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The U.S Government and the 1972 Burundi Genocide

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The term “genocide,” since being created in the 1940s by the Polish legal scholar Raphael Lemkin, has evolved into an incredibly complex concept and formed the basis for a new interdisciplinary field of study—genocide studies. This field of study has defined itself through research on some of the 20th century's most horrific events—from the Armenian genocide of 1915 to the ethnic violence that erupted after the breakup of Yugoslavia. However, research in this field has not been equitable across all genocides. Some genocides—Armenia, the Holocaust, Cambodia, Rwanda—are widely studied and researched. This research has provoked debate about responsibility, human rights, and international law in both the academic and public spheres. Other genocides, in the words of the eminent genocide scholar René Lemarchand, have become “Forgotten Genocides.” These genocides have not been the topic of extensive research or vigorous private/public discussion. In attempt to remedy this historical neglect, the focus of this paper is one of these “Forgotten Genocides”—the 1972 genocide of Burundian Hutus.

This 1972 genocide has gone under-researched, even among seasoned analysts of Africa, genocide scholars, and human rights activists. Occurring in a matter of months, the Tutsi-controlled Government of Burundi (GOB) took the lives of between 100,000 and 300,000 Burundian Hutus.¹ The research done on the Genocide has been conducted, mainly, by Belgian historian Filip Reyntjen, French historian Jean-Pierre Chrétien, French-American political scientist René Lemarchand, and American anthropologist Lissa Malkki. The majority of this research has examined ethnic polarization and other major roots of the Genocide. Lemarchand and Malkki's research has explored the role of myth in sustaining the killing and in the creation of history after the Genocide. This paper explores the US response to the killing and the reasons

¹ René Lemarchand, “Burundi: Genocide Forgotten, Invented, and Anticipated,” (Center of African Studies: Copenhagen, 1995), 5. Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 84. Like many genocides, the exact number of those killed is unknown, with conservative estimates ranging from 80,000 to the highest estimates around 300,000.

for non-intervention. The documents used throughout this paper allow for an analysis of the day-to-day reports within the US government, which, given the lack of international news reporting, permits one to examine what exactly the United States government knew about the killing as it shaped, implemented, and sustained (in the face of changing circumstances and other international policies) its policies towards the GOB during the killing.

This was the first recorded genocide in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, occurring some twenty-two years before the more widely publicized and researched genocide in Rwanda. Moreover, foreshadowing the international community's, represented by the United Nations (UN)², shameful inaction during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, it was during this genocide that the international community's post-World War II policy of neutrality in the face of clear genocide was first practiced.

The policy that was employed in Burundi was two-fold. First, after the outbreak of violence between Hutu-led anti-government rebels and Tutsi-controlled GOB forces under Colonel Michel Micombero, the United States and other Western powers pledged to maintain neutrality. This neutrality was maintained even as evidence of genocide against Burundi's Hutu population mounted. Second, though the West preformed token measures of disapproval, i.e. suspend aid programs, or urge members of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) or United Nations (UN) to act, etc., it failed to directly intervene. Yet, when it became politically or economically advantageous, the West regularly ignored international human rights law and was always more than willing to support a genocidal government. In Burundi, United States economic and business interests would eventually prevail over any US-commitments to human rights. For the African Community, represented by the OAU, solidarity with the GOB was much

² Particularly important within the United Nations are the major world powers who hold permanent seats in the Security Council: the United States, the United Kingdom (UK), France, Russia, and China.

more important than intervening in an “internal matter” of a fellow African state. In the international community outside of Africa, there was too little at stake to preform anything more than a “humanitarian” mission to alleviate the suffering of Hutu refugees and, when the GOB permitted, the suffering of Hutus within Burundi. Thus for Burundian Hutus, the world, including their own government and their fellow Tutsi countrymen, as well as other Africans made the consciousness decision that they were expendable—and with very little protest and miniscule repercussions the GOB engaged in a highly successful policy of genocide.

In the wake of World War II and the Nazi Holocaust, members of the United Nations understood that genocide had “inflicted great losses on humanity” and that international cooperation was necessary in order to “liberate mankind from such an odious scourge.”³ From this understanding and the tireless efforts of Raphael Lemkin, the UN General Assembly passed the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948. By 1951, enough member states had ratified the Convention for it to become international law. The Genocide Convention is critical because, under Article II, genocide, as a crime under international law subject to universal jurisdiction, is defined:

Article 2: In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction, in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within a group
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁴

The states that ratify this convention are obligated to “enact...necessary legislation to give effect

³ United Nations, “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” UN General Assembly, 1949. (Hereafter: Genocide Convention)

⁴ Article II, Genocide Convention.

to the provisions of the present Convention and, in particular, to provide effective penalties for persons guilty of genocide.”⁵ By 1972, seventy countries had ratified the Genocide Convention, including the United Kingdom (1972), Belgium (1951), and France (1950).⁶ By 1972, enough states had ratified the treaty to make Genocide punishable under *customary* international law for all nations—even those who have not actually ratified the Convention. In spite of the treaty's obligations, the international community, including those who had ratified the Convention, did not uphold these obligations. In trying to understand *why* the world would turn away and how the GOB could carry out such a horrific genocide, one must first begin with history.

Historical Background:

Burundi is a small, landlocked central African country slightly larger than the state of Maryland. Like Rwanda, Burundi is composed of three major ethnic groups: the Hutu (85% of the population), the Tutsi (14% of the population), and the Twa (1% of the population).⁷ Not only are their ethnic compositions similar, the history of Burundi and Rwanda are closely intertwined and the two share many similar cultural characteristics, i.e. a vertical system of social stratification, similar languages⁸, pre-colonial pastoral-feudal kingdoms, etc. However, critical differences between the two countries did, and still do, exist. In pre-colonial Burundi, the ethnic fluidity was much more pronounced and the monarchy (*Mwami*) was relatively free of ethnic

⁵ Article V, Genocide Convention.

⁶ United Nations Treaty Collection, “Chapter IV Human Rights Treaties: Status of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 78, pg. 277, May 31st, 2011. http://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtsg_no=IV-1&chapter=4&lang=en The United States would not ratify the Genocide Convention until 1988.

⁷ Roger Morris et Al, *Passing By: The United States and Genocide in Burundi*. (The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Washington, DC, 1973), 2.

⁸ The language of Burundi is Kirundi, the Burundian dialect of Rwandan-Rundi. Kinyarwanda is the Rwandan dialect.

bias.⁹ This ethnic transience would be a crucial factor in the development of Burundi's pre-colonial and post-colonial political system and ethnic crystallization, like in Rwanda, would have disastrous effects.

