

# The Complexities of Culture and Reconciliation in Burundi

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**B**urundi, one of the poorest countries in the world, is struggling to recover from four brutal decades of violence. Reconstruction and development efforts, which are currently taking place in the country, must be conducted particularly carefully, so as to not upset Burundi's delicate truce. Thus, acknowledging the role of culture while implementing projects in Burundi is crucial to achieving sustainability in this war-prone country. We argue that only while taking into account both traditional Burundian culture and the profound impact of colonization on Burundi's culture will positive societal reconstruction and economic development become possible.

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A BRIEF HISTORY

Civil war broke out in Burundi on October 21, 1993, when Tutsi factions assassinated the Hutu president Melchior Ndadaye.<sup>1</sup> Over the next 12 years, a wave of interethnic violence between Hutu and Tutsi left over 200,000 people dead and 1.3 million Burundians, almost 16 percent of the total population, displaced.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally, violent struggles in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, to the north and west, also ethnically charged and spiraling downward in their own torrents of violence, would spill over Burundi's borders in the form of refugees and guerrilla soldiers, adding complicated dimensions of conflict to the violence.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, by the turn of the twenty-first century, the spilling over of ethnic violence across the borders in the Great Lakes region made it one of the most violent places on the planet.

The outpouring of this ethnic violence did not suddenly manifest itself after the death of Ndadaye; it had been smoldering under the surface for years. Indeed, since securing its independence from Belgium in 1962, Burundi has remained entrenched in a perpetual cycle of violence.<sup>4</sup> This paper will not dwell on those bloodstained pages of history. Instead, it will focus on the present efforts in Burundi to transition its nation towards a more positive and sustainable peace. We will look at how cultural institutions, taken from both traditional roots and modern "Western" sources, can positively affect this transformation.

To provide framework and context, the first section will define some ethnic cultural indicators, give a brief overview of John Paul Lederach's theory of reconciliation, and expound the Burundian traditional *Bashingantahe* system of dispute resolution. The second part of the paper will investigate the evolution of Burundian culture as a result of Western intervention, and how emerging trends present potential barriers to reconciliation. The third and fourth sections look closely at how Western mechanisms can integrate traditional cultural institutions like the *Bashingantahe* to positively affect two critical aspects of post-civil war Burundian society: disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion, and reintegration (DDRR); and poverty.

The path to sustainable peace in Burundi does not simply entail a return to traditional values and mechanisms. Burundian society has evolved since the Burundians experienced German and Belgian colonialism, and subsequent post-independence communal violence. Most of the Burundians today have been born into this violent society based largely on Western

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<sup>1</sup> Commission of Inquiry, Burundi, United States Institute of Peace (1995).

<sup>2</sup> B. Juana and H. Wolpe, "Conflict-Sensitive Development Assistance: The Case of Burundi," *Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Working Paper 27* (June 2005).

<sup>3</sup> X. Rice, "Burundi Refugees Set Aside Anger to Return Home," *Dawn* (2008).

<sup>4</sup> M. B. Jooma, "We Can't Eat the Constitution," *Institute for Security Studies Paper 106* (2005).

institutions. The local population does not have a strong connection to indigenous Burundian mechanisms. Therefore, in order to advance Burundian society, there cannot be a return, but rather a rediscovery. Burundi must find an identity upon which to balance the traditional and the modern, and utilize the beneficial aspects of both systems to facilitate the long road to reconciliation and development.

*CULTURE, RECONCILIATION, AND THE BASHINGANTAHE CULTURAL INDICATORS*

Several cultural indicators exist that assist in providing an etic understanding of a country relative to other countries. In this paper, the reader will find three categories borrowed from Geert Hofstede's *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*.<sup>5</sup>

The first distinguishes between individualist and collectivist cultures. Individualistic cultures define people based on their individual personalities and the affiliations they choose.<sup>6</sup> In collectivist societies, people are defined by the long-term groups they belong to, but do not necessarily choose, such as their family or clan.<sup>7</sup> The second indicator, power distance, measured through the power distance index (PDI), is particularly relevant in situations of conflict. PDI is an indicator of how much the less powerful people in an organization accept the unequal distribution of power.<sup>8</sup> Low PDI societies insist on a more democratic and collaborative system of decision making, while high PDI societies are comfortable with a more autocratic and hierarchical system.<sup>9</sup> The third indicator has to do with time orientation. This category measures the time frame a society uses as it nurtures its values. Short-term orientation demonstrates an emphasis on immediate gratification, whereas a long-term orientation demonstrates evidence of a larger vision for the future.<sup>10</sup> Shifts in a society across these three categories can indicate shifts in its values, structures, power dynamics, and the future vision of its people.

