frequent in the years immediately following the Arusha accords and accounts of return prior to 2005. See Royer, Arnaud, “Les Personnes Déplacées Du Burundi et Du Rwanda,” in *Crises Extrêmes: Face Aux Massacres, Aux Guerres Civiles et Aux Génocides*, ed. Marc Le Pape, Johanna Siméant, and Claudine Vidal, Recherches (Paris: Découverte, 2006), 171–87; Julien Nimubona, “Mémoires des réfugiés et déplacés du Burundi: lecture critique de la politique publique de réhabilitation,” in *Exilés, réfugiés, déplacés en Afrique centrale et orientale*, ed. André Guichaoua (Paris: Karthala, 2004).

⁴⁸ Author Interview 02/10/2015

⁴⁹ Author Interview 02/24/2015

Social & Political Tension: While the creation of new identity groups does not automatically entail conflict or differential treatment, many Burundians described segregation in their communities 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 come to the family's home to mourn with them, usually a community-wide practice. One woman explained with much derision that when her husband died, the *résidents* in her neighborhood just went to go drink beer instead.⁵⁰ Other informants in Burundi reported that a local administrator would call a meeting, and either not invite or not inform returnees about the gathering. Some "1993 caseload" 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* claimed 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 government and international community preferred returnees when distributing aid. Said one *résident*, "It's because the government is not fair. They always want to help the people who repatriated and those who remained inside they see as meaningless."⁵¹ The trope of government favoritism in particular reflected the fact that the ruling party, the *Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie–Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD-FDD), 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. The party therefore tended to favor returnees from 1972.

⁵⁰ Author Interview 12/03/2015.

⁵¹ Author Interview 02/10/2015

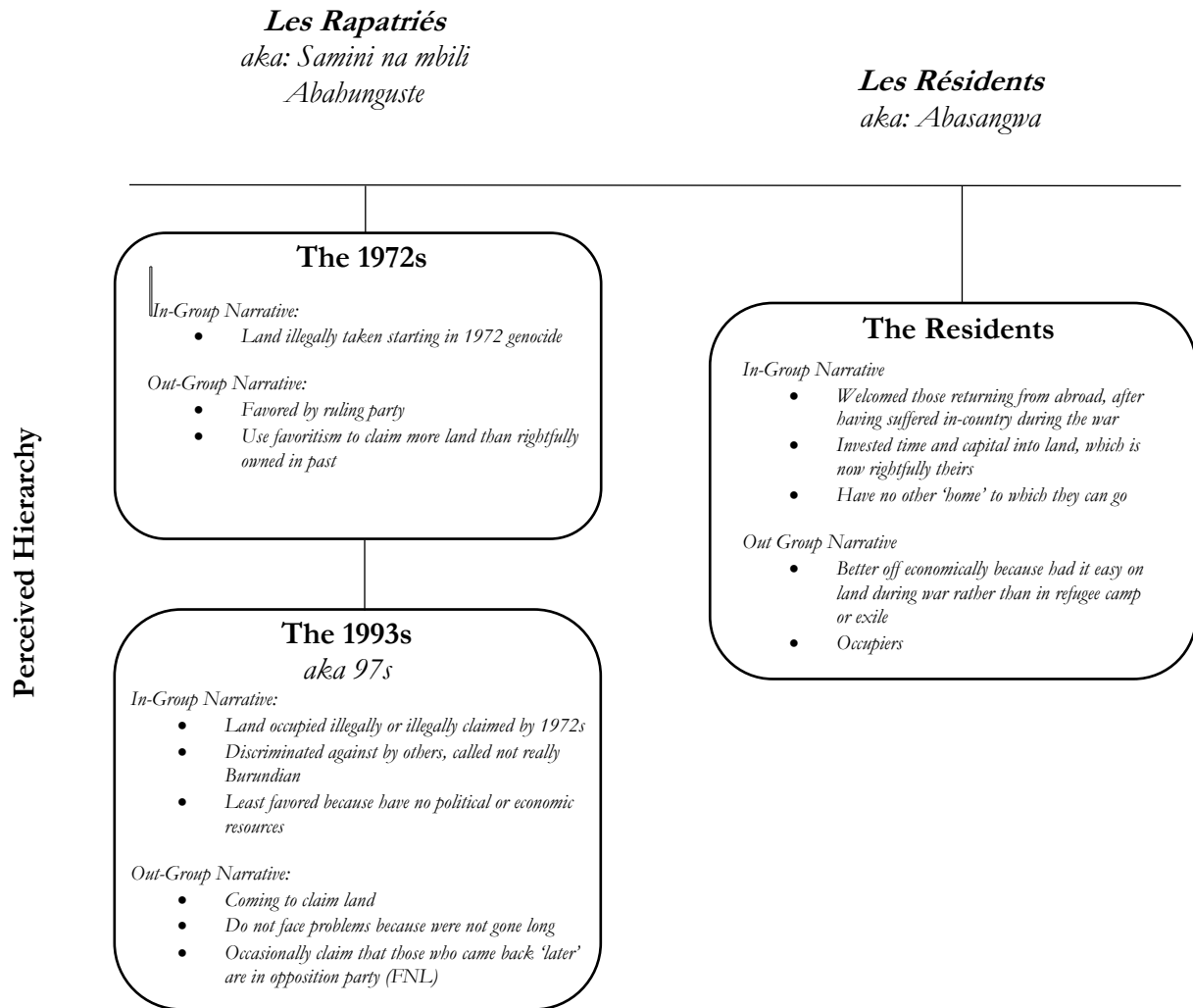
Land Conflict: In addition to these sources of segregation and animosity, tensions between *résidents* and *rapatriés* were most evident in conflict over land. An estimated 90% of Burundians depend on smallholder agriculture for a living.⁵² Therefore, combined with rapid population growth, the mass population return put immense pressure on the country's most desired resource. 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 posed a potential threat to non-migrants. 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.⁵³