In regards to ethnicity, the meaning and connotation of the terms "Hutu" and "Tutsi" changed throughout pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Burundian and Rwandan history. Originally, these terms signified status of an individual. The social structure at work in Burundi was a pastoral-feudal system, which is a social system in which cattle-owning families (Tutsi) lent out cattle to commoners (Hutu) who herded and managed the cattle in return for milk and other daily products. Under this system, a Tutsi was a person rich in cattle and a Hutu was a "subordinate," "follower," or "social son," who cultivated or managed cattle in return for dairy products.¹⁰ Hutu nationalists in Rwanda and Burundi, in an attempt to vilify Tutsi, have attempted to portray pastoral-feudalism as a system in which the cattle-owning Tutsi subjugated the Hutu cultivator. Yet historically, the system was "symbiotic" and mutually beneficial to both the Hutu and Tutsi.¹¹ Thus, the pre-colonial terms were social, rather than ethnic, indicators and did not possess the negative (or positive) racial connotations that they would acquired in the 20th century.

Though the terms are employed similarly in both Burundi and Rwanda, pre-colonial political differences and differing degrees of ethnic mutability caused differences in connotation of the terms "Hutu" and "Tutsi" in the pre-colonial kingdoms. In pre-colonial Rwanda, the *Mwami* consolidated his power by suppressing, and then replacing, any local hereditary chiefs

⁹ René Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1995), 1. In Rwanda, the *Mwami* was much more closely associated with the Tutsi ethnic group.

¹⁰ Lemarchand, *Ethnic Conflict and Genocide*, 10.

¹¹ René Lemarchand, *Burundi and Rwanda* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 19.

with his royal retainers of Tutsi derivation.¹² “Tutsi” signified political power and influence, making it desirable for the Tutsi elite to make ethnicity less permeable—protecting their influence and power. In Burundi, state power was fragmented and split between several relatively autonomous princely factions (i.e. the *Ganwa*¹³) and the Burundian *Mwami*. This political plurality and fragmentation “resulted in far greater political decentralization,” in-turn increasing ethnic fluidity.¹⁴ These *Ganwa* rivalries “caused the contestants, including the *Mwami*, to seek the support of both Hutu and Tutsi.”¹⁵ Thus, in order to establish and maintain power, *Ganwa* factions and the *Mwami* had to adopt a conciliatory and supportive attitude towards the Hutu masses.

Furthermore, unlike Rwanda, there existed intra-ethnic division among Burundian Tutsi that further prevented the consolidation of monolithic ethnic categories until the late 1960s and 1970s. This intra-ethnic division manifested itself in two different categories of Tutsi that competed with one another for power: the Tutsi-Hima and Tutsi-Banyaruguru. The Tutsi-Hima were “lower-caste” Tutsis who were more distant from the *Mwami* in the pre-colonial Burundian kingdom. In the post-colonial state, this Tutsi faction, led by Captain Micombero, became the most powerful and prestigious ethnic category. The Tutsi-Banyaruguru were “upper-caste” Tutsi (“Banyaruguru” means “from above” or “people from above”) and were more closely associated with the monarchy. Compounding this intra-ethnic divisions were various patrilineal lines within each ethnicity that carried social prestige and classified each family as “very good” (*imiryango*

¹² Lemarchand, *Burundi and Rwanda*, 22.

¹³ *Ganwa* literally translates to: “Princes of the Blood.”

¹⁴ Lemarchand, *Burundi and Rwanda*, 22. This decentralization was pronounced throughout Burundi's 18th and 19th century pre-colonial history. For example, by 1900, *Mwami* Mwezi Kisabo (c. 1852-1908) only effectively controlled about half of the Burundian Kingdom. The children of the former Ntare *Mwami* dynasty controlled the remainder of the Kingdom.

¹⁵ Lemarchand, *Burundi and Rwanda*, 24.

myiza), “rather good” (*imiryango myiza cane*), “neither good nor bad” (*imiryango si myiza si mibi*), and “bad” (*imiryango mibi*).¹⁶ There were no less than forty-three different patrilineages, which combine with region and social position to create complex identities that formed the basis for potential conflict among clans, families, and lineages even within the same broad ethnic spectrum.¹⁷

The Road to Genocide:

Burundian society changed rapidly during the colonial era, when Germany (1885-1916) controlled both the pre-colonial kingdoms of Burundi and Rwanda as the consolidated territory of Ruanda-Urundi.¹⁸ In 1916, Belgium was given control over the territory first as a League of Nation's Mandate, then a UN Trust Territory. Beginning in the 1950s, as the modern Burundian state began to be organized, two political parties emerged. The first party was the *Union pour le Progres National* (UPRONA), which was founded by Prince Louis Rwagasore and operated on a platform of independence and self-governance. Rwagasore, a *Ganwa* prince, had the unique ability to incorporate Burundian traditions and the needs of contemporary Burundi—making both UPRONA and Rwagasore extremely popular.¹⁹ The second party was the *Parti Démocrate Chrétien* (PDC), which was established by the Belgian administrators to protect Belgian interests and used token *Ganwa* clans close to Belgium as their candidates. During the 1961 legislative election, UPRONA dominated and gained 58 out of 64 seats.²⁰ However, this ended up being a hollow victory when Rwagasore was assassinated by PDC agents. This assassination eliminated a trans-ethnic leader capable of successfully bridging Burundi's complex traditions,

¹⁶ Lemarchand, *Burundi and Rwanda*, 24.

¹⁷ René Lemarchand and David Martin, “Selective Genocide in Burundi” (Minority Rights Group, 1974), 6.

¹⁸ Morris, *Passing By*, IX. .

¹⁹ Lemarchand, *Burundi and Rwanda*, 329.

²⁰ Peter Uvin, *Life after Violence: A People's Story of Burundi* (New York: Zed Books, 2009), 9.

such as balancing Burundi's ethnic and regional factions through unifying symbols such as the *Mwami* court, with the needs of a modern political state, such as a functioning government that promotes economic stability and growth. This assassination destabilized Burundian politics and, when independence came in 1962, post-colonial Burundi was a highly unstable state whose instability was demonstrated, and exacerbated, by the assassination of the first three prime ministers in the first four years of independence.²¹

In 1965, an attempted Hutu gendarmerie *coup d'etat* led to government-sponsored repression in which "thirty-eight Hutu officers and noncoms were executed...virtually every Hutu leader [in Bujumbura] was apprehended...and eighty-six death sentences were handed down by improvised military tribunals."²² The impact of this attempted coup was immense and resulted not only in the near physical elimination of the entire first generation of Hutu leader, but also significantly weakened the "government machine built around the Court."²³ This weakening of the government allowed the Burundian army, led by Captain Michel Micombero, to overthrow the monarchy and proclaimed the First Republic (November 28, 1966).