*The Truth in Reconciliation*

John Paul Lederach defines reconciliation as the place where "Truth and Mercy, Justice and Peace meet."<sup>11</sup> He explains how truth couples with mercy in such a way that wrongdoing is acknowledged and painful loss validated (Truth), with the goal of being able to accept past events and pursue a new beginning

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<sup>5</sup> G. H. Hofstede and G. J. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>11</sup> J. P. Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

(Mercy).<sup>12</sup> Truth without mercy can often lead to bitterness and grudge keeping. In the same way justice – the search for individual and group rights, social restructuring, and restitution – is coupled with peace, a manifestation of interdependence, well-being, and security.<sup>13</sup> Peace is unlikely to occur in the absence of justice. Furthermore, there must be a balance between justice and mercy. Who is punished and how? And who, if anyone, should be eligible for amnesty?

Truth, therefore, becomes the critical first step in the reconciliation process. Without a consensus on truth, victims are unlikely to extend mercy. Without truth it is impossible to know who should be brought to justice. Without truth, distrust will persist between groups, and peace, as defined by Lederach, is unattainable. Therefore, the amalgamation of international and indigenous reconciliation methods is evaluated based on its efficacy in establishing truth and mercy, justice and peace in the transition from destructive violent conflict.

#### *Bashingantahe*

According to legend, the *Bashingantahe* is an institution that dates back to the 1600s and is an interethnic council made up of elder tribesmen who have a “highly developed sense of justice and fairness” and whose focus is “primarily on reconciliation, peacekeeping, social cohesion, and harmony.”<sup>14</sup> As such, the *Bashingantahe* epitomize the traditional cultural values of Burundian society, with its focus on social cohesion, tolerance, and a love of one’s neighbors.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, since the *Bashingantahe* are made up of community members who personally suffered through the violence and turmoil, they are keenly aware of the interests, needs, fears, and grievances of the communities they serve.<sup>16</sup>

Because of their social connectedness, the *Bashingantahe* have what Kevin Avruch calls “insider partial,” or the trust of all parties to a dispute, and are ideal mediators and arbitrators.<sup>17</sup> The *Bashingantahe* as insiders are able to create new relationships among individuals and between individuals and the greater community. Because of their ancient roots, and subsequent experience during the communal violence, we postulate that the *Bashingantahe* epitomize the balance between traditional mechanisms and modern practicality needed to engender reconciliation in Burundian culture.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> A. Naniwe-Kaburahe/The Institution of Bashingantahe in Burundi, *Traditional Justice and Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: Learning from African Experiences*, ed. L. Huyse, M. Salter, and B. Ingelaere (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electorate Assistance, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> K. Avruch, *Culture & Conflict Resolution* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998).

With cultural indicators established, reconciliation defined, and the *Bashingantahe* explained, we will now focus on Burundi and its quest for reconciliation. The analysis will examine what Western involvement and war have done to Burundian culture, the problems this poses for reconciliation, and the ways in which Western methods have integrated elements of traditional culture to address post-war issues like DDRR and poverty.

### *CULTURE AND RECONCILIATION IN BURUNDI*

For peace to be sustainable in Burundi, the process of reconciliation must be clearly and deliberately implemented. Prior to colonization, Burundian subgroups, the Bahutu and the Batutsi, shared a common set of cultural values. They spoke the same language, had the same religious beliefs, were loyal to the same king, and respected the justice handed down by the *Bashingantahe*.<sup>18</sup> The concept of ethnicity and ethnic difference was perpetuated and manipulated during colonial rule and by politicians following independence.<sup>19</sup>

Today, poor governance remains an obstacle to reconciliation and long-term peace. With a recent history of violence perpetuated along ethnic lines, and a current political structure where parties are defined by ethnicity, it is unlikely that people in power, many of them former rebel leaders, will be eager to have the truth told.