However, relations did not have to be this bad. As I will demonstrate in the following section, conflicts between *rapatriés* and *résidents* became as severe and widespread as they did in part because institutions governing land and property rights provided different dividends to individuals depending on their migration history. 1972-returnees tended to fare better than both *résidents* and 1993-returnees, as the ruling party promoted property restitution for crimes committed during the 1972 genocide. The 1993-returnees were least advantaged land competition: they did not have the favor of the ruling party as compared to 1972-*rapatriés*, and without political capital 1993-*rapatriés* had little power to evict *résidents* from a disputed property. For their part, *résidents* claimed that having lived on the land for over 20 years, and investing time and money into planting crops and building houses on the property, that it was rightfully theirs.

⁵² World Bank, "Country Overview: Burundi," October 31, 2017, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/burundi/overview>.

⁵³ See [International Crisis Group](https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/burundi/fields-bitterness-i), "Fields of Bitterness (I)"; [International Crisis Group](https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/burundi/fields-bitterness-ii-restitution-and-reconciliation-burundi), "Fields of Bitterness (II): Restitution and Reconciliation in Burundi," 2014, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/burundi/fields-bitterness-ii-restitution-and-reconciliation-burundi>.

Figure 2: Migration Related Divisions in Burundi



4.2 Interaction with Institutions

The primary institutions contributing to the widespread violent conflict between *rapatriés* and *résidents* in Burundi were formal and informal land governance practices. 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 non-migrants who were not related,

rapatrié-résident divisions within kinship groups show how powerful return-migration's impact was on Burundian communities.

If informal inheritance practices created a permissive environment for intra-familial *résident-rapatrié* conflict, the formal institutions governing land and property rights, including a newly created federal land commission called the Commission Nationale des Terres et Autres Biens (CNTB), had an even greater impact. While the CNTB was not the only formal institution governing land, by 2014 it had become the focal institution in the politics of return and resettlement.⁵⁴ The CNTB was widely known in rural areas and my interviewees regularly cited the commission by name without prompting. Therefore, to understand the role of institutions in the construction of migration-based situational identities, I focus on the institution most salient in respondents' accounts of returnee – non-migrant relations.

The CNTB was created by mandate of the peace agreement ending Burundi's civil war. The Arusha Accords stipulated that the government encourage the repatriation and reintegration of refugees and create a special commission to adjudicate land disputes arising from return - specifically those from "old caseload" returnees.⁵⁵ 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 *résidents* and *rapatriés*. While this was not fully satisfactory to either party, some villagers were satisfied with the policy.

