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CHAPTER 12

Ethnic and Political Conflicts Resolution in Burundi: The Contribution of Religious Organisations

Elias Sentamba

Introduction

In spite of the current meanings, Hutu, Tutsi, Twa and Ganwa in Burundi cannot be defined as 'ethnic groups' as is the case in several African countries. The term 'ethnic group' implies a human grouping with a specific culture, language, territory and so on, in relation to the others. Here, all these 'segments' share these elements and had a social cohesion as a nation before the Belgian colonial intrusion. They only became 'ethnic components' in violent conflict as a result of political mismanagement since independence. The crises of 1965, 1972, 1993 and 2015 have finally inoculated Burundians with an ethno-political culture that is difficult to ward off. Even the Arusha Agreements (2017) have not decanted the ethno-political reflexes, since each electoral process is followed by violent conflicts, always on the ethno-political terrain.

It is in this context that religions are working, in line with the SDG 16 (Sustainable Development Goal) whose motto is "*Peace and governance (just, peaceful and inclusive societies)*" (République du Burundi, 2018). These are the main religions, namely Christianity and Islam. The former has many religious organisations: the Catholic Church on the one hand and several Protestant churches such as the Anglican, Pentecostal, Methodist and Adventist, to mention only the best known, on the other. As for the second, it has two main

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religious organisations, namely the Sunnis and the Shiites. It should be noted that these different religious organisations enjoy varying degrees of social rooteedness. As the most deeply rooted of these have been able to carry out charitable works without the distinction of multiple affiliations, they have proved to be the most appropriate actors to resolve the ethno-political conflicts in Burundi. It should be noted that this chapter focuses on the two main religions, Christianity and Islam. Within the former, only the Catholic Church (62% of the Burundian population) and the Anglican and Pentecostal Churches (the most important Protestant organisations) are included. As for the second (Islam), it is retained without the distinction of religious organisations. Finally, the 'traditional religion' (k*ubandwa* cult) in which all the clans (*miryango*) met before colonisation and therefore before the introduction of the Christian and Islamic faiths remains alive even if the cult is practised rather discreetly, except in some regions such as Mwaro and the east of the country.

As human institutions, the selected religions necessarily have strengths and weaknesses. Strengths include ethno-political inclusiveness, as religious leaders are indiscriminately Hutu and Tutsi on the one hand, and the faithful come from all ethnic and political backgrounds on the other. Moreover, as their work (preaching and charity) benefits all segments of society, religious organisations try to build a 'universal brother/sisterhood' by bringing Burundians together in a large 'family of God' beyond multiple affiliations (ethno-political and religious). In doing so, these religions contribute to the construction of a peaceful society as stated in MDG 16.

As for the weaknesses, we can cite the tendency to 'over-politicise', which characterises electoral periods: in the absence of relevant social projects, political leaders know how to gain the confidence of voters, who are otherwise loyal to the said religious confessions, by manipulating the painful history of our country. The resentments inherent in badly healed wounds are not slow to reawaken. Ethno-political identity then supplants that of 'universal brother/sisterhood' and consequently opens the door to ethno-political violence by undermining the efforts hitherto invested by these religious organisations.

Deadly Ethno-political Cleavages Since Independence

The social cleavages that Burundians have suffered so much from, and that need to be analysed in this section, are in fact of two kinds: ethnic and political. However, since we are analysing the role played by religious organisations (which are the subject of conflict elsewhere), I will say a word about them.

Social Construction of Ethnic Identities with Deadly Consequences

When one hears about the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa ethnic groups in Burundi, one might think that they are groups with their own language, culture, geographical area and so on, as in many African countries. However, Hutu, Tutsi and Twa share the same language (*Kirundi*), have the same culture, practise (before colonisation) the same monotheistic religion by worshipping *Imana* (God) through the cult of *kubandwa*, live together on the same hills and so on. In short, Burundi was indeed a single ethnic group *stricto sensu*.

The Burundian population was simply made up of a multitude of *miryango* (i.e. clans) scattered throughout the country, some of which were more influential than others according to the roles they played at the royal court. It was from the Bajiji clan, for example, that the ritualists (*banyamabanga*) were recruited. Their role was to organise the *umuganuro* (i.e. the sowing festival). All the clans were involved in the life of the kingdom to varying degrees. In this way, the *mwami* demonstrated 'participatory governance' in which practically all segments of Burundian society were involved. In other words, all the clans were involved in the various services of the monarchy. Michel Bahenduzi's statement is more precise:

> The links between the populations and the power were first of all through the lineages and not by social categories (Hutu and Tutsi) as one would tend to believe. The informants interviewed during our surveys spontaneously answered that such and such a role belonged to the Bajiji, the Bavumu, the Bashubi, the Bahima, etc. It is only after thinking for a while that they establish the correspondence between the lineage they come from and the social category in which the clan or lineage usually classifies itself. (1991, p. 235)