During this period, ethnicity and loyalty became much more centered around the terms Hutu and Tutsi, leading to these terms acquiring new meaning. In the 1950's and 1960s, three crises led to "a sharp polarization of ethnic feelings." The first crisis was the 1959 Hutu Revolution in Rwanda, which provided the oppressed Hutu with an example of what popular rebellion around a common identity—Hutu—could lead to. The Hutu Revolution, which was violent, bloody, and generated a massive refugee population, scared many Burundian Tutsis into fearing their Hutu countrymen. Second, a crisis of authority in UPRONA after Rwagasore's death

²¹ Morris, *Passing By*, 2.

²² Lemarchand, *Ethnic Conflict and Genocide*, 71.

²³ Lemarchand, *Ethnic Conflict and Genocide*, 72.

would lead to a "bitter struggle for the leadership of the UPRONA between Hutu and Tutsi elements," with an eventual victory by the Tutsi faction. This caused UPRONA, the ruling party in the government, to become a pro-Tutsi political machine. Third, and the *most* important, was the "crisis of [governmental] legitimacy culminating in the abolition of the monarchy in 1966 following a Tutsi-led coup within the army."²⁴ This radical change in Burundian politics, leading to the declaration of the first "republic," greatly exacerbated the country's two conflict paradigms, i.e. Hutu v. Tutsi and Tutsi-Banyaruguru v. Tutsi-Hima.

After the 1966 *coup*, Micombero spent the next six-years consolidating his power and establishing a highly centralized patron-client state. The specific clients in this system were members of Micombero's sub-category of Tutsi—the Tutsi-Hima—from Bururi, a southern province in Burundi. For the Tutsi-Hima from Bururi, regional self-consciousness became a new basis for solidarity with Micombero, who became the leader of this new political bloc. The Tutsi-Banyaruguru, the former "high-caste" Tutsi, became less important and, by 1972, were virtually powerless.²⁵ In 1969, there was another smaller *coup* that led to the arrest of thirty Hutu personalities, leaders, and soldiers. These coups not only intensified competition between Hutu and Tutsi, but also aggravated Tutsi-Banyaruguru and Tutsi-Hima tensions. In the wake of growing domestic tensions, Micombero established a military advisory board (*Conseil Suprême de la Révolution*) that would allow the complete execution of his wishes during the next attempted Hutu *coup*.²⁶

During this period (1966-1972), Burundian Hutus were systematically excluded from the government, secondary/post-secondary education, and the military leadership—a policy

²⁴ Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide* pg. 59.

²⁵ René Lemarchand and David Martin, "Selective Genocide in Burundi" (Minority Rights Group, 1974), 6.

²⁶ Lemarchand, "Selective Genocide," 14.

maintained from the colonial era and implemented with a new fervor after 1972. Over the years, the level of exclusion and insecurity increased, along with harsh governmental measures towards Hutus after each attempted *coup*. These levels of repression increased to the point that some Hutu saw violence as a justifiable end to achieve some form of political or economic self-determination. Even in the face of these injustices, most members of the Hutu community were not willing or likely to rebel, judged by the lack of popular support for the April 29 rebellion, to prevent this injustice from being heaped upon them.²⁷ Most of these Hutus were too preoccupied with the daily struggle of survival to be consumed with any political struggle.

It is important to remember that one cannot view the 1972 Genocide as a teleological event, i.e. that a Tutsi- (or ethnic-minority) controlled government inevitably leads to genocide. Genocide has never been, and never will be, the product of historical inevitability. For example, the Nazi Holocaust was not the inevitable end to two millennia of European anti-semitism nor was the Rwandan genocide the inevitable end to 60 year of ethnic polarization. In reality, no event is inevitable. Yet genocides, such as the Rwandan genocide, have often been portrayed as inevitable and rooted in undefinable and atavistic (or tribal) hatreds.

The Burundi Genocide, was, again, *not* inevitable nor was it caused by tribal hatreds. Intra-ethnic tensions within the Tutsi-community caused the exigencies of all ethnicities to come to the surface, which along with outside events such as the 1959 Rwandan Revolution, allowed genocide to appear to be a legitimate policy option for some Burundian government and army officials, as well as a few opportunistic civilians. These leaders then made very conscious decisions to formulate and executed genocide against their fellow citizens. They could have simply repressed, not killed, the Hutu, however this would not have eliminated the possibility of

²⁷ Michael Hoyt, "U.S. Embassy Cables from Bujumbura to Washington D.C. (Lemarchand Collection, Series 3, Box 11, Folder 7), May 3rd, Bujumbura 413. (Hereafter: Embassy Cables)

a massive Hutu rebellion—in fact it may have exacerbated ethnic hatred and led to one. Like all people of power, these Tutsi elite sought to protect their money and influence and would not have seen an power-sharing scheme as viable either. With these options dismissed and all of the dynamics tensions at work within Burundian society, particularly the two-folded competition (Hutu v. Tutsi, and Tutsi v. Tutsi), ethnic polarization was compounded by political polarization. All of which led to the horrors that occurred in 1972.²⁸

Genocide: “Only the guilty will be punished”

This genocide began on April 29 when a Hutu-led rebel force attacked the towns of Rumonge, Nyanza-lac, Gitega throughout Burundi, as well as the capital city of Bujumbura. Though the conflict at first appeared to be a simple Hutu v. Tutsi event, the US government was aware from the onset of intra-ethnic tension between northern “moderate” Tutsi faction (i.e. Tutsi-Banyaruguru) and southern “radical” Tutsi group (i.e. Tutsi-Hima).²⁹ The next day the United State Embassy confirmed that *Mwami* Ntare V was killed in an “attempt by reactionaries to free him.”³⁰ As previously stated, the Burundian *Mwami*, unlike its Rwandan counterpart, was relatively free of ethnic bias, and thus Ntare V's murder eliminated a trans-ethnic symbol that could have united moderate Tutsi elements and the Hutu community against radical Tutsi hegemony.

In those first few days, the language of “reactionaries,” “monarchists,” and “imperialist agents” became catchphrases used by the Tutsi in power to denounce, categorically, the *entire* Hutu community (particularly Hutu leaders and intellectuals) and, to a lesser-extent, the

²⁸ Lemarchand, *Ethnic Conflict and Genocide*, 77.

²⁹ U.S. Embassy Cables, April 29th, Bujumbura 385.

³⁰ US Embassy Cables, April 30th, Bujumbura 389. It was later discovered that Micombero ordered the execution of Ntare the Fifth. Eliminating a trans-ethnic symbol of leadership and traditional symbol of authority in Burundi.

historically pro-monarchist Tutsi-Banyaruguru.³¹ It is possible that this language was employed to make Western powers even more cautious about interfering with what the GOB saw as its own internal affairs. It is also possible that these particular words were employed to vilify the rebelling Hutu in rhetoric that was, and still is, seen as universal anti-Africa, i.e. pro-Colonist. A third possibility is that by employing this rhetoric, the GOB may have been able to hide its repression by portraying it as an residual anti-colonial struggle that most other African states could sympathize with and thus would be less likely to interfere with. Whatever the reason for this language, the Embassies of France, Belgium, and the United States were very deliberate in trying not to appear imperialistic and other African states proclaimed solidarity with the GOB.