However, this sharing policy was not universally upheld. People could appeal CNTB rulings through the regular court system, which often reversed the CNTB's decisions. In other cases,

⁵⁴ On other institutions governing land see Tracy Dexter and Philippe Ntahombaye, "The Role of Informal Justice Systems in Fostering the Rule of Law in Post-Conflict Situations: The Case of Burundi" (Geneva: HD Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, July 2005), <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/26971/CaseofBurundi.pdf>. On "Peace Villages" see Jean-Benoît Falisse and René Claude Niyonkuru, "Social Engineering for Reintegration: Peace Villages for the 'Uprooted' Returnees in Burundi," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 28, no. 3 (September 2015): 388–411, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fev002>.

⁵⁵ "Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement" (2000), Protocol I, Chapter 2, Article 7.25.C

returnees, especially those from the nineties who had less political and economic capital, were too scared to take their claims to court for fear of retribution. Moreover, it was generally easier for *résidents* to maintain occupation than to enforce an eviction. *Résidents*, having earned livelihoods from the land for decades, tended to have more resources that allowed them to get by in a stand-off 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, 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 forced to leave the disputed property, *résidents* disagreed, claiming that having lived for decades in the area, they maintained no other home. Taking matters to the extreme, Bambonanire's 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 non-migrants, and exacerbated violence between community members and against the CNTB itself. As many villages describe it, hostility between *résidents* and *rapatriés* over land worsened with the new institutional design. As one *résident* claimed, "The CNTB is the one that has killed everything. Because before these [people] would share fifty-fifty... But now [the CNTB] gives all."⁵⁶ Where previous policies were less

⁵⁶ Author Interview 02/24/2015

detrimental to returnee – non-migrant 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. As one respondent explained, with the new policy relationships between non-migrant 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."⁵⁷

With the CNTB exacerbating already volatile land conflicts, communities began rebelling against the commission. Villagers attempted 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 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 announced a nationwide suspension of CNTB activity.⁵⁸

Beyond the violent conflict, the economic 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 financial 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.

In addition to land governance, respondents also described other institutions as discriminating against individuals based on their migration history. For example, returnees regularly cited disadvantages in accessing education because the Burundian system taught in French and Kirundi while they had studied in English and Swahili in Tanzania. In other cases, individuals

⁵⁷ Author Interview 02/23/2015

⁵⁸ RFI, "Burundi: Le Président Nkurunziza Limoge Son Chef Des Services Secrets," February 19, 2015, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20150219-burundi-president-pierre-nkurunziza-limoge-son-chef-services-secrets-cndd-fdd-hutu-godefroid-niyombare>).

assigned this narrative of discrimination without the same concrete evidence of differential treatment. For example, Bonifax⁵⁹ – 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 employment in Burundi. In this instance Bonifax’s qualifications earned in Tanzania may not have been equivalent to the diploma he sought in Burundi. But according to Bonifax and others, discrimination against returnees was to blame: “I think it’s because we are repatriates.”⁶⁰ Bonifax later went on to explain that issues between *résidents* and *rapatriés* persist in his community because they were still having land conflicts, and in some cases having to give back land.⁶¹ This account therefore illustrates my theory’s proposition of an endogenous cycle where new local divisions spurred by population return are aggravated by institutions which provide differential dividends based on where individuals lived during wartime, such that individuals continue to interpret other community interactions through the same returnee – non-migrant frame.

4.3 Alternative Explanations

One could argue that resource scarcity and/or poor land governance are sufficient to explain the widespread local-level violence in post-civil war Burundi. Land in Burundi is scarce yet extremely valuable. So, regardless of institutions, one may expect competition for property rights. I agree that resource competition was an essential contributing factor to the local-level violence in Burundi’s transition period. However, resource competition alone is not a sufficient explanation for the character and persistence of returnee – non-migrant conflict in Burundi as the content of the land governance regime appears to have played a role. Given the same resource scarcity, returnee – non-

⁵⁹ All names of respondents were changed to protect confidentiality of informants.

⁶⁰ Author Interview 02/23/2015

⁶¹ Ibid.

migrant tensions were worse under the second iteration of the CNTB than they were under the initial policy of land-sharing between residents and repatriates.