On their arrival, the German (1898–1916) and Belgian (1916–1962) colonisers, inspired by the paradigm of the hierarchy of races that had prevailed in Europe, considered the Ganwa and Tutsi (whom they confused with each other) as the superior race, the Hutu as an intermediate race and the Twa as the inferior race. This is why the Belgian colonial administration restructured the Burundian nation:

1. Firstly, by removing key functions of the kingdom, notably the ritualistic roles controlled by the predominantly Hutu clans, such as the *Bajiji*.
2. Secondly, by restructuring the administration: not only were all Hutu chiefs systematically removed from their positions as chiefs, judges, and auxiliaries in important posts, but also an ideology that portrayed Ganwa and Tutsi as the 'superior race' on the one hand, and Hutu and especially Twa as the 'inferior race' on the other, was inculcated in the Burundian population.
3. Furthermore, by establishing the Groupe Scolaire d'Astrida (Rwanda) in 1925: while this school for the first elites welcomed Ganwa, Hutu and

> Tutsi, the 'candidate chiefs' section was exclusively reserved for children whose fathers were serving chiefs. However, as the Hutus had been removed from office, their children could not be admitted to this section. This meant that the laureates of this section came to replace their fathers who were retiring. And it was they who enjoyed dazzling 'social success' (purchase of vehicles, construction of permanent houses, etc.).

This upheaval has led to a profound ethnicisation of society. It is therefore not surprising that around the 1960s, political parties mobilised the electoral campaign on the ethnic register. Similarly, many recurrent crises (1961, 1965, 1969, 1972, 1988, 1993, etc.) are part of this register:

1. The assassinations of elites at the top of the State: since the assassination of Prince Louis Rwagasore, the hero of independence, many Hutu personalities have been assassinated. Particularly in 1965 during the failed coup against King Mwambutsa. Several parliamentarians, officers and senior officials were eliminated for their ethnic identity. The macabre cycle was also observed in 1972 when, following a rebellion in the south of the country, all Hutu leaders were systematically killed throughout the country. The assassinations that took the life of President Melchior Ndadaye and several of his collaborators in 1993 are part of this cycle (Lemarchand, 1996).
2. The massacres of the humble peasants in the hills: in 1965, peasants in the centre of the country (Bugarama and Busanga) awoke to unspeakable violence. Tutsi peasants were massacred with machetes by their Hutu neighbours. Similarly, following the assassination of President Ndadaye, Tutsis (of all categories) were massacred by Hutus, this time throughout the country! In this way, ethnic violence raged on all the hills of the country, entering the hearts and minds of Burundians (Ngayimpenda, 2004).

In short, as Jean-Pierre Chrétien rightly writes, "the trap was closing on Burundi: following the crises of 1965 and 1972, the split between Hutu and Tutsi became as deep as in Rwanda. It is based on an omnipresent fear. What is it to be a Hutu or a Tutsi? [...] It is to remember who killed your relatives fifteen years ago or to wonder who will kill your child in ten years ahead" (2000, pp. 298–299).

Political Cleavages with Recurrent Violence

In response to the spiral of ethnic violence that has marked the country's history, the stakeholders in the Burundian crisis, namely the government, the transitional parliament, the ten so-called "Tutsi" parties commonly known as the "G10" and the six so-called "Hutu" parties commonly known as the "G6", participated in the Arusha negotiation process. This resulted in the Arusha Agreements for peace and reconciliation in Burundi signed in 2000 under the mediation of the Tanzanian and South African presidents respectively. Once

adopted by the National Assembly, these Arusha Agreements saw their pillars cast in the constitutions that Burundi has known so far: those of 2005 and 2018 (Buyoya, 2012).

The designers of the Agreements seem to have been inspired by the theory of consociational democracy developed by Arend Lipjhart (1999). In concrete terms, ethnic quotas were adopted as follows: 60% for Hutus and 40% for Tutsis as well as 30% for women in political institutions such as the Government and the National Assembly on the one hand, and 50% for Hutus and 50% for Tutsis with 30% women in the Senate, 50% for Hutus and 50% for Tutsis in the Army and the Police. And each time, the Twa are co-opted (Sentamba, 2008).

While these quota mechanisms have undoubtedly contributed to appeasing the ethnic reflex gradually, crises have become more political than ethnic. This has been observed over time, especially during sensitive periods such as electoral processes. For example, let us take the elections of 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020.