There is also a more cultural element to the truth-telling dilemma. Certain trends in Burundian society seem to have emerged or been reinforced as a direct result of the violence. A growing emphasis on the individual rather than the collective, changing power distance dynamics, and short-term orientation (which will be discussed in Section IV, *Poverty and Economic Development*) mark a cultural shift, which could also stand in the way of truth-telling.

### *From Collective to Individual*

Traditional values in Burundi centered on the concept of the collective. Values, which emphasized hard work, solidarity and mutual help, and the importance of keeping one's word, were clearly necessary in this collectivist society.<sup>20</sup> Individual rights, self-promotion, and power were not highly valued concepts.<sup>21</sup> This was true among both the Bahutu and the Batutsi people. Indeed, prior to colonization, Burundian communities were mixed; collective

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<sup>18</sup> Philippe Ntahombaye and Gaspard Nduwayo, "Identity and Cultural Diversity in Conflict Resolution and Democratisation for the African Renaissance: The Case of Burundi," *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 7, no. 2 (2007): 239–274.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 258–259.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

identity did not hinge on the conception of ethnicity.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the Bahutu and Batutsi people lived together, worked together, and intermarried; they spoke the same language, *Kirundi*, believed in the same god, and were ruled by one king, called the *Mwami*.<sup>23</sup> Even representation on the council of *Bashingantahe* was based on merit and wisdom and not on ethnicity.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the best demonstration of the collectivist nature of traditional Burundian society can be found in the *Bashingantahe* system of justice. When a case was brought before the *Bashingantahe*, there was generally respect for their decisions, which were accepted in the community as being fair and honest.<sup>25</sup> The decisions were specifically designed to reunite and reconcile parties to a conflict, not simply to punish wrongdoing. The *Bashingantahe* were not paid, but acted out of a sense of responsibility and concern for the collective.<sup>26</sup> As is the case in many collective societies, penalties were usually designed to shame the guilty parties through moral and social sanctions rather than to impose physical punishment or material fines.<sup>27</sup>

Great damage was done to the *Bashingantahe* and other elements of collectivist society during colonial times, but especially after independence and during the civil war. Instead of emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between Bahutu and Batutsi, politicians were focusing on ethnic cleavages in order to consolidate political power.<sup>28</sup> Even the liberal concept of voting was a step toward individualism, as decisions were traditionally made as a group. More recently, poverty, land disputes, and other challenges associated with high numbers of returnees are also eroding the sense of the collective.<sup>29</sup> Refugees, by definition, represent an assault on the collective and often people are forced into an individual quest for survival. In some cases people are returning to find that someone else has occupied their land. These problems illustrate the challenge of maintaining a collective mindset when destructive violent conflict has fragmented the community.

#### *The Complexities of Power Distance*

PDI in Burundi has never been particularly small. In pre-colonial times, Burundi was structured in what could best be described as a feudal system. There was a king, a class of aristocrats, and peasants who were mostly

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 257-258.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 258-259.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 265-267.

<sup>26</sup> J. Ntahobari and B. Ndayiziga, "The Role of Burundian Women in the Peaceful Settlement of Conflicts," in *Women and Peace in Africa: Case Studies on Traditional Conflict Resolution Practices* (Paris: UNESCO, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> P. Ntahombaye and G. Nduwayo, 2007.

<sup>29</sup> L. Specker, I. Briscoe, et al., *Early Economic Recovery in Fragile States: Case Study Burundi: Operational Challenges* (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2010).

farmers.<sup>30</sup> Since family or clan determined class, there was no mechanism for upward mobility.<sup>31</sup> There was, however, a mechanism whereby peasants could bring requests to the rulers. It was usually marked by ritual and deference (the peasant usually had to bring a gift as a gesture of respect and loyalty), but the mechanism achieved what both parties wanted: The ruler could maintain the dependence and loyalty of his population and the peasant felt like he had an acceptable degree of self-determination.<sup>32</sup>

While the system of governance was decidedly large, or vertical, in terms of PDI, the system of justice and dispute resolution was just the opposite. Elders on the *Bashingantahe* council were known members of their community, their selection process was considered legitimate, and they were well equipped to resolve disputes at the neighborhood level.<sup>33</sup> This bottom-up system of conflict regulation represented a low PDI mechanism that balanced out the high PDI system of governance.