A land governance-based explanation would suggest that longstanding structural issues concerning land rights in Burundi could explain the local violence in Burundi after the civil war regardless of migration.⁶² To this end Van Leeuwen (2010) points to the fact that return migration did not exacerbate ethnic relations between Hutu *rapatriés* and Tutsi *résidents*. Instead violent local conflicts in Burundi after the civil war largely occurred between family members, or were the result of state expropriation during the war.⁶³ He argues that migration was not a primary contributing factor and therefore analyzing the violence through the lens of land conflict, not return migration, sufficiently explains the observed dynamics.⁶⁴ I agree that land governance is one of the primary factors which contributed to the violence in post-war Burundi. In fact, this is central to my theory. However, my data suggest that we cannot discount the role of return migration in this process. In my interviews, conflicts between family members were often *also* characterized as conflict between returnees and non-migrants and frequently, though not always, interviewees used the language of migration identity, e.g. “the one who stayed” to describe problems within their family.⁶⁵ Moreover, while the violence between returnees 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; they were also evident in descriptions of social segregation, claims of legitimate citizenship, and perceived discrimination in education. Limiting our understanding of the

⁶² Van Leeuwen, “Crisis or Continuity”

⁶³ In a 2014, the International Crisis Group (ICG) made a similar claim that, “Seventy-two percent of conflicts submitted to judicial courts consisted of ordinary land conflicts, while only four percent were tied to returns.” International Crisis Group, “Fields of Bitterness (I).” However, the official government statistics ICG cites from 2009 would reflect estimates of cases in the regular courts *after* the establishment of the CNTB in 2006. The CNTB took over primary jurisdiction on all cases of land conflict between returning and non-migrant populations. Though some of the CNTB cases were then appealed through the regular judicial system, this statistic cited by ICG speaks more to the pervasiveness of land issues *generally* than to the lack of land issues provoked by return, which would have been calculated as CNTB cases, not judicial cases.

⁶⁴ Van Leeuwen and Van der Haar, “Theorizing the Land-Violent Conflict Nexus.”

⁶⁵ Van Leeuwen (2010) and Van Leeuwen and Haartsen (2005) suggest that this overlap does indeed occur, but considers it regular family conflict as opposed to return-induced.

rapatrié-résident divide to land conflict would preclude the identification of a wider pattern of conflict between returnees and non-migrants in Burundi and in other countries where the institutional environment rendered a different issue as the primary source of competition between migrants and non-migrants.

5. The Legacy of Return: Who Fled & Who Stayed in 2015

In 2014, given the violent conflict over land and extreme poverty, there was a significant population in Makamba – especially among the 1993-caseload returnees – who wanted to leave Burundi. 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: “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.”⁶⁶

At the same time, Burundi was approaching another nationwide conflict. The country was scheduled for a presidential election in 2015, the first in which a president would face the constitutional two-term limit envisioned by the Arusha peace accords. In April 2015, the ruling CNDD-FDD party declared that sitting President Pierre Nkurunziza would seek a third term in office, or “third mandate.” This announcement set off 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 in Tanzania daily.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Author Interview 8/4/2014

⁶⁷ These are the earliest publicly available data via UNHCR, “Burundian Refugees in Tanzania - Daily Statistics” (UNHCR, July 10, 2015), http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Tanzania_Registrationstatistics_10Jul2015.pdf.

Observers initially thought that the divisions characterizing who fled and who stayed in 2015 reflected the political nature of the conflict, with allies of the ruling political party staying and civilians who feared the CNDD-FDD, or were allied with opposition parties, fleeing.⁶⁸ However, in the following section, I will argue that prior experiences of return also influenced who stayed, who left, and when they left in 2015.

5.1 Who Fleed? Threats of violence along both local and national cleavages

Refugees' explanations for what forced them to flee clearly elucidate the existence of two types of security issues in 2015 which operated both separately and in combination: the national level crisis political crisis and local conflicts related to previous return migration. Refugees' reasons for flight fell into three categories: (1) those who emphasized local level issues related to their previous return such as land insecurity, discrimination and extreme poverty (25.6%); (2) those who emphasized the national unrest, citing fear of recruitment/political targeting, direct experience of torture, etc. (28%); and (3) those who described a combination of the two (46.4%).