1. The 2005 electoral process: after the transition period led by Pierre Buyoya (Tutsi) of UPRONA and Domitien Ndayizeye (Hutu) of FRODEBU, the 2005 elections did not see any major violence, as the fear of civil war was so great that the CNDD-FDD fighters, fresh from the bush rebellion, jealously guarded the terrain against any intrusion by another political party. For example, the FRODEBU parliamentarians who went to the east of the country (Ruyigi Province) almost lost their lives. This is because the two Hutu-dominated parties, CNDD-FDD and FRODEBU, were in reality hunting on the same Hutu electoral terrain.
2. The 2010 electoral process: with the victory of the CNDD-FDD in the communal elections, 11 opposition parties including FRODEBU, FNL, CNDD and MSD cried electoral fraud. They formed a coalition called *Democratic Alliance for Change* (ADC-Ikibiri) to reject the results of the communal elections. An arm-wrestling match was then engaged between the ADC-Ikibiri and the CNDD-FDD. As this coalition was qualified as illegal by the Ministry of the Interior, the electoral process was continued with the support of UPRONA (a party that is considered to be predominantly Tutsi, more wrongly than rightly), while the leaders of the member parties of the said coalition had to go into exile, fearing for their safety. This was followed by a series of targeted assassinations against militants of the opposition parties in general and FNL supporters in particular. Even the media and civil society organisations that dared to report on the situation were persecuted by the government. It should be noted that even some CNDD-FDD activists were assassinated for reasons of revenge, hence the spiral of appalling violence in the capital Bujumbura and the surrounding regions.
3. The 2015 electoral process: as soon as President Nkurunziza announced his intention to run for a third term, huge demonstrations took place in the capital Bujumbura in general and in the working-class neigh-

bourhoods that had won over the opposition in particular. Called by the opposition and some civil society organisations, the demonstrators denounced a mandate deemed to be contrary to the Arusha Agreements and the 2005 Constitution. As these demonstrations were qualified as illegal by the Ministry of Interior, the demonstrators were subjected to relentless police and military repression. Moreover, they were worsened by the failed coup d'état (13 May 2015) against President Nkurunziza: this gave the authorities the opportunity to lump the demonstrators and the coup plotters together and thus to carry out a ruthless repression against them: hundreds of young people from neighbourhoods such as Nyakabiga, Musaga, Ngagara and Mutakura were rounded up and reported missing. As these neighbourhoods are predominantly Tutsi, the wounds of ethnic violence quickly resurfaced, fuelling movements of exile in neighbouring countries such as Rwanda and Tanzania or even distant destinations such as Europe. At the same time, political violence hit activists irrespective of ethnicity: members of the CNDD-FDD opposed to Nkurunziza's third term in office (known as 'frondeurs') were also persecuted, and many had to go into exile abroad (Banshimiyubusa, 2022).

4. The 2020 electoral process: coming on the heels of the 2018 constitutional referendum marked by raw violence and hate speech against any 'no' campaigner, the 2020 electoral process took place in a climate of unspeakable fear. The main opposition party, the predominantly Hutu CNL (National Congress for Freedom), was largely targeted: its activists were intimidated, arrested and even murdered. To take just one example, a police commissioner in Mwaro Province publicly threatened to throw those who opposed the CNDD-FDD march into the Ruvyironza River, and lifeless bodies were indeed found in the same river a few days later. Lewis Mudge, Human Right Watch's Central Africa director, made this point poignantly in his June 2020 report.

In short, the leaders of the CNDD-FDD have used two main methods during the electoral process: the exploitation of the ethnic card and violence. In the first one, they awaken the resentments inherent in the crises the country suffered in the past to gain the confidence of the Hutu electoral majority. In the second, they blocked the way to the main challenger, the CNL, as soon as it was hunting on the same Hutu electoral ground. It is therefore not surprising that every election rhymes with violence, which makes many citizens living near the borders such as in the provinces of Rumonge or Makamba flee to neighbouring countries when the elections approach!

In such conditions, MDG 16 is difficult to implement. Without social cohesion, where Burundians see themselves as antagonistic sub-national identities and not as daughters and sons of the same nation, the ideals of peace and good governance struggle to take root. As a result, the various institutions lose legitimacy as soon as those in charge at all levels are perceived as having been appointed or elected only because of their ethnic or political affiliation and not as having proven competence.

Possible Inter-religious Conflicts in Prospect?

Even before the German and Belgian colonial intrusion, Burundians had always believed in one God (*Imana*), whom they worshipped through the cult of *Kubandwa* (Gorju, 1938). Only with the takeover of the Belgian colonial administration was this traditional religion suppressed in favour of the Catholic religion. As the Belgian colonial power worked hand in hand with the Catholic Church (Mvuyekure, 2003), other religions such as Islam or organisations such as Protestants were not welcome.

The colonial administration relied on the Catholic Church to such an extent that it entrusted it with the management of the first primary and secondary schools accompanying the parishes and bishoprics. It is understandable that this religion has had a virtual monopoly on the training of almost all the elites from the colonial era until very recently. This favouritism also explains the fact that the chief towns of the first dioceses were built near the provincial capitals, while the dioceses of the Protestant churches were located on the 'periphery' and that the Catholic faith was established in practically all the hills of the country. However, apart from the areas where the Pentecostal denomination was first established, such as Kiremba (Bururi) and Matana (Bururi) for the Anglican denomination., the Protestant denominations only spread to all the provinces and communes of the country later on.

As for Islam, it has been confined to towns such as Rumonge, Bujumbura, Gitega and Muyinga, mainly (Castryck, 2019). This is how mosques have been established in the remote hills of deepest Burundi for only about ten years. This is naturally at the expense of previously powerful organisations such as Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal. The following graph shows the demographic distribution of the different religions and denominations (Fig. 12.1).