It is highly likely, though difficult to prove in certainty, that the GOB was aware of a possible attack by anti-government forces prior to the onset of violence. Micombero would later admit that “he knew of possible anti-government activity two week before April 23.”³² Some rumors and stories have attributed the failure of the coup to “the fact that Micombero had been sleeping with the Tutsi wife of one of the few Hutu army officers and she told the president that something was afoot.”³³ For many Hutu, the *coup* was part of a Tutsi master plan, known as the “*le plan Simbananiye*,” which aimed to provoke the “Hutu into staging an uprising so as to justify a devastating repression and cleanse the country once and for all of the Hutu peril.”³⁴ But all of this is purely speculation and rumor.

Initially, the international press and the outside world saw this rebellion as “an unsuccessful attempt by 'monarchists and imperialists agents' [language is drawn directly from

³¹ US Embassy Cables, May 30th, Bujumbura 726.

³² US Embassy Cables, June 8th, Bujumbura 796.

³³ Nigel Watt, “Burundi: Biography of a Small African Country” (Columbia University Press: New York, 2008), 33.

³⁴ René Lemarchand, “The Burundi Genocide” in *Century of Genocide: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts 3rd edition*, eds. Samuel Totten and William S. Parsons (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2009), 323.

Burundian government radio] to overthrow the Government of the President, Col. Michel Micombero.”³⁵ The pure aggression of the rebels, as well as the indiscriminate and violent tactics employed, made initial government suppression appear justified. Nonetheless, outside of the attempted *coup* and the GOB's reaction, little was known about the actual events as they developed. This was the product of GOB control of the places foreign reporters could go, as well as the lack of Western reporters in central Africa. The day after the attempted coup only three things were clear to the US Government: 1) “Micombero was still very much in power:” 2) that *Mwami* King Ntare V was dead (also reported in the international press); and 3) that “considerable” blood had been shed in Bujumbura and the provinces of Bururi and Gitega.³⁶

On the ground in Bujumbura, two US officials—US Ambassador Thomas Patrick Melady and *Charge d'Affaires* Michael Hoyt—were critical in creating and maintain the US policy towards the Genocide, as well as informing US State Department officials in Washington about the Genocide as it unfolded. Melady, an Afro-Asian specialist and an authority on sub-Saharan African politics, spent the majority of his time as Ambassador cultivating diplomatic relations with Micombero's government. When the Genocide began, Melady was quite straightforward in his description of the bloodshed, but he argued against direct US/European diplomatic intervention on the grounds that it would be counterproductive.³⁷ Hoyt, who took over the operations of the Embassy at the end of May when Melady left for the Ambassadorial post in Uganda, continued Melady's policy of nonintervention. But unlike Melady who is unrepentant for his lack of action, Hoyt was deeply effected by the killing. The cables used in this paper were acquired by Hoyt through the Freedom of Information Act and he plans to analyze them in a

³⁵ Dispatch of The Times London, “Burundi Says Ex-King Is Dead as Coup Fails,” *New York Times*, May 1st, 1972.

³⁶ US Embassy Cables, April 30th, Bujumbura 389.

³⁷ Power, *A Problem from Hell*, 536. Micombero's account of the killing can be understood through his 1974 book: *Burundi: The Tragic Years*.

forthcoming book: *The Burundi Cables: The American Embassy and the 1972 Genocide*.³⁸

By May 1, US Ambassador Patrick Melady noted the harsh and repressive qualities of the GOB's actions regarding the Hutu and stated that the French, Belgian, and Zairian governments differed in their analysis of the events. Although all four governments were unsure of what exactly was unfolding in Burundi, a consensus was reached in which they agreed to “stay *totally* out of these developments as none of us has any (significant) interests involved.”³⁹ Unfortunately, this was sadly true. Outside Belgium, the former colonial power, France's desires to build and consolidate its neo-colonial *Francophonie*, and the US-Burundi coffee trade, Burundi was relatively unimportant for international politics or business.

On May 2, the GOB began to employ inverted discourse⁴⁰—a phenomenon first noted by Lemarchand—when the term “genocide” was used by Burundi's foreign minister Bwakira to describe the actions of the “rebels,” who he did not refer to as “Hutus.” Additionally, Bwakira described this period as one of the most difficult “periods in Burundi's history” and made the official GOB plea “for immediate international assistance for refugees in [the] form of good[s], clothing, and medicines.”⁴¹ The same day that the US Embassy began to receive reports of the “round-up of educated Hutus in Bujumbura.” These reports of the Hutu elite being targeted would mark the beginning of a pattern that would develop over the next few weeks and become the defining nature of the “selective genocide” of the Burundian Hutu elite, i.e. intellectuals, students (primary through post-secondary), and the financially successful, as well as sympathetic

³⁸ Power, *A Problem from Hell*, 536.

³⁹ US Embassy Cables, May 1st, Bujumbura 393.

⁴⁰ Immediately from the beginning of the Genocide, GOB officials employed *inverted discourse* which portrayed the Hutu-led insurgents as having committed “monstrous acts of genocide against the Tutsi.” This complicated the reporting of the Genocide and has contributed to the lack of an agreed upon official narrative of the genocide. René Lemarchand, “Burundi 1972: Genocide denied, revised, and remembered” in *Forgotten Genocides: oblivion, denial, and memory*, ed. René Lemarchand (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2011), 42.

⁴¹ US Embassy Cables, May 2nd, Bujumbura 402.

Tutsi.⁴²

Within the first week of the killing (April 29 – May 6) US Government officials on the ground were hampered by travel restrictions and curfews instituted by the GOB and reported that there were “no indications...of [a] general Hutu uprising, but [the] possibility is not far from people's minds.”⁴³ As previously noted, beginning May 1 there are reports of mass arrests of educated Hutus, including prominent Hutus such as the “minister of Communications, minister of Social Welfare, two remaining Hutu commandants...central bank administrators, party officials, etc.”⁴⁴ At first there was no indications that any of those arrested were harmed, yet hopes for safe returns of those arrested faded on May 4 with reports of Hutu bodies appearing in the streets of Bujumbura. That same day, twenty students from the University of Bujumbura were arrested, Hutu students began to flee from their universities and schools, and students began to divide along ethnic lines in the University's dormitories.⁴⁵

Near the end of that first week, reports describe the involvement of youth revolutionary groups, i.e. *Jeunesse Révolutionnaire Rwagasore* (JRR), in the roundup of Hutu students and the Hutu elite. Though only limited research has been done on this urban-based youth movement, we know that the JRR began as a loosely organized group comprised mostly of secondary and university students, school dropouts, and unemployed youth, all of whom seethed with ethnic hatred. After the 1962 Kamenge riots, the Tutsi elite responsible for the 1972 Genocide is believed to have begun organizing these men into an horrific youth militia and vehicle of Tutsi

⁴² Morris, *Passing By*, 9.