Those in the first category emphasized land conflict or related issues as the preponderant threat. These refugees were more likely to be repeat-refugees from the 1993-cohort. For example, in an interview with two women who fled early on in the crisis, 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."⁶⁹ 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 "New Settlements" in 2012. According

⁶⁸ The destination countries were still correlated with ethnicity, with primarily Hutu congregating in Tanzania and Tutsi in Rwanda.

⁶⁹ Author Interview 11/26/2015

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.”⁷⁰

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. When I asked them about the “third mandate crisis” the second woman looked at me with an expression completely absent of recognition and said, “I do not understand.” I explained about Peeta (as President Nkurunziza is colloquially known) running for a third term, and she replied “[We have] Nothing to hear about Peeta.”⁷¹

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 each other based on land.”⁷² Another woman said she left simply because, “We had no lands and nowhere to cultivate.”⁷³

Refugees in category two 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, 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 (*meaning 2015 electoral crisis*) they were coming to finish me. At 22.00hrs that night I made the decision to leave.” He later went on to describe how the

⁷⁰ Author Interview 11/26/2015

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Author Interview 12/8/2015

⁷³ Author Interview 12/21/2015

main problems in Burundi were with the ruling party – which he had been asked to join and had refused.⁷⁴

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].”⁷⁵ Refugees who fell into this category 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.

Responses in category three (3) cited *both* local-level issues related to their previous return *and* the 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, and separately expressed fear that the country was about to descend into full-scale war. More commonly, however, respondents saw the two as intertwined: 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 in CNDD-FDD’s feared youth militia, the *Imbonerakure*, and therefore able to use the cover the ruling party’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.”⁷⁶ This response is

⁷⁴ Author Interview 11/27/2015

⁷⁵ Author Interview 02/26/2016

⁷⁶ Author Interview 12/10/2015

consistent with those of *rapatriés* interviewed in Burundi before the third mandate crisis broke who worried the electoral crisis would exacerbate existing land conflicts.

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 (*meaning support the third term*), [they are] to kill him."⁷⁷ 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 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 *Forces Nationales de Libération* or 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 affiliated with the FNL even before the 2015 crisis broke, using the logic that only FNL loyalists 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 CNTB. For example, one respondent explained, "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."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Author Interview 1/19/2016

⁷⁸ Author Interview 1/19/2016

The ways in which refugees’ spoke about these different divisions operating in alliance reflects a common pattern of civil war violence: Local actors act jointly with national players, appropriating public discourses – like religion, class, or political allegiance – for private or supra-local purposes.⁷⁹ In turn, local politics can shape the outlines of contestation at the center. In this case, the local cleavages were clearly linked to prior cycles of forced migration and return from the previous civil wars. This is evident in how respondents across all three categories delineated between threats coming from “those who didn’t run away,” “repatriates,” and “the ruling party.”⁸⁰ Importantly, the fact that so many refugees (72%) included *rapatrié-résident* conflict or other issues related to return as among their reasons for flight reflects the high salience migration-related divisions after the 1993-2005 civil war.

5.2 When Did They Flee? Early vs Late Flight

Experiences of return after the civil war also influenced the *timing* of out-migration from Burundi amid the 2015 crisis.

Early Flight: While the violence at the outset of the crisis centered in the capital city, Bujumbura, the majority of Burundian refugees arriving in Tanzania came from Makamba province.⁸¹ As previously discussed, Makamba was one of the regions with the greatest density of returnees after the previous war. The first available 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 – the area

⁷⁹ Kalyvas, “The Ontology of ‘Political Violence’”; Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*; Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo*.

⁸⁰ Respondents also referenced ethnic divisions in Burundi, but the majority emphasized that ethnic conflict was *not* a primary reason for flight.

⁸¹ Estimates suggest that 78-90% of conflict events from April through May 2015 occurred in Bujumbura. 2015Burundi Project, “Cartographie Du Conflit Au Burundi En 2015 Dataset,” accessed December 15, 2016, <https://2015burundi.crowdmap.com/main>; ACLED, “Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset,” accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.acledata.com/data/>.

where protests and violence centered at the outbreak of the national conflict.⁸² International organizations staff also confided that the vast majority of the refugees they met arriving in first few months of the refugee influx were women and children, many of whom were repeat migrants – this was their second, third, or even fourth time fleeing Burundi. In my interviews, these “early arrivers” more frequently emphasized issues resulting from their previous return (like land conflict) as their primary reason for flight. Many claimed that they had wanted to leave Burundi well before the 2015 crisis, but had not found the means to do so. As one refugee explained, “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.”⁸³ The official [opening of the border] allowed these returnees to re-migrate as refugees to Tanzania in 2015.