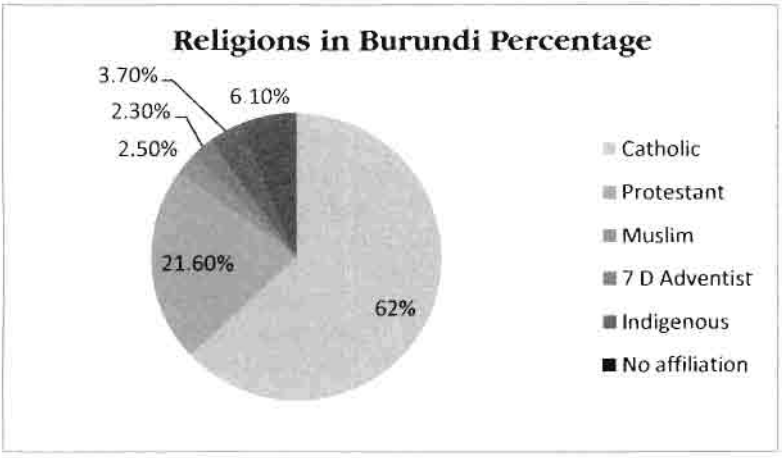


Fig. 12.1 Religions in Burundi percentage: prepared by the author on the basis of ISTEEBU data (ISTEEBU, 2008)

This graph shows that Catholics constitute the majority of believers with 62% and that Protestants come in second place with 21.6%, the others being in a very small minority. It should be noted in passing that within the Protestants there are several variants, the main organisations of which are the Anglicans, Pentecostals and Methodists on the one hand, and a multitude of evangelical churches, some of which have no real social or regional base on the other. Similarly, Islam has two main faiths: Sunni and Shia. And COMIBU (Islamic Community of Muslims) includes all Muslim faiths. Although its headquarters is in Bujumbura, its scope of action covers the entire national territory. According to the IRCB, COMIBU's missions include (a) contributing to the peaceful propagation of Islam in Burundi by appropriate means, (b) promoting the education of Muslims in all areas and at all levels of the education system, (c) contributing to the improvement of the well-being of the members of the Community and Burundian society: education, health, the fight against HIV/AIDS and STIs, economic development and so on (IRCB, 2019, p. 12).

Finally, believers in traditional religions are difficult to identify since the cult of *kubandwa*, which brought people together during the pre-colonial period, seems to be very marginal today and is practised in secret… except perhaps in the province of Mwaro.

These religious organisations bring together all the ethnic components and the militants of all the political parties mentioned above. Apart from differences in confession, one cannot speak of conflicts among them: apart from a few stigmatisations such as the fact that drinking alcohol is prohibited among certain Protestant or Muslim confessions, whereas it does not pose a problem among Catholics and certain Protestants, there are no inter-religious conflicts, strictly speaking.

It is worth noting that the religious groups meet regularly through their platform (IRCB). Comprising the major religions (Catholic, Protestant and Muslim), the IRCB operates as a large non-profit association and has a philosophy that fits well with MDG 16 as stated in its strategic plan 2016–2023: IRCB "engages and fosters dialogue, cooperation and collaboration among religious communities for the transformation of conflicts, the promotion of just and harmonious societies, the building of democratic, equitable, peaceful and reconciled communities, the protection and promotion of human rights and gender, the fight against HIV/AIDS and the participation in the socioeconomic development of the country" (IRCB, 2019). And this is translated into action in two main directions. On the one hand, during the ecumenical prayers regularly organised throughout the country. To take just one example, the one organised on 26 January 2023 in the Catholic parish of Bukeye (Muramvya Province). The participation of many non-Catholic leaders (including Muslims) pleasantly surprised the population. It was unheard of between faiths and a novelty for the community members to see leaders of different religions walking together towards God!

The IRCB regularly organises development work in the field. This was the case in Mwaro Province on 21 May 2022 (cleaning of gutters on the

Kigutu-Gihinga road), where leaders from different religions worked in a 'family' atmosphere. This pleased both the leaders of the IRCB and the provincial authorities very much, according to the speeches of their respective representatives.

In sum, the different religions really do not have conflicts with each other, as the above-mentioned facts show. And while it is true that there was some suspicion between some religious organisations, the IRCB has succeeded in creating an interfaith cohesion that is increasingly perceptible on the ground. In doing so, it is undoubtedly working towards MDG 16.

Religious Organisations as Relevant Actors in Resolving Ethno-political Conflicts

And this hierarchical dominance makes religious organisations the most appropriate actors to inculcate the principles of 'universal brotherhood' to the masses. In doing so, they contribute to the implementation of MDG 16 by advocating not only a just society but also a 'big family' of God.