⁴³ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 3rd, Bujumbura 413.

⁴⁴ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 2nd, Bujumbura 400.

⁴⁵ US Embassy Cables, May 4th, Bujumbura 439.

ethnocracy.⁴⁶ By the end of the 1960s the JRR emerged as a “consistently radical, anti-Western, and increasingly violence-prone organization.”⁴⁷ In 1972, JRR members “actively engage in roundups” of Hutu leaders and students and, originally serving only a psychological role, by May 5 the JRR were “being armed and reportedly showing no mercy” to any Hutu that crossed their path.⁴⁸

US Embassy telegrams and reports submitted to the US Embassy indicated that the JRR, along with the Burundian soldiers, invaded classrooms and forced students onto trucks and brought them to government facilities and increasingly crowded prisons. By May 6, the killing of Hutus in these prisons was confirmed through both first and second hand sources.⁴⁹ On the same day, reports emerged that GOB began arresting *Lycée* (i.e. Secondary-School) students both in Bujumbura and the interior of Burundi. At the Athane Secondary School, according to a Canadian teacher, “half of the Hutu students...[were] picked up [on] May 5...all other Hutu students disappeared from Athene before” May 6 and were believed by school officials to have fled.⁵⁰

During this week the Burundian government began to manipulate the international community's perception of the events unfolding in Burundi. On May 5, Micombero stated that “thousands” of Tutsi had been killed by the Hutu rebels. Moreover, the Hutu-led rebellion was an “organized attempt to overthrow [his] Government through *Genocide*.”⁵¹ Thus, from Micombero's perspective, any allegations of genocide could have only been leveled against the

⁴⁶ Lemarchand, *Burundi and Rwanda*, 62.

⁴⁷ Lemarchand, *Burundi and Rwanda*, 63.

⁴⁸ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 5th, Bujumbura 464. U.S. Embassy Cables, May 5th, Bujumbura 454.

⁴⁹ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 6th, Bujumbura 477.

⁵⁰ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 6th, Bujumbura 477.

⁵¹ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 5th, Bujumbura 462. Emphasis mine.

Hutus who led the rebellion and, given Micombero's inclinations for collective demonization, the Hutu Community at large. Micombero justified his statement by arguing that "almost all Tutsi officials [of] Bururi were massacred."⁵² Micombero ignored the fact that most government officials were Tutsi, thus any anti-government attack would involve the killing of Tutsi. Moreover, of the several thousand reportedly killed by the rebels, the victims included both Tutsi and Hutu. Micombero followed this by stating that the rebel's actions were "highly organized...[the] Bandits had lists [of Tutsi]...most killed Saturday and Sunday were on lists...most with firearms and other hand weapons."⁵³ Micombero seemed to argue that this "highly organized" nature indicated genocidal intent to eliminate the Tutsi community. However, it was simply another attempt at employing inverted discourse to hide all signs that he was implementing a program of genocide.

During this time, Ambassador Melady did not want to "over-react' and destroy" the carefully crafted relationship with the Micombero regime.⁵⁴ In the face of mounting evidence and bodies, Melady stated that "it [was] becoming urgent to make an attempt to bring them [the killings] to an end. I recommend we [the US Government] urge Mobutu [president of Zaire] to send an emissary" to Micombero.⁵⁵ Yet, this desire to "urge" other African nations or international organizations to do something to end the killing rather than take direct measures, i.e. direct diplomatic communication or economic/arms embargoes, to end the killing was a staple of US foreign policy in regions of the world without any strategic interests in the face of large-scale human rights abuses. For example, without any critical resource of global importance

⁵² U.S. Embassy Cables, May 5th, Bujumbura 462.

⁵³ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 5th, Bujumbura 462.

⁵⁴ Roger Morris, *Uncertain Greatness: Henry Kissinger & American Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 266.

⁵⁵ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 7th, Bujumbura 482.

genocide was allowed to occur, with little to no condemnation, in Rwanda and Cambodia.⁵⁶

By May 7, several reports were sent to the US Embassy in days following Micombero's statement that quickly undermined the President's claims of a Hutu-on-Tutsi genocide. First, it was reported that all the Hutu teachers in Kilemba had been rounded up by the army. Second, later that day, a report described a Kirundi-language broadcast that stated that "all those who had been taken were executed;" Melady adding that "all executed were presumably Hutu." The Embassy had several reports, dating back to May 4, of "Bulldozers digging mass graves near the airport." These reports were later confirmed, on May 6, by numerous first and second-hand accounts of "burials in [the] same region and observed car and truck lights in [the] general area of [the] reported graves."⁵⁷ Ambassador Melady, in his memoir *Burundi: The Tragic Years*, would write about the reports he received and his own view of the freshly disturbed ground near the airport:

Our plane circled over the lake [on May 25th, when Melady was leaving for a new assignment]...I noticed the area near the airport where, according to reports I had received from reliable sources, thousands of Hutus had been buried in a mass grave. It was easy to see the fresh earth.⁵⁸

Even though these reports were credible and soon reports emerged of over 1,000 confirmed Hutu dead in Bujumbura, the policy of "strict non-involvement in internal affairs," first articulated on April 30, was affirmed on May 11 (even after all the reports of GOB atrocities). After the Genocide, Melady believed that what he did was correct and any direct intervention, diplomatic or economic, would have been highly detrimental to the situation and the Burundians being

⁵⁶ Power, *A Problem from Hell*, xv.

⁵⁷ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 7th, Bujumbura 490.

⁵⁸ Thomas Patrick Melady, *Burundi: The Tragic Years* (Orbis Books: New York, 1974), xv – xvi.

killed.⁵⁹

Soon the United States Embassy forwarded to Washington estimates made by other foreign Embassies and missionaries out in the field. Late on May 10, the French Embassy estimated that between “1,000 to 1,500” Hutus have been executed [in Bujumbura]. The German Embassy estimated even higher.⁶⁰ By May 12, the Dean of the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences at the University of Bujumbura estimated that the events have generated over 100,000 victims and between 50,000 and 100,000 refugees.⁶¹ Moreover, he also stated that: “all of the Hutu students were arrested and some executed on the spot by their comrades...[*La quasi-totalite d'etudiants Hutu ont ete arretes et certains executed sur place par leurs comrades...*]”⁶²

This type of horror was still remembered by former Hutu students living in Tanzanian refugees camps in 1995: “the girls of the secondary schools, they killed each other. The Tutsi girls were given bamboos. They were made to kill by pushing the bamboo from below (from the vagina) to the mouth.”⁶³ This element of the Genocide—the murdering of secondary, and even primary, school students—has invoked a deep moral indignation within the Hutu community because educational achievement or personal success became a sufficient reason for the Micombero government to label any Hutu a threat and have them executed. This indignation is expressed by another Hutu refugee living in Tanzania:

They wanted to kill my clan because my clan was educated. The clans which were educated, cultivated, they were killed. In my clan, there were school teachers, medical assistants, agronomists...some evangelicals, not yet priests, and two who were in the army...All have been executed. Among those who were educated, it is I alone who

⁵⁹ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 11th, Bujumbura 544.