During colonial times and throughout the post-colonial state, a shift in PDI has made present-day reconciliation especially difficult. Challenges like poverty and reintegration require effective governance and dispute-resolution mechanisms. Now more than ever, the rural population must feel connected to their rulers and trust their judges. Unfortunately this is not the case. Even though PDI was large in the feudal system, each member of the population knew how to make his voice heard. Following independence, though the state said it wanted to make itself accessible to the population, many people viewed (and continue to view) the state as an unhearing force that simply imposed itself on them and their communities.<sup>34</sup> Hofstede says that subordinates in high PDI societies either prefer high levels of dependence on superiors or they reject it entirely.<sup>35</sup> This rejection was clearly evidenced in Burundi with the assassination of President Ndadaye in 1993.

For their part, the people simply do not know how the state agencies are supposed to work. Once again, the *Bashingantahe* is a good example of this. Following independence, the *Bashingantahe* was one institution that the rural people still recognized. It was a known entity, accessible and trusted. Seeing this, the new republican state attempted to integrate this popular institution into the state by nominating all members of the ruling *Uprona* party as *Bashingantahe*.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately they did not include those who had been traditionally initiated, and even went so far as to declare *Kwaturwa*, the

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<sup>30</sup> T. Laely, "Peasants, Local Communities, and Central Power in Burundi," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 35, no. 4 (1997).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 709–710.

<sup>35</sup> Hofstede and Hofstede 2005, 46.

<sup>36</sup> Laely 1997, 709.

traditional initiation system, illicit.<sup>37</sup> To the rural population it was one more example of the state turning a local, trusted, low PDI institution into an unknown, inaccessible, corrupted machine.

*Summary*

In order for reconciliation to gain momentum in Burundi these cultural trends must be taken into account. If there is to be a Burundian truth, or common narrative, about the violence perpetrated during the civil war, it will have to start at the local level. It cannot be imposed from above or from outside the community. So long as the sense of the collective is fractured, this community truth-building is unlikely to occur.

A total return to pre-colonial Burundian culture is out of the question. The state must play a role by understanding PDI dynamics and by opening up channels for local people to speak and be heard. Lastly, the state should understand the cultural importance of the *Bashingantahe* and take a hands-off approach to this trusted institution. It is almost certain that if "Truth," "Mercy," "Justice," and "Peace" are to rule in Burundi, the *Bashingantahe* will need to be nurtured back to health and trusted once again by the communities they serve. The next section demonstrates that this process has already begun.

*DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, REINSERTION, AND REINTEGRATION*

Even though a formal peace agreement was signed in Burundi in 2000, violence between the government and rebel forces has continued.<sup>38</sup> As Patricia Daley points out, "peace agreements mark only the start of the process," and in order to engender stability, the "scale of militarism in the region" needs to be specifically addressed.<sup>39</sup> With the aim of achieving stability, the international community has worked alongside community leaders to disarm, demobilize, reinsert, and reintegrate former combatants. The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations defines DDRR as "the process whereby former combatants and their families are integrated into the social, economic, and political life of [civilian] communities" after giving up their weapons and disbanding.<sup>40</sup> Successful DDRR campaigns are vital to peace because they serve both as visible reassurance to belligerent parties that a permanent cessation of hostilities is possible, and also because, by integrating ex-combatants back into

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 710.

<sup>38</sup> P. Daley, "Challenges to Peace: Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region of Africa," *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2006).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Knight and Alpaslan Özerdem, "Guns, Camps, and Cash: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reinsertion of Former Combatants in Transitions from War to Peace," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 4 (2004): 499, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4149686>.

their communities, it starts to rebuild the social cohesion necessary for sustainable peace.<sup>41</sup>

In Burundi, the DDRR efforts have made substantial progress mainly because the peacebuilding policies of the international community have been complemented by traditional means of conflict resolution. Specifically, the international community has handled disarmament, demobilization, and reinsertion, and local communities have taken the task of reintegration.<sup>42</sup> In this section, the role of the international community in the DDRR effort is examined first, followed by a synopsis of the benefits gleaned from traditional Burundian methods. The section concludes with an analysis of why the synchronized efforts of the two communities, international and indigenous, have been so effective.