Religious Confessions, a Hierocracy at the Service of Social Cohesion

With Hutu, Tutsi, Twa and Ganwa on the one hand and militants of all the above-mentioned political parties on the other, different religious groups enjoy an unparalleled power over them: hierocratic domination, that is, an enormous power that they draw from registers of shared sacred beliefs. Through masses/cults or a variety of activities such as 'liturgical' feasts that follow one another throughout the year, on the one hand, and through all informal socialisation on the other, the leaders of religious organisations have the power to build/reinforce very strong religious identities. By drawing their teachings from the Holy Scriptures (Bible or Koran), they inculcate in their flock a behaviour that reinforces social cohesion beyond multiform allegiances.

After having exchanged with some religious leaders and notables of the different religious organisations, I can take as illustrations some themes developed by religious organisations with a view to consolidating peace:

1. Universal brother/sisterhood: by the prayer "*Our Father in Heaven*", which is very significant in all Christian denominations, for example, all believers are daughters and sons of the same Creator. Consequently, they would be brothers and sisters in God and would constitute by definition a large family/community or Umma for Muslims. Moreover, since Christ is a universal saviour, even believers of other religions are also children of God; hence the "universal brotherhood" that Pope Francis defends in his Encyclical "Fratelli Tutti". It should be noted that Pope Francis himself does not hesitate to interact with his brothers from other religions such as the Orthodox Church or Islam:

if I found inspiration in my brother Bartholomew, the Orthodox Patriarch who has promoted with great vigour the safeguarding of creation, in this case I felt particularly encouraged by the great Iman Ahmad Al-Tayyeb whom I met in Abu Dhabi to recall that God 'created all human beings equal in rights, duties, and dignity, and called them to coexist as brothers and sisters'. (Pope Francis, 2020)

2. The Fifth commandment, "*Thou shalt not kill*" (Exodus 20:13): We know the biblical case where Cain out of jealousy killed his brother Abel. Fearing revenge for such a crime, he wandered off and said to God, "*If anyone finds me, he will kill me*". And God put a sign on his forehead and warned against anyone who dared to kill Cain: "*If anyone kills Cain, he will be avenged seven times*". In other words, religious leaders keep explaining, God absolutely forbids humans to take the life that only God has given to humans and whose course only God can stop. Even in the case of murder, as in the case of Abel, no one can be allowed to kill in revenge!Applied to the spiral of civil wars that Burundi has experienced over time, it is clear that the victims of the above-mentioned assassinations or massacres would find it difficult to digest such messages, if they were delivered by civilian leaders and under normal circumstances. For, as Mamood Mamdani (2001) has shown in the case of genocidal violence in Africa's Great Lakes region, the victims' vengeance is not directed at the real perpetrators but at their innocent descendants! As a result, the victims become the executioners in their turn, hence the vicious circle that fuels interminable civil wars in our countries. On the other hand, religious leaders easily give the said teachings, and the faithful welcome them with fervour...? as long as the communication takes place in the rather sacred register.
3. Forgiveness: when his executioners were putting him to death, Jesus Christ prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Religious leaders keep explaining that even though he suffered horribly on the cross not for his own sins but for the sins of men, Jesus still asked his Father to forgive his killers, believing that they did not really know what they were doing, and therefore they were killing not only an innocent but also a Son of God sent to earth to save them from their darkness. The same is true, mutatis mutandis, in the Islamic religion, in which forgiveness occupies a considerable place: "O My servants who have committed excesses to your own detriment: do not despair of God's mercy, for He will forgive all sins" (Quran 39:53).

That said, Pope Francis makes it clear that forgiveness does not consist of turning the second cheek to the wrongdoer who has slapped the first. This would allow the evil to continue indefinitely. Instead, one must think of a way out of the impasse, so that the evil ceases both for the offender him/herself and for the victims: "Forgiving does not mean allowing him/her [the offender] to

continue trampling on his/her own dignity and that of the other, or letting a criminal continue to do harm."

Applied to the spiral of civil wars that Burundi has been experiencing, many religious leaders have converged on the following idea: Burundian citizens should forgive each other without ignoring what really happened and without shying away from restorative justice for the victims where possible. This would be a better way to ward off evil. And in so doing, ensure that the victims of one crisis are not the perpetrators of subsequent crises, especially since those who are the object of revenge are rarely the actors of the facts underlying the revenge in question. And that in reality, this would be true forgiveness, a forgiveness that produces lasting reconciliation.

In short, unlike state leaders who are obliged to use physical coercion (cf. police, courts, etc.), religious leaders exercise sacred power over the masses, all social categories included, without the slightest physical coercion because recourse to God alone is more than enough. And the teachings of the Holy Scriptures are so persuasive that they are often preceded by songs with such fascinating content, music so enchanting that the hearts of the faithful are psychologically prepared. This is why religious groups seem to us to be the best actors to inculcate the ideals of peace in the masses for at least three reasons.