⁶⁰ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 11th, Bujumbura 546.

⁶¹ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 12th, Bujumbura 553.

⁶² U.S. Embassy Cables, May 12th, Bujumbura 553. Translated from French.

⁶³ Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 91.

remains...There are many person who leave Burundi today because one kills everyday. The pupils, the students...It is because these are intellectuals...If you are a students, that's reason for killing you; if you're rich, that's a reason; if you are a man who dares to say a valid word to the population, that's a reason for killing you. In short, it is a racial hate.⁶⁴

Unfortunately, this refugee's experience was not unique and, by May 15, the entire Hutu elite of Bujumbura was reported have been eliminated.⁶⁵ Yet, once again, on this same day as this statement was issued, another telegram sent to Washington stated that there was "consensus of the Western Embassies that foreign Western countries *should not participate* in this as any posture by us [France, Belgium, and USA] would be greatly resented and counterproductive...our general prescription is that Africans should settle African problems."⁶⁶

The Tutsi Community's Response:

During the Genocide, the majority, through not all, of Burundi's Tutsi took one of two paths during the Genocide. On the first path, they openly supported the killing and/or, at some point, participating in the killing and rounding up of their fellow country. On the second path, they silently supported the killing for either personal reasons or out of fear of a successful Hutu rebellion. The ability for the Tutsi community to be perpetrators of and bystanders in the face of genocide was aided through the polarization of the Hutu v. Tutsi paradigm and the gradual elimination of intra-Tutsi tension.

As noted above, by the 1960s ethnic identities were polarized, exasperating the Hutu v. Tutsi conflict paradigm. But, prior to the Genocide, there still existed a Tutsi-Banyaruguru v. Tutsi-Hima conflict paradigm. After "*Mwami Ntare V* [was] executed," which Micombero confessed to ordering on the night of April 29th, the Tutsi-Banyaruguru lost their ties to the

⁶⁴ Lemarchand in *Century of Genocide*, 336.

⁶⁵ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 15th, Bujumbura 573.

⁶⁶ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 15th, Bujumbura 576.

traditional Burundi kingdom and the *Mwami*, the symbol of their loyalty.⁶⁷ The threat of a Hutu rebellion, similar to the 1959 Rwandan Revolution, created a “fear of annihilation [that] cut through and across all other affiliations, whether ideological, religious, social, or regional...among the Tutsi, a divided tribe united to survive. The Tutsi believe that all of them would have been slaughtered if the Hutu had been successful.”⁶⁸ Thus, the Tutsi community, which was described by Melady and Hoyt as “highly traumatized by events” and lashing “out at everyone who might be considered a threat,” was able to unite along ethnic lines.⁶⁹

This Tutsi fear of annihilation was endemic to all corners of society from the average Tutsi farmer to the Western-educated Tutsi elite. For example, in the Burundian army, of the 122 soldiers killed in a two week period of fighting the rebels, sixty-one soldiers were killed in actual combat and the another sixty-one (Hutu Soldiers) were killed in reprisals by their own Tutsi comrades and/or commanders.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the U.S. Embassy reported that “Burundi's 3,500 man army is now completely Tutsi.”⁷¹ This fear of annihilation was even present in the Catholic Church, where Burundi's Church officials were unwilling “to take a stand against Genocide.” The US Embassy knew of “no churchmen who had decided to go abroad to make an appeal for Christian intercession...[the] Bishop of Bujumbura and archbishop of Gitega [...were] both Tutsi and convinced [the] Hutu uprising was [the] result of [a] plot to liquidate Burundian Tutsi.”⁷² As a result, similar to twenty-two years later in Rwanda, the Church mostly stood aside as both their

⁶⁷ U.S. Embassy Cables, June 6th, Bujumbura 796. In the same interview, which Micombero had with American and British Journalists, he also stated that the Burundian government was not committing genocide against the Hutu and it was still in “pursuit of guilty.”

⁶⁸ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 16th, Bujumbura 594.

⁶⁹ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 16th, Bujumbura 594.

⁷⁰ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 12th, Bujumbura 571.

⁷¹ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 18th, Bujumbura 605.

⁷² U.S. Embassy Cables, May 15th, Bujumbura 578.

fellow Hutu clergy and their Hutu flock were murdered.⁷³ The role of the Vatican will be discussed later.

It must be noted that there were a few “righteous Tutsi” who risked their “own lives to protect Hutus they considered innocent;” as there would be similar “righteous Rwandan Hutus” who protected their fellow countrymen in 1994. Reports sent to the U.S. Embassy brought to light stories of “Tutsis hiding Hutu friends in their home or passing them from one home to another. Several policemen have reportedly done so, having seen what fate their friends can expect if captured.”⁷⁴ But as the killing proceeded it became less advantageous to help Hutu and any signs of ethnic moderation among members of the Tutsi community was punished harshly by more extreme Tutsi elements.

The African Community & OAU's Response:

Unfortunately, the African community, represented through the OAU, would act more in line with the average Tutsi than the few “righteous Tutsi.” It must be remembered that the United State's policy in Burundi was two-fold: 1) non-involvement and 2) enacted token measures of disapproval and allowing the UN or the OAU to solve the problem. In regards to the OAU, the U.S. State Department continued to maintain its policy, even though it was “very clear” to the US government that the OAU would not do much, if anything, to stop the killing.⁷⁵

What little the OAU did do was send a four-hour diplomatic mission to Bujumbura on May 22. By this time several things had become very clear. First, by May 18, the US Embassy no longer considered the rebels a threat to the Burundian government. Second, even though the

⁷³ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 16th, Bujumbura 599.

⁷⁴ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 16th, Bujumbura 599.