Given that so many of the early-arriving refugees in camp cited issues that pre-dated the third mandate crisis, it is unsurprising there were also some Burundians who fled in the five years prior to the 2015 crisis after unsuccessfully returning. Take the case of a young construction worker, James, who returned from the New Settlements 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 Burundi. He and his family tried to flee to Kenya, but wound up settling as irregular migrants in Ilagala, a small Tanzanian town near the Burundian border. I found that James’ fears were common among Burundians living in Ilagala, who were desperate not to return to Burundi. Many, like James and others in the refugee camps, were former *rapatriés* who lived in Burundi for

⁸² Bujumbura residents did not simply flee across the closer border with Rwanda. As of June 2015 only 8% of refugees in Rwanda originated from Bujumbura. UNHCR, “Burundian Refugees in Tanzania - Daily Statistics”; UNHCR, “Burundian Refugees in Rwanda - Daily Statistics,” June 11, 2015, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR RwandaDailyStatistics11062015.pdf>.

⁸³ Author Interview 12/2/2015

only a year or two before deciding to re-migrate. Like the refugees in Nyarugusu, land and/or family conflicts upon return were among the primary reasons that new arrivals in Ilagala cited as why they left Burundi.

Later Flight: Refugees fleeing to Tanzania from approximately mid/late July 2015 onward were more likely to highlight political persecution as one of the primary reasons they left. These refugees were also more likely to be first time migrants (former *résidents*), and originate from a more diverse set of locations in Burundi: the percentage of refugees arriving in Tanzania from Makamba fell from 65% in July 2015 to 46% in January 2016.⁸⁴ In addition, later arrivals were more likely to be men who had stayed on land they maintained or reclaimed after the previous war until they felt it was too risky (vis-à-vis the national conflict) to stay.

Accordingly, in my interviews in Nyarugusu it was not until I reached the zones housing a greater proportion of refugees who arrived later in the crisis that I saw outward signs of heightened political engagement, indicative of flight based on the threats posed by party-politics. 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 were Champions League football teams and the other was FNL.

This pattern in the timing 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. Nyarugusu was the first camp to receive refugees in Tanzania, but as the refugee crisis drew on, the international community opened two new camps, 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

⁸⁴ UNHCR, “Operations Portal: Burundi Situation.”

earlier arrivals who were directly transferred from Nyarugusu to relieve overcrowding. NGO and UN staff reported that refugees in Nyarugusu and Mtendeli would complain about different security risks than those in Nduta: In Nduta refugees more frequently reported that their safety in camp was at risk because of potential cross-border forced recruitment or infiltration of *Imbonerakure* into Tanzania - in other words political-party related conflict. In Nyarugusu and Mtendeli camps, they were much more likely to receive safety complaints from refugees citing land conflict back in Burundi which had emerged during their previous repatriation. These refugees feared that family members or neighbors would send someone to come and “hunt” them to prevent them from returning to Burundi and reclaiming land.

5.3 Who Stayed in 2015?

As discussed in section 5.2, Burundians who fled later on during the crisis were more likely to be first time migrants (former *résidents*) and/or those who recovered land during the return period; they stayed as long as they felt it was still safe in order to protect those assets. Similarly, those who stayed in-country tended to be *résidents* or 1972-*rapatriés* who were less adversely affected by prior return migration in their community.⁸⁵

Perceptions of Security: On the Burundian side of the border, state officials in Makamba and villagers alike asserted that there were no security issues in area. These claims of relative safety reflect the direct inverse of the early-leaving refugees’ reasons for flight: Where those who fled early felt their safety was threatened due to land conflict, those who stayed (or waited to leave) expressed that these issues did not threaten their safety. However, where those who fled later on in the conflict admitted the national security issues had finally reached a breaking point, those still in Burundi as of

⁸⁵ In addition, some respondents who stayed had fled in the 1990s but returned between 1999 and 2002 before the war fully concluded and prior to the mass return. As such they identified more strongly as *résidents* not *rapatriés*.