Firstly, the teachings are derived from the Holy Scriptures which no one would dare to dispute, so much so that the cognitive register is shared. Secondly, their leaders enjoy, for almost all of them, an unquestionable social legitimacy based on a better education (all Catholic priests have not only studied philosophy and theology, which constitute their basic training) but have also pursued master's and doctoral studies in the best universities in the world...? in various disciplines. The same is true, to a lesser extent, of the older Protestant churches such as the Anglican Church and the Pentecostal Church. Moreover, as they cover the entire national territory down to the remotest hills (at least for the major Christian denominations), the religious organisations supervise their followers more closely, in particular through the prayer movements which are practised within small groups of dwellings (streets in urban centres and "villages" in the rural areas). Finally, the religious organisations know how to make the most of demographic variables: young people and women. Knowing that the Burundian population is predominantly young (65.7% or two-thirds of the population are under 25 years old), all the religious organisations invest considerable efforts in the supervision of young people (Catholic action movements for the Catholic Church, Sunday Schools for the Protestant Churches, Koranic schools for Islam, etc., on the one hand, and a whole series of associative organisations in favour of young people for practically all religious organisations on the other). Similarly, different religions invest substantial efforts in the supervision of women: not only do they represent about 52% of the Burundian population, but they are also the ones who impart basic education to children. This is why all religious organisations make use of women's networks as much as possible.

Scope of "Universal Brother/Sisterhood" Promotion

The contribution of religious organisations to peace-building in Burundi is a multi-dimensional process that we can measure in terms of a variety of facts and actions. In concrete terms, I will take facts that have a fairly considerable impact on society. I will therefore take the following three tracks:

1. For seemingly innocuous things such as public greetings: we can take the simple greetings that people give to the public when they speak: "*Tugire Kristu*" (Let us have Christ) to which everyone responds "*Ni aganze Kristu*" (i.e. "May Christ reign"), "*Yesu ashiimwe*" (Jesus be praised) to which everyone responds "*Amen*", "*As-salamu alay-kum wa rahmatu-l-lah*" ("May God's peace and mercy be upon you") to which everyone responds "*Amin*", depending on whether one is Catholic, Protestant and Muslim respectively. It should be noted that people are so used to this that the formulas pass without difficulty, except perhaps with regard to the Muslim greeting formulated in Arabic.

   It should be noted that these formulas replaced old formulas in use at national level, which paid tribute to the regimes in place, '*Tugire amahoro na Micomb.ero yayaduhaye*' (i.e. 'Let's have peace with President Micombero who gave it to us'), '*Tugire amahoro n'umugambwe w'abasasigana UPRONA*' (i.e. 'Let's have peace with the UPRONA party') and so on. It should be noted that many people only cited this greeting reluctantly since the ethno-political civil wars had already divided Burundians to the point that many Hutu did not fit in. It is undoubtedly this cognitive dissonance that the new religious greetings have come to appease. But it is still necessary to find one that is consensual beyond the religious organisations.
2. Charities: the charities that the different religious organisations undertake are important in peace-building. Three main areas of intervention can be cited: education, health and social assistance. Firstly, in the area of education, the main religious organisations have primary and secondary schools to which all children have access without ethnic, political or religious distinction. This work contributes to cohesion when young people are socialised together in several schools belonging to different religious organisations, with a good mix of religious training depending on the organisations. Secondly, in terms of health, the religious organisations have health centres and sometimes hospitals throughout the country that serve all Burundian citizens without the distinction of ethnic, political or religious affiliation. In addition, organisations assist the poor or victims of natural disasters. For example, through the Caritas project, the Catholic Church helped the population of Mugoboka and Kirundo Province (ODEDIM/CARITAS, 2021) for example, regardless of ethnic, political or religious affiliation. Finally, religious organisations build orphanages to take in children without parents or guardians: in view of

the painful history of our country, many orphans would not have had any assistance without these charitable souls.

As the parish priest of Mutanga-South explained to us, "it is through works of charity that religious organisations demonstrate that they are not mere associations but families of believers founded on Christ. Moreover, it is through works at the service of the great Family of God that universal fraternity is translated into action." Here we find the *Fratelli Tutti* of Pope Francis: by walking together and enjoying the same support according to the needs of each person and not according to ethnic, political or religious affiliation, the beneficiaries effectively become "brothers/sister in God", hence a more solid and quite lasting social cohesion.

3. Protection of victims of ethno-political crises: during the ethno-political crises that Burundi has experienced, some religious organisations have intervened to protect the lives of victims of violence. Two cases can serve as an illustration, the Catholic Church on the one hand and Islam on the other.

With regard to the Catholic Church, two cases can be mentioned. On the one hand, no seminary experienced violence between Hutu and Tutsi students during the 1993 crisis, unlike schools of the same level in the same region. For example, the seminary of Buta (Bururi Province) is located near the high schools of Kiremba (less than 2 km) and Bururi (about 5 km), both of which experienced shooting and throwing of grenades among students! Similarly, the seminaries of Mureke (16 km from Ngozi) and Burasira (32 km from Ngozi) did not experience any 'inter-student' violence, whereas the lycée of Burengo (near the provincial capital of Ngozi) was the object of violence that took human lives. This can be explained by a pedagogical framework (targeted recruitment for both pupils and staff members, who are, in principle, Catholic and of good morality) and a religious framework (masses, prayers, Catholic action movements, etc.) that develop a 'fraternal' cohesion over and above ethnic or political affiliations. This is not the case in secondary schools run by lay leaders: not only do the pupils and staff come from different religions, but also the supervision is not as tight as in seminaries. In other words, as soon as a socio-political crisis breaks out, the already fragile social cohesion easily gives way to the violence in the immediate environment. Moreover, the legitimacy enjoyed by the priest-managers of the seminaries allowed the leaders of the seminaries to contain the anger of the activists who were targeting the schools.