⁷⁵ Morris, *Passing By*, pg. 9.

rebels were no longer considered a threat, reprisals against the Hutu continued without any substantial government interference. On May 19, there were reports of JRR members being directed by a "Murundi teacher from [the] Canadian Brother's School" and helped to round up "all other male Hutus using clubs." The Burundian army then "shot many [of the Hutu students] and pushed [the] rest over a cliff to their deaths." There were also reports that members of the Burundian army shot Hutu women and children near mission stations if they were assembled into groups of three or more—forbidden by emergency legislation passed by Micombero.⁷⁶ Immediately before the arrival of the OAU mission it was reported that 10,000 Hutu were executed north of Gitega and that United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) vehicles were being used by the Burundian army to coordinate arrests and executions.⁷⁷

This mounting evidence should have greatly undermined Micombero's claims to the international community that he was simply suppressing/preventing a genocide against the Tutsi community. The OAU, considering that it had condemned South African Apartheid since 1963 and taken a number of stances against government-sanctioned murder, might be expected to respond to this evidence of genocide by issuing a powerful condemnation of the GOB's action.⁷⁸ The opposite would eventually occur and rather than condemn genocide, the OAU would support it. The mission was headed by Diallo Telli, the Secretary-General of the OAU, and comprised of Rashidi Kawawa, Prime Minister of Tanzania, Fonmin Malecella, a Tanzanian senior official, and Hussein Kulmiye Afrah, the Vice President of Somali. The mission, upon its arrival in Bujumbura, was "led by Burundian Minister Simbananiye [as] they made [a] trip to

⁷⁶ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 19th, Bujumbura 635.

⁷⁷ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 20th, Bujumbura 643.

⁷⁸ Organization of African Unity, CM/Res. 48 (IV): Resolution of the Forth Ordinary Session of Council of Ministers," March 1965, 2.

[the] presidential palace and presumably received [the] official GOB briefing on events in Burundi.”⁷⁹ When these officials were departing from the airport, it appeared that “Micombero and [the] guests...were in perfect harmony, a dramatic show of support for the regime.”⁸⁰

US government officials seemed to believe, in regards to the OAU mission, that the GOB “pulled off [the] great[est] coup in obtaining public support for its stance of reaction to [the] threat of its existence.” Following the OAU visit, Telli stated that:

The organization of African Unity, being essentially based on solidarity, my presence and that of the delegates here in Bujumbura, signifies the *total solidarity* of General Secretariat with the president of Burundi, the government and the fraternal people of Burundi who have been through a period and a test which all Africa feels...Our total solidarity with respect to what is happening [in Burundi...] and the wish we express is that Burundi *united behind its chief*, will continue to make its significant contribution to the realization of the social progress, of total rehabilitation of the African people.”⁸¹

At the OAU Summit in Rabat in June of 1972, the same ministers who visited on May 22, speaking to a large assembly of African statesmen, sent Micombero another message supporting his actions regarding the Hutu.⁸²

The Council of Ministers of the OAU has listened with interest to the presentation of your delegation concerning the events in Burundi. The Council of Ministers is convinced that thanks to your saving action [or lifesaving actions], peace will be rapidly reestablished, national unity will be consolidated, and territorial integrity will be maintained ...[Son excellence, le colonel Micombero. *Le conseil des ministres de l'OAU a entendu avec interet la declaration de votre delegation sur les evenements du Burundi. Le conseil des ministres est convaincu que grace a votre action Salvatore, la paix sera rapidement et que l'unite nationale sera consolidee et l'integrite territoriale sauvee.*]⁸³

This message of “solidarity” is important to note. Most, if not all, African states deal with issues

⁷⁹ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 22nd, Bujumbura 656.

⁸⁰ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 22th, Bujumbura 656.

⁸¹ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 23rd, Bujumbura 664. Translated from French, Emphasis Mine. Also included in this telegram were statements made by Kawawa of Tanzania and Hussen Culmie Afrah of the Somali Republic. All statements expressed solidarity with Micombero.

⁸² Morris, *Passing By*, 9.

⁸³ U.S. Embassy Cables, July 8th, Bujumbura 953. Translated from French.

relating to ethnic conflict—a byproduct of the arbitrariness with which European statesmen at the 1885 Berlin Conference constructed the modern map of Africa. Ironically, Burundi and Rwanda are two of the most ethnically homogenous countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Most other African states two or more major ethnic groups that results in regular, though not necessary bloody, ethnic disputes. Thus, to protect themselves from reciprocal interference, no other African state wanted to interfere with the “internal” affairs of Burundi and most could proclaim sincerely “solidarity” with what they believed Micombero was facing.

Domestically, the GOB capitalized on this solidarity by replaying broadcasts of the OAU-Micombero meetings and the OAU statements of support over the state-controlled radio in French, Swahili, and Kirundi. More importantly, the actions, or lack of action, taken by the OAU and the supporting African states, as well as the silence of all other African states, gave the “pan-African seal of approval” to what was happening in Burundi.⁸⁴ For Burundian Hutus, neither their government, other African states, nor Africa-controlled international organizations were willing to protect them and, given their lack of alternative options, many were forced to accept any humiliation heaped upon them. This included being “shaken down” by Tutsi seeking money or land in which Tutsis would reportedly threaten a Hutu with: “your money or I’ll report you.”⁸⁵

It would be a month until the United Nations (UN) sent the UN Special Mission to Burundi and throughout this period the killing continued—against all GOB promises to stop any organized killing, punish reprisal against Burundi’s innocent Hutu, and prosecute only the guilty. The day after Telli’s statement of solidarity (May 23), a French expert stated that he “believes

⁸⁴ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 23rd, Bujumbura 665. U.S. Embassy Cables, May 23rd, Bujumbura 659. Not one African country was known to have raised any voice against Micombero’s domestic policy. This lack of African concern indicated to Washington that “Africa, at this point, stands publicly and firmly with the Burundian government.”

⁸⁵ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 17th, Bujumbura 599.

30,000 Hutus” have been executed so far throughout the country.⁸⁶ After the OAU mission visit, credible estimates began to be produced documenting the number of Hutu killed, all of the estimates were in the high tens or hundreds of thousands.

The Genocide Continues:

On May 25, Ambassador Melady left for the Ambassadorial post in Uganda leaving *Charge d'Affaires* Hoyt to head the U.S. Embassy until his replacement arrived. One day later, for first time, a U.S. Telegram was cabled to Washington contained the word “genocide.” Yet the word was not employed in a manner that indicated the US' commitment to preventing further genocide, rather it was use to detest the use of UNICEF vehicles in the killing. The telegram indicates the Embassy staff's, particularly Hoyt's, revulsion regarding the use of UNICEF vehicles to aid in the killing. The telegram stated: “We [the Bujumbura US Embassy] believe continued use [of] UNICEF vehicles in present campaign of repression which can only be called genocide.”⁸⁷ Though he is not applying the word directly to the killing, Hoyt at least makes some attempt to connect the killing to the crime of Genocide. It appears that the State Department did not respond to the Hoyt initial use of the word. Later, near the end of June, the State Department did use the word “genocide” in a telegram sent to Bujumbura in a telegram with the subject head “Burundi Problem.” The State Department informed Hoyt: “It [is] clear from reactions to newspapers that GRB [Government of the Republic of Burundi] [is] extremely sensitive about allegations of ethnic reprisals and genocide. Embassy must there be properly circumspect in discussing events in Burundi with people not connected with” the United States

⁸⁶ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 24th, Bujumbura 684.