#### *The Role of the International Community*

Peacemaking interventions by (Western) states, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations are often referred to as the “liberal peace.”<sup>43</sup> Roger MacGinty opines that liberal peace efforts are often ineffective because they have a highly standardized format, which reflects the skills and capacities of the interveners instead of the specific needs of the recipients.<sup>44</sup> However, this has not been the case in Burundi. By providing financial assistance and logistical support, the international community has been very beneficial to the DDRR process. For instance, in 2009, the World Bank approved a \$15-million grant to the “Emergency Demobilization and Transitional Reintegration Project” with the objectives of financing the demobilization and reintegration of National Liberation Forces (NLF), reuniting child soldiers with their families, and providing medical and rehabilitation support to disabled ex-combatants and displaced persons.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, in his article from May 2008, Olalekan Ajia detailed the combined efforts of UNICEF, the United Nations, the African Union, and the World Bank in negotiating the release of 200 child soldiers being held by a rebel group. In addition to securing their release, the international organizations provided the children with medical care, clothing, food, and transportation to their home communities.<sup>46</sup> And not only have liberal peace efforts targeted ex-soldiers, but the “vast

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 501.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 499 and A. Naniwe-Kaburahe, “The Institution of Bashingantahe in Burundi,” *Traditional Justice and Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: Learning from African Experiences*, ed. L. Huyse, M. Salter, and B. Ingelaere (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electorate Assistance, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> R. MacGinty, “Indigenous Peace-Making Versus Liberal Peace,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 43, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>45</sup> “World Bank Approves \$15 Million Grant to Burundi for Emergency Demobilization, Transitional Reintegration,” *US Fed News Service, Including US State News*, June 17, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> O. Ajia, “Over 200 Soldiers Demobilized in Burundi,” *UNICEF (2008)*.

majority of [refugee] returnees have come back on UNHCR facilitated convoys."<sup>47</sup> These efforts of the international community are essential to the peace process because the Burundian government and local organizations are unable to access the funds and resources needed for the disarming, demobilizing, and reinsertion process. However, despite the immense material resources of the international community, they often lack cultural expertise, and in the case of Burundi, have turned to traditional local mechanisms for the communal reconciliation process that is so vital to reintegration.

#### *Traditional Mechanisms*

Once soldiers have been disarmed, demobilized, and along with refugees and internally displaced persons have been returned home, they have to be successfully reintegrated into their native communities. The difficulty of this task lies in the fact that many people have lost their land during their absence, and in addition, must live alongside their former enemies.<sup>48</sup> In order to resolve these interpersonal conflicts and reestablish social cohesion, many Burundians turn to the *Bashingantahe*.

In Burundi, the reconciliation role of the *Bashingantahe* has been critical. Apollinaire Rujongo, a *Bashingantahe* council member, describes the importance of the institution in an environment where "hostilities and anger [are] still smoldering . . . a direct confrontation could be disastrous," so the *Bashingantahe* mediate and arbitrate disputes in order to "reunite the Hutu and Tutsi and to reconcile them so that they live in peace and forget what divided them."<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the *Bashingantahe* have been vital to the reintegration process, by recreating the social relationships and communal bonds that managed conflict in traditional Burundian society.

#### *Summary*

The reestablishment of strong communities, with the reintegration and reconciliation of ex-soldiers and displaced persons, is an essential component for Burundi to transition from war to a sustainable peace. The role of the international community has been essential in providing the logistical support and technical expertise in disarming, demobilizing, and reinserting people back into their communities. Even more important, the *Bashingantahe* councils have had impressive successes in reintegrating and reconciling individuals back into their communities.

Burundian society had traditionally managed conflict with their emphasis on community over the individual. And as Geert Hofstede would

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<sup>47</sup> J. Clover, "Burundi Beyond the Transition? The Challenge to Return to Peace," *African Security Review* 13, no. 2 (2004).