February 2016 denied that political unrest was creating insecurity. Indeed, respondents in Burundi explained away the refugee flight by claiming that these Burundians fled only *rumors* of war, not real violence. Others derided refugees for leaving by saying they only left to seek hand-outs from the UN, or because they thought they could would be resettled in America. Many respondents I interviewed in Burundi claimed that while there had been issues between *rapatriés* and *résidents* over land “before,” this had not been an issue for some time.

However, despite respondents’ claims that there was nothing to fear the fact that the governor now traveled in an extended motorcade armed with rocket launchers would suggest that the security situation was slightly more precarious than these interviewees, including the Governor himself, cared to admit. Analyzing why some respondents had incentives to lie about the security situation provides important evidence about the political atmosphere in Burundi. Where the refugees in Tanzania pointed to violent conflict over land with their neighbors as forcing them to flee, if you felt safe in Burundi in 2016, it was quite possible that you had been on the winning side of a violent land conflict, or threatened to use violence in such a conflict.

In addition to these incentives to deemphasize their own role in creating insecurity, respondents may have avoided characterizing the situation as insecure because they were scared of repercussions from the ruling party. The state apparatus was deeply embedded, and respondents may have worried that their answers in an interview would leak to party officials. Indeed, respondents’ frequent attempts to discredit the refugees mirrored the CNDD-FDD’s rhetoric that the Burundians fleeing were overly fearful, unfaithful to Burundi, or opposition supporters.

This evidence suggests that individuals who stayed in Burundi had incentives to dissemble about the real sources of violence in their community – both local and national. While it is more difficult to parse out for each respondent whether their interests in covering up the insecurity were due to their participation in local land conflict or because of their alliances with and/or fear of the

ruling party, triangulating this evidence with stayers' economic status provides further indication that local-level conflict and access to land were part of the equation.

Economic Incentives: Many of the Burundian villagers I interviewed who were still in-country as of February 2016 had economic assets to protect, describing that they would wait until it was absolutely necessary to leave if they had land or a job. For example, some of the villagers I spoke to owned or had access to land; others had a business, job, or other source of income that allowed them to get by. This makes sense if we consider the two sources of insecurity pushing people to leave. Those who were on the winning side of a local-level land conflict, and therefore had economic assets to protect, would be more likely to risk staying behind to protect those assets until they felt that the insecurity posed by national crisis outweighed the benefit of protecting the land they had recovered or maintained during the previous period of return migration.

6. Conclusion

The mass return of refugees to their countries-of-origin is often thought of as a sign of increased peace and stability. However, return migration is actually a frequent source of insecurity in countries recovering from civil war. Processes of out-migration and return can aggravate old rivalries and create new divisions between populations who were displaced across borders and those who remained in-country. New migration-related group identities are more likely to 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. In a country plagued by ethnic divisions, return migration to Burundi after the 1993-2005 civil war created new community divisions between so called *rapatriés* and *residents*. Exacerbated by land governance policies, competition along return migration-related cleavages led to widespread, violent, conflict over land.

Rivalries between returnees and non-migrants 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* 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 were therefore among the first to flee to Tanzania. As the conflict took hold, later arrivals had more direct connections to opposition groups or direct experience of being targeted by the CNDD-FDD.

This pattern accords with existing theories which explain the origins of violence during civil war as the result of alliances between local and national divisions, but also highlights a crucial dimension missing from those explanations. Seemingly idiosyncratic local conflicts may actually have a common source: return migration. Because forced migration is one of the most common sequelae of civil war, the process of return is likely to spark local level hostilities across a variety of post-conflict contexts. The differing manifestations are related to institutional conditions in the country-of-origin.

Understanding the process through which return migration leads to violence is critical for policymakers engaged in humanitarian responses to refugee crises. 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. In cases of repeat migration, this may mean that individuals who 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 in host-countries or resettle abroad.

More broadly, the implication of institutions in the emergence of displacement-based identities has important consequences for how we think about successful peacebuilding. Building strong institutions is frequently cast as one of the strongest tools in the peacebuilding arsenal, especially in cases of ethnic conflict. 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.