On the other hand, the seminary of Buta was the object of a heroic cohesion between young Hutu and Tutsi pupils in 1997: when the Hutu rebels attacked the school, they ordered the seminarians to split into two Hutu and Tutsi groups, which the teenagers refused. The latter were coldly shot with Kalashnikovs, hence the 40 martyrs of Buta (Bukuru, 2004).

As for Islam, two facts can also be cited for the 1993 crisis. On the one hand, the victims fleeing the atrocities from the hills above the town of Rumonge (on

the shores of Lake Tanganyika). According to an Imam from the Rumonge mosque whom I interviewed in 2019, a crowd of children, women and men had taken refuge in the Rumonge mosque. The faithful of Islam took turns to help them, like brothers and sisters in Allah, without distinguishing between Hutu and Tutsi. These '*displaced persons*' spent several months there before their hills of origin found some calm. On the other hand, when the Tutsi militia "*Sans Echec*" chased the Hutu out of Bujumbura in 1993, they never entered the Islamic-dominated neighbourhood of Buyenzi. According to concordant witnesses of former members of the '*Sans Echec*' militia, it was formally forbidden to pursue anyone who found refuge there at the risk of facing 'evil spirits' (*amajini*). In reality, an old imam told us, a criminal who dared to enter the neighbourhood in pursuit of a fugitive would not come out: he was arrested and handed over to the gendarmerie (Faith to Action Network 2019).

In short, in both cases of protection among Catholics and Muslims, religious identity was able to override ethnic identity. In other words, the students of the different seminaries in general and those of the seminary of Buta in particular showed such a strong social cohesion that it dominated the Hutu and Tutsi ethnicities, while the teachers and other support staff were both Hutu and Tutsi. The same is true for the Muslims who protected the Hutu and Tutsi escapees: themselves composed of Hutu and Tutsi, their Muslim identity supplanted the ethnic identity. So they perceived them as creatures of God (Allah) rather than mere Hutu and Tutsi! And it is precisely here that the religious organisations translated peace-building into action. And if all Burundians had followed this model, the conditions of MDG 16 could undoubtedly have been met!

Limitations of Promoting Social Cohesion

As I have shown above, religious organisations have undoubtedly invested incalculable efforts in peace-building through a variety of actions. But these efforts are set in a socio-historical context that has many variables that skew their impact on the expected peace. At least four elements should be mentioned.

1. With intense political mobilisation, ethnic identity takes precedence over religious identity: many political leaders seeking votes do not hesitate to mobilise their potential voters along ethnic lines. By insidiously manipulating Burundi's painful history, they know how to draw arguments from an ethnic register that is all the more shared because all Burundians have suffered from poorly healed wounds since independence. A well-documented example by Denis Banshimiyubusa (Banshimiyubusa, 2022) is revealing in this respect: the third mandate sought and won by the late Pierre Nkurunziza. In the face of fierce opposition to a third term deemed to be against both the Arusha Agreements and the Constitution, President Nkurunziza and those close to him distilled hateful speeches 'Tutsising' the rejection of the said term. However, the anti-third man-

date mobilisers came first from his own party (the 'frondeurs', the most numerous being the Hutu) and even more so from the Council of Elders (the supreme organ of the CNDD-FDD) such as the former President of the National Assembly and the former second Vice-President of the Republic. They then came from the parties of the opposition, the political parties and the government. They then came from the predominantly Hutu and Tutsi opposition parties. Finally, they came from certain civil society organisations naturally composed of all the social components of Burundian society.

However, these hateful and 'ethnicising' speeches ended up presenting the Tutsi as the main instigators of the demonstrations. This is how the so-called protesting neighbourhoods, coincidentally inhabited mainly by Tutsi (Musaga, Nyakabiga, Ngagara, Mutakura), were subjected to a repression that was as indiscriminate as it was deadly, and which targeted young people in particular (Carayol, 2016)! Under these conditions, ethnic identity could only resurface and take precedence over any other identity, including religious identity.