<sup>48</sup> J. Heer, In the Wake of War, IFAD Television Trust for the Environment.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

argue, when individuals broke their loyalty to the “we-group” (families and communities) before and during the conflict, the resulting rift between the individuals and their community was severe.<sup>50</sup> Therefore mediation of the *Bashingantahe*, which allows individuals to reestablish their proper relationship with the community and social environment, is essential to restoring social cohesion and furthering the reconciliation process.

### *POVERTY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT*

Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world, and has been such since its independence.<sup>51</sup> Currently, Burundi’s GDP per capita (PPP) is estimated at \$300, and 68 percent of its population lives below the poverty line.<sup>52</sup> Landlocked and poor in resources, with overemphasis on agriculture and little manufacturing, the country heavily relies on imports from neighboring countries.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the growing population has led to exceptionally high population density and to the division of land into very small plots on which people have to rely for their survival.<sup>54</sup> Although Burundi was struggling financially prior to 1993, the civil war aggravated its circumstances even further. A tragic cycle of poverty and conflict was created as poverty led to mobilization, and violence led to more poverty.<sup>55</sup> The fighting also led to the erosion of already scarce land.<sup>56</sup> The worsening of what were already poor living conditions in the country resulted in massive displacement of people.

The existence of this cycle of poverty and conflict in Burundi indicates that only through the harmonization of development work with post-conflict peacebuilding will the country be able to restore its order and improve its economic status. Furthermore, while seeking for sustainable impact, rehabilitation efforts must be done in a culturally appropriate way. This section will explore and evaluate some of the existing efforts towards economic development in Burundi through cultural lenses. It will also include recommendations for culturally appropriate development activities.

### *Governance*

A key reason for Burundi’s dire economic situation is its poor governance. Burundi’s colonizing regimes established a highly centralized political and

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<sup>50</sup> Hofstede and Hofstede 2005, 89.

<sup>51</sup> Brachet Juana and Howard Wolpe, “Conflict-Sensitive Development Assistance: The Case of Burundi,” Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Working Paper 27 (World Bank, June 2005), 8.

<sup>52</sup> CIA (2010). “CIA-The World Factbook-Burundi” (accessed 13 April 2010, from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/by.html>).

<sup>53</sup> World Resources Institute, “EarthTrends: Environmental Information” (accessed 14 April 2010 from <http://earthtrends.wri.org>).

<sup>54</sup> Brachet and Wolpe 2005, 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

economic structure that remained concentrated after Burundi's independence.<sup>57</sup> This centralization, coupled with the harsh economic conditions in Burundi, led to high levels of corruption, a chronic lack of control over public spending, and deployment of economic policies that favor the rulers' own interests.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Burundian culture's strong inclination towards short-term orientation, or "the fostering of virtues related to the past and present," rather than focus on the future,<sup>59</sup> prevents the government from implementing medium- and long-term development projects.<sup>60</sup> This is particularly worrying due to the strong positive correlation between long-term orientation and economic growth.<sup>61</sup> Due to all of the reasons described above, the Burundian government today lacks the capacity to implement essential economic development programs.<sup>62</sup> Without local capacity in place, major development efforts are taken by international organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF. While working towards Burundi's development, these institutions must bear in mind the consequences of imposing Western values on the traditional Burundian society, and thus must work to utilize Western resources in a way that is sensitive to Burundian needs.

#### *Economic Initiatives and Time Orientation*

One initiative related to decentralization includes the efforts of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to strengthen Burundi's private sector. While the elites are not interested in the private sector, these institutions wish to decentralize ownership of goods such as coffee, which is the country's main cash crop.<sup>63</sup> The shortcoming of these efforts is that they are taken from a very Western and individualistic perspective. Privatization reforms are by-and-large top-down projects. Thus, full responsibility for their implementation lies in the hands of elites and in this case, outsiders. Not taking community empowerment or local values into account, such efforts have the potential to cause conflicts regarding land, ownership, and the distribution of wealth.<sup>64</sup>

Another approach to promote the private sector includes bottom-up efforts through microfinance. Since the vast majority of Burundi's population lives in rural areas, many local entrepreneurs do not have access to credit from

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<sup>57</sup> U.N. International Fund for Agricultural Development, E. B. n. S. (2004). Agenda Item 9(a)(i): Report and Recommendations of the President to the Executive Board on a Proposed Loan to the Republic of Burundi for the Transitional Programme of Post Conflict Reconstruction. Rome: 4.

