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Review

Kristina A Bentley and Roger Southall (2005)
An African Peace Process – Mandela, South Africa and Burundi. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

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Burundi must be one of the least-known African countries to outsiders, especially in the English speaking world. A few realise that the stability of Burundi is closely tied to the stability of its neighbours, Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Even fewer can probably identify Burundi as having the same Hutu/Tutsi mix in its population as Rwanda but with the post-colonial history being one of continuous Tutsi domination, as opposed to the Hutu revolution that swept Rwanda with the coming of independence. In South Africa, inexplicable news bulletins occasionally highlight the long process of negotiations to end conflict in Burundi and the role that the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) (within the African Union peacekeeping force) has played there. Therefore the Nelson Mandela Foundation is to be commended for commissioning this study which sheds considerable light on the problems of Burundi and discusses analytically the role South Africa has played in bringing peace to the country.

There exists today, in large part because a sort of profession has developed around it, a 'peace studies' or 'conflict studies' industry that tries to project peacemaking as some sort of universalising process which can be studied and which has key elements that repeat themselves in most or all international conflicts. There are such elements of course (the need of finding a way of bringing violence to a close, for instance) but they are too obvious and also too abstract to be worth studying in a classroom. In terms of what counts, each conflict situation has its own particular problems and dimensions. The contribution that Nelson Mandela in particular made to solving the Burundi problem came not from a peacekeeping formula he

learnt from the negotiations to end conflict in South Africa, but from his skill as a negotiator and his shrewdness at getting to the heart of the matter and forcing a way through the key blockages that were preventing progress. Although peace in Burundi remains fragile and the larger problems of peace in the Great Lakes region of central Africa still far from resolved, the Mandela team certainly deserve considerable credit for the progress made here. They succeeded the previous efforts of the late Tanzanian ex-president, Julius Nyerere, who was not entirely unsuccessful but, because he was seen as less neutral and because his team of negotiators was more limited, accomplished far less. With the main thrust of peace-making established, ex-Deputy President Jacob Zuma was also able to play a skilful role in tense situations following the retirement of Mandela from the scene.

The greatest problem that the Burundi negotiations faced was that a power-sharing formula had been reached between UPRONA, the traditional party supported by Tutsi in Burundi and FRODEBU, the old Hutu political movement, while increasing armed struggle was still being waged from the outside by breakaway Hutu fighters who rejected it. An equivalent process involving FRODEBU had in fact helped to scupper a previous negotiation and election process a few years earlier, a failure bathed in serious violence and assassinations. The key moment therefore was when the Arusha accords were substantially modified so as to allow CNDD-FDD under its leader Jean-Pierre Nkurunziza, to take part in the interim government. This was a very messy business, given the level of mistrust and the fragmentation of political leadership amongst both Hutu and Tutsi, agreed to initially in late 2002 but only put into practice from 2003. The growing confidence that various parties had in the honest broker nature of the South African troops on the ground in Burundi, and their willingness to protect various Burundian leaders, helped enormously here.

Tied to this was the necessity to move from a crude power-sharing formula (Tutsi form no more than 15 per cent or so of the Burundian population) towards some system that would combine stability and democracy. The key element proved to be a requirement that legitimate political parties include substantial numbers of both Tutsi and Hutu in their leadership cadres. This has so far been a very successful policy. In fact, CNDD-FDD and FRODEBU in the recent election (which have brought Nkurunziza to power as President of Burundi) probably had more Tutsi voting for them than the old UPRONA, which has become a very small faction. The adoption of a constitution and the institution of very peaceful

elections have taken place since this book was completed in September 2004 and have been further landmarks; in fact, it is questionable whether the book should not have awaited these events before completion.

Nonetheless, peace does remain fragile. A smaller and more chauvinist grouping than CNDD-FDD called the PALIPEHUTU remains committed to violence and causes havoc especially in the countryside around the capital, Bujumbura through its military wing, the FNL. Attempts to bring the FNL into the political process remain frustrated and it is not clear what would induce them, probably a relatively small bloc of voters in an electoral process, towards the path of peace. FNL activities remain possible because of the lack of a coherent government committed to peace in the DRC. Burundi's situation was greatly assisted by such a commitment amongst other neighbours, but it cannot be assured if rebels with violent intent can find a hideaway just across a border. There remain many Hutu refugees in the DRC and, especially, Tanzania.

The problem of the integration of the oversized Burundi military -and its transformation into a much smaller, mixed force loyal to the country rather than to the Hutus or the Tutsis – is still in an early stage of resolution. It was really the Tutsi domination of the army which kept the Hutu at bay during forty previous years of independence. Tutsi officers were unable previously to tolerate a Hutu president; they overthrew one and killed another in varying episodes. The possibility of this cycle repeating itself has to be scotched.

Despite both similarities and important connections, there is one key difference between Burundi and Rwanda which has really been fundamental to peacemaking. Both Hutu and Tutsi have always accepted that some kind of power-sharing will have to be implemented in Burundi. In 1972 and again in the early 1990s, mass murders of Hutu were on such a scale that we could call them genocidal, if less sweeping than what happened to the Rwanda Tutsi in 1994. Nonetheless the Tutsi elite have always seen the need to promote what they saw as loyal or compliant Hutu while CNDD-FDD, and FRODEBU before it, claimed to be fighting Tutsi privilege, not to eliminate the Tutsi from society. The reasons for this go back to the early history of modern nationalism in Burundi, the relative strength and moderation of the former monarchy and the establishment of clientage-based alliances from time to time. Pierre Buyoya, the Tutsi Major who oversaw the first attempt at a power-sharing electoral system in 1993, and whose overthrow of the Burundi government in 1996 marked the beginning of a renewed effort that

accompanied the Arusha negotiations, was the de Klerk of Burundi who played an invaluable part in breaking down the old system. He understood that a stable Burundi could not be constructed on Tutsi armed control of the country, but failed himself to find a formula for stability.

A more ambiguous cause of peace in Burundi has been the dominance in one of Africa's most impoverished, least urbanised countries of patronage politics. In a country like Burundi, there is no private sector worth talking about and no substitute to government work for access to a decent income. Political power comes with money and it is possible to cajole apparent ethnic hard-liners to settle for compromise when offered cash. Bentley and Southall devote considerable space to commenting on the extent to which Burundi has witnessed a deal between male ethnic brokers, obviously mostly interested in the spoils of office in which civil society actors have played very little role. Such a peace has an inherent brittleness if it does not take deeper root in society as a whole.

It should perhaps be underscored that this book does not provide a very profound or deep understanding of the history or culture of Burundi. The bibliography is confined to the extremely limited material available in English (Burundi, as a former Belgian colony, is French speaking), and thus excludes most serious scholarship on the country as well as the voices of the Burundians themselves. The absence of maps and an index are serious flaws. However, *An African Peace Process* is a thought-provoking book that does an excellent job unpacking a complex series of events, apart from one which discusses events in which South Africans can take some pride.