2. Religious leaders are also human beings: if I consider only those who were born during the two crises that engulfed the entire country and from which all Burundians suffered in one way or another (1972, 1993), they are now 40 and 29 years old, respectively. Knowing how young the Burundian population is (ISTEEBU, 2008) on the one hand and taking into account the generation of the parents of those who are now 40 years old on the other hand, one understands that the majority of religious leaders have personally experienced the atrocities, hence the resentment inherent in the above-mentioned wars. This explains the participation of some religious personnel either in certain massacres or in some political parties openly mobilising for massacres of this or that ethnic group.
3. Religious organisations doing more business than religious service, hence leadership conflicts: according to a workshop organised for religious organisations by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in March 2021, many "evangelical organisations" are not yet socially based. They do not have many followers, and many of their leaders seem to do more business than religious service. This is why internal rivalries between members of the leadership lead to scuffles during worship, and hence the intervention of the police, arrests of "pastors" in front of the faithful, arbitration by the Ministry of the Interior, legal proceedings in court and so on. Such cases are common in Burundian towns and urban centres. For example, let us read the minutes of a meeting held in Sororezo (Bujumbura) on 30 November 2021 for 40 religious organisations with internal disputes:

> Ndirakobuca Gervais [Minister of the Interior] thus ordered that the activities of unauthorised churches be suspended, the legal representatives of churches who are foreigners or who live abroad be replaced in accordance with the law by Burundians living in the country, the judicial sentences handed down on conflicts within the churches be properly executed.

The role of such religious organisations in peace-building becomes unlikely as divisions are observed even among the faithful, resulting in an anti-model of a classical church or mosque. This is why the faithful are quick to realise that they have been manipulated by leaders of dubious morality. According to Professor Nicodème Bugwabari interviewed on this subject: "it is normal that within religious organisations there are conflicts that intensify in churches where the degree of institutionalisation is much lower. [...] these churches should activate socialisation and compromise, to the great joy of the millions of Burundians who suffer from their conflicts. If the church does not lead by example, who else will?"

4. Religious "sects" contributing to social disintegration: the "sect" of a then 36-year-old woman, Eusebie Ngendakumana, was followed by a crowd of followers. And as the 'prophetess' wanted to make Businde her sanctuary, the government prevented her from doing so. In a tussle between her followers and the Police in 2013, the Police fired into the crowd, taking the lives of 12 people. Since then, the crowd of followers wanders between Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Bukeyeneza, 2018).

The problem is that this "sect" snatches married people, who leave behind spouses and children (of whatever age). And the children who follow the harsh wandering naturally drop out of school. Similarly, care provided by official health facilities such as health centres and hospitals is prohibited by the Zebiya 'doctrine': the faithful then lead an unspeakable life through the Congolese forests, on interminable walks between the three countries, where they find themselves unwanted every time.

As a colleague explained to me, quoting Emile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1912), these practices contravene social integration, one of the main functions normally performed by religious organisations. Instead of reinforcing social cohesion at the micro level where it operates, the sect constructs a "counter-society" by preaching practices (prohibition to eat certain food products, to be treated in contemporary health centres, etc.) which are harmful to the normal functioning of society.

All in all, religious organisations are certainly better placed to resolve ethno-political conflicts in Burundi because of their ability to build 'universal brother/sisterhood'. But stubborn facts such as politicisation and weaknesses inherent in human nature from which religious leaders are not spared have constantly ruined this potential in times of political crisis. Let us take the example of youth: at each crisis, youth organisations affiliated to the parties in power have taken the lead in violence...? whereas religions had invested enormously in youth. This is why the implementation of MDG 16 is not easy if things do not change in the direction of peace-building.

Conclusion

This chapter has taught us a few lessons. Firstly, the Belgian colonial administration left Burundians with a heavy ethnic heritage which they unfortunately appropriated by turning it into a weapon of self-destruction. In other words, the 'socially constructed ethnic groups', whereas Burundi has only one ethnic group, have continued to underpin the fratricidal wars that Burundi has experienced (1965, 1972, 1988, 1993, 2015). Even conflicts of a political nature have always been wrapped up in ethnicity.

It is in such an ethno-politically 'polluted' environment that the religious organisations have come to work. By enjoying their hierocratic authority and conducting a proximity supervision, the leaders of the main religious organisations were able to build considerable social cohesion. Already composed of all the social components of the population (Hutu, Tutsi, Twa, Ganwa) and addressing the faithful from all the 'ethnic groups' and all the political parties, the religious leaders managed to build a 'universal brother/sisterhood', that is, an identity supplanting the ethno-political affiliations, at least in times of peace.

Unfortunately, during sensitive periods such as electoral processes, 'over-politicisation' on an ethno-political basis awakens ethno-political consciences. For past resentments are used as an easy springboard to effortlessly gain the trust of the population. This opens the door to murderous violence that can sweep away the efforts invested by religious organisations. This explains the difficulty of bringing lasting peace to Burundian society and setting up institutions that are both legitimate and peaceful.

In this regard, some recommendations can be made: (1) all stakeholders in the resolution of ethno-political conflicts in general and religious organisations in particular should continue their commendable work during periods of peace and redouble their efforts in the run-up to sensitive periods such as electoral processes; (2) through IRCB the different religious organisations should institute common messages to promote social cohesion among the population before, during and after electoral processes; (3) through IRCB, religious organisations should invest as much effort as possible to ensure the emergence of a political leadership socialised to the ideal of 'universal brother/sisterhood' and therefore in line with MDG 16.

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