<sup>58</sup> Brachet and Wolpe 2005, 16-17.

<sup>59</sup> Hofstede and Hofstede 2005, 210.

<sup>60</sup> M. Loevslett, "Building Peace in Burundi: A Multi-faceted Approach," *The Pathfinder: A Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>61</sup> Hofstede and Hofstede 2005, 222.

<sup>62</sup> Specker et al. 2010, 12-17.

<sup>63</sup> Loevslett 2009, 10.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

commercial banks.<sup>65</sup> Several microcredit banks are currently operating in Burundi, but they face two main challenges. First, many of them demonstrate low probity, and they are characterized by a lack of professionalism among creditors, as many of them do not possess the skills to perform crucial tasks such as proposal analysis.<sup>66</sup> In order to deal with this issue and help microfinance institutions work effectively, professional training is needed. International organizations, rather than establishing their own microfinance systems in the country, should focus on capacity building of the local population through professional training in finance. A second challenge regarding microcredit has to do with clients' low repayment capacity.<sup>67</sup>

Other than the gaps that currently exist between supply and demand in the country,<sup>68</sup> a short-term cultural orientation may play a part in people's low ability to pay back loans, since short-term-oriented societies are not concerned with thrift.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, while looking at the culture's traditional values, such as the strong sense of responsibility and of keeping one's word (*kugumya ibanga*), some of the issues regarding repayment could be addressed.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the African Values Survey found that long-term orientation is significantly correlated to traditional wisdom.<sup>71</sup> This indicates that the restoration of traditional values that faded due to conflict and modernization is likely to assist the country's economic development. Lastly, NGOs like CARE have found a method of addressing repayment issues that is also contributing to the restoration of values such as social cohesion, solidarity, and mutual help, to which they call "village civilian loan system."<sup>72</sup> Through solidarity lending, they bring together groups of women who create a communal fund.<sup>73</sup> This creates an internal banking system that allows members to apply for a loan when in need.<sup>74</sup> We view such a system as highly appropriate to the current state in Burundi, and trust that it should be expanded. While allowing people to borrow money, it also empowers them, teaches them skills, and reinforces communal values that are necessary in a post-conflict situation. As illustrated here, microfinance institutions, despite their many challenges, have a strong potential in improving people's well-being in Burundi.

Economic development and decentralization are addressed through other means as well. Rather than taking the approach of the World Bank and

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<sup>65</sup> Specker et al. 2010, 45.

<sup>66</sup> International Monetary Fund, "Burundi: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – Annual Progress Report."

<sup>67</sup> IMF, 42.

<sup>68</sup> Specker et al. 2010, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Hofstede and Hofstede 2005, 210.

<sup>70</sup> Ntahombaye and Nduwayo 2007, 258.

<sup>71</sup> Hofstede and Hofstede 2005, 235.

<sup>72</sup> Specker et al. 2010, 46.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Specker et al. 2010, 45.

the IMF, which decide where to direct their aid, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has created Community Development Committees (CDCs) that receive development aid directly and decide how it will be utilized based on individual and societal needs.<sup>75</sup> The CDCs are seen as the economic equivalent to the aforementioned *Bashingantahe*.<sup>76</sup> The CDCs, which were originally introduced by IFAD in Rwanda, now exist in 1,000 communities in Burundi.<sup>77</sup> The CDCs are an exemplary case of using traditional mechanisms for dealing with modern problems. On the one hand, they emphasize traditional values of decency, modesty, solidarity, and respect for life.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, through the CDCs other traditional values that might cause harm and suffering to certain individuals are challenged in a democratic fashion, on a case-by-case basis. For example, in Burundi the law states that widows cannot inherit property from their dead husbands.<sup>79</sup> As a result, these women become extremely poor and often turn to prostitution.<sup>80</sup> Yet, the CDCs can help such widows get access to resources and live respectfully.<sup>81</sup> The CDCs, although established to distribute economic assistance, are also developing local capacity and empowering individuals. In the future they may act as a base for a municipal ruling body that would take away some power from the government, and allow for higher accountability and lower levels of corruption.

One drawback to the CDCs, judging from lessons in Rwanda, is that CDC activities are highly time consuming, which may lead some of their members to economic hardships.<sup>82</sup> While compensation would help them maintain their position, it could also open the door for corruption and elite capture.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, considering the transparency and accountability factors of the local CDCs, which do not exist at the governmental level, corruption is less likely to occur in these and similar institutions.

### *Education*

In order to move Burundi away from its impoverished condition the issue of education must be addressed as well. Education is important for several reasons. First, it can help reinstall traditional values that were abandoned due to poverty and war. Traditionally, mothers taught their children, through storytelling and proverbs, qualities such as moderation, respect for truth,

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<sup>75</sup> "IFAD in Burundi." IFAD.

<sup>76</sup> IFAD film.

<sup>77</sup> IFAD film.

<sup>78</sup> Ntahobari and Ndayiziga 2003, 14.

<sup>79</sup> E. B. Rackley, "Armed Violence Against Women in Burundi," *Humanitarian Practice Network*.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> IFAD film.

<sup>82</sup> S. Arne, T. Hege, et al., *Community Driven Development in Contexts of Conflict* (World Bank, 2003).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

modestly, and tolerance.<sup>84</sup> Currently, however, with the deterioration of living conditions in Burundi, this type of education is no longer available to children.<sup>85</sup> Second, education can help in the rehabilitation process of ex-combatants who are returning to their villages, as the international community has recognized.<sup>86</sup> Third, educating citizens about their rights and responsibilities creates a more vibrant civil society.<sup>87</sup> This can assist with the decentralization process as well as encourage transparency within the government, and promote the rights of those who are being discriminated against, such as widows. Lastly, education can make people more employable, and the more employment, the higher the possibility is for economic growth. Educating and training, thus, must target both the younger generation and individuals in vulnerable positions, such as ex-combatants, refugees, and landless people.

It is important to note that while training and education by foreigners is essential, it is also limited and unsustainable. Therefore, a good avenue of directing education programs would be through training of women as teachers. This will maintain traditional social roles while adjusting them to changes due to modernism, and at the same time allow for the women educators to remain on the ground and make a long-lasting impact on many individuals.

#### *Summary*

This section discussed economic development efforts of international organizations, including decentralization through the revitalization of the private sector and support of small businesses, as well as through creating local committees that make decisions regarding the appropriation of international aid. Furthermore, this section indicated that education has a role in arriving at economic growth. While looking at cultural aspects of each of these development efforts, it becomes clear that foreign expertise is necessary but not sufficient when working on economic development. It is only by taking culture into account that economic development can provide a stable framework in which peace is sustainable.

#### *CONCLUSION*

Having operated under the auspices of a Western structure for generations, Burundi can no longer simply return to its traditional past. It is not an escape Burundi needs, but rather a transformation from the intractable to the tractable, from conflict to positive peace. MacGinty poses an important question when he

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<sup>84</sup> Ntahobari and Ndayiziga 2003, 15.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> IFAD, 6.

asks, "If traditional and indigenous peace-making mechanisms can only operate under the auspices of internationally supported peace interventions, can we still consider them to be 'traditional' and 'indigenous'?"<sup>88</sup> With respect to Burundi, MacGinty hints at a deeper issue, namely, a return to the pure and unrevised traditional mechanisms that have maintained peace and harmony might be based on the misconception that modern Burundian values have not changed. This is not entirely true. Though traditions are remembered, years of ethnic violence have shifted the cultural emphasis – from harmony and respect to asymmetry and power.

However, reconciliation is about rediscovery, on societal, ethnic, collective, spiritual, and individual levels. It is about truth, peace, justice, and mercy. It is about rediscovering the balance between the individual and the collective, between victim and victimizer, between "us" and "them." Though Burundi has changed since its traditional days of the Mwami and the Bashingantahe, that history and those values still constitute a part of its identity. Rediscovering these values can be useful in finding the balance. Positive aspects of cultural institutions such as the Bashingantahe can be interwoven into the modern framework to facilitate the difficult task of disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion, and reintegration; the task of addressing poverty issues; and reconciliation. Ultimately, it is the Burundian people who must embrace this delicate balance of old and new as they continue their journey toward sustainable peace.

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<sup>88</sup> MacGinty 2008, 157.