⁸⁷ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 26th, Bujumbura 705.

Government.⁸⁸ Without any reaction from his use of the word “genocide,” signs of commitment from Washington, or directions informing him to act different, Hoyt maintained Melady's policies.

The United States and Belgium appear to have been the only States that initiated policies that were some-what detrimental, though by no means devastating, to the Burundian state. Belgium threatened to cut (*couper*) all further economic aid to Burundi, which is substantial given that Belgian economic assistance supplied a quarter of the GOB's budget. Though not all economic aid was severed, Belgium did cut a number of assistance programs to the GOB.⁸⁹ As previously mentioned, the United States also cut a number of aid programs—all which were reinstated several years after the end of the Genocide. All other countries involved with Burundi, such as France and Zaire, did not implemented any policies to deter Burundi from further killing. States who did not trade with Burundi simply followed the actions of the UN and OAU. These states did not have any incentive, except moral and legal ones, to get involved in preventing the killing.

In reaction to the limited number of highly critical, anti-GOB newspaper reports and governmental condemnations of the killing that resulted in the organizing of the UN mission to Burundi, the GOB established councils of “wise men” (*groupes de sages*) whose goal was to “attempt [to] limit wanton execution of Hutus.”⁹⁰ The French Embassy and the Papal Nuncio later confirmed that these groups were being established with the specific intent of urging “restraint on part of Revolutionary Youth Groups [i.e. JRR] and [the] Burundian army.” The establishment of these councils might have been initiated by the government for two reasons.

⁸⁸ U.S. Embassy Cables, June 20th, Ext 21128.

⁸⁹ Marvin Howe, “Burundi: Massacre in the Heart of Africa,” *The New York Times*, June 4th, 1972.

⁹⁰ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 27th, Bujumbura 706. U.S. Embassy Cables, May 30th, Bujumbura 731.

First, there were reports of growing fears about the international reaction to the killing. Second, there was growing fear that the Hutus were forming "self-defense units."⁹¹ To quell any further international outrage over the events, the GOB supposedly began to take action against the mob-like killing of Hutus. Yet, there were also counter-reports that some Tutsi who urged restraint in Bujumbura were "being arrested and immediately executed."⁹² While other Tutsi were instigating violence by setting fire to other people's homes and blaming Hutu rebels.⁹³ If this is true and the government was continuing to participate in the killing then these "wise men councils" were simply a credibility-preserving measure.

One institution that could have been extremely influential in preventing bloodshed and stopping the killing in this highly Catholic country was the Roman Catholic Church. But just like in Rwanda, the Church would stand by and not actively condemn the killing of their priests and parishioners. The Church did not denounce the killing as genocide, but instead portrayed the killing as a fratricidal struggle in which both sides were participating. Pope John Paul II stated that "what is going on in Burundi [is] a bloody struggle of brothers against brothers."⁹⁴ Though Pope John Paul did denounce the "organized massacre of innocent people," he did not go much further than that. No known repercussions were brought against the GOB by the Vatican for its actions. On May 30th, a statement signed by Western diplomats and released by Apostolic Nuncio William Aquin Carew assumed the GOB "will make every effort to assist those who have suffered and are suffering," while the Church will assist their efforts "to promote peace, unity

⁹¹ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 27th, Bujumbura 716.

⁹² U.S. Embassy Cables, May 27th, Bujumbura 716.

⁹³ U.S. Embassy Cables, June 6th, Bujumbura 894.

⁹⁴ "Pope Calls for End of Burundi Violence," *New York Times*, May 29th, 1972.

and progress to Burundi and all of its inhabitants.”⁹⁵ However, the GOB easily ignored these statements as local church officials, including the Bishop of Bujumbura and Archbishop of Gitega, were convinced that the Hutu uprising was an attempt to “liquidate Burundi Tutsi.”⁹⁶ The GOB did not need to convince its local Church officials nor was it pressured to offer protection to targeted Burundian Hutu parishioners or clergy by the Catholic Church. Church officials played little to zero role in pacifying the factions to prevent further bloodshed.

The United Nations Special Mission to Burundi:

Then finally, two months after the first confirmed reports of mass reprisals against the Burundian Hutu community, the United Nations Special Mission to Burundi (SMB), headed by assistant Secretary-General Issafoud Djemakoye, landed in Bujumbura. For the SMB, it would be understandable, given a recent UN High Commissioner for Refugee report that confirmed that Hutu males were being buried alive and the normal means of execution was a sledge hammer, if the SMB was critical of the Burundi government.⁹⁷ It might even be understandable, given recent reports of Hutu nursing students at the Gitega Nursing School being clubbed to death by their classmates or, at a different school, reports of another 120 students being beaten to death in sight of their teachers, if the mission was hostile to the GOB representatives. However, this was not the case and all diplomatic niceties were maintained.

From the onset, the US Embassy noted that “the visiting U.N. Mission has continued to be largely in [the] hands of [the] Burundi government...[and] Micombero made [the] mission

⁹⁵ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 23th, Bujumbura 731. Translated from French.

⁹⁶ U.S. Embassy Cables, May 1st, Bujumbura 578.

⁹⁷ U.S. Embassy Cables, June 21st, Bujumbura 868.

look like one of sympathy and support for Burundi” during national broadcast.⁹⁸ The UN Mission, strictly labeled a “humanitarian undertaking,” thus avoiding any impression of political intervention, was given first-class treatment by the GOB and led Micombero to state that “UN Mission's visit as an aspect of moral approval and Burundi and the Burundi people are touched by such an expression of sympathy and compassion.”⁹⁹ In spite of how hard the GOB tried, the devastation throughout the country was so immense that it appears it was impossible for the UN mission to not have observed at least a small glimpse of the reality most Burundian Hutus were living through.

On July 4, at a press conference held in Geneva, Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim confirmed that the UN team had “found awful suffering and that the dead might number as high as 200,000.”¹⁰⁰ In reaction to this press conference, there was silence throughout African and in Washington D.C. regarding the UN's findings. It was decided to send another UN team later in July to try to better assess the situation, but this did little to deter future killing and, throughout the remaining months of killing, the same policies were maintained. Thus, as in 1994, the UN sat on its hands, rather than possibly deploy a peacekeeping force (which had occurred in twelve years earlier in the Congo¹⁰¹), and watched as hundreds of thousands of innocent people were slaughtered in preventable bloodshed.

Bujumbura's Response:

The Burundian government, released their official version of the events called the “White

⁹⁸ U.S. Embassy Cables, June 26th, Bujumbura 892.

⁹⁹ Kathleen Teltsch, “Confusing Reports on Burundi stall action by U.N.,” *New York Times*, June 23rd, 1972. U.S. Embassy Cables, June 26th, Bujumbura 892.

¹⁰⁰ Morris, *Passing By*, 11.

¹⁰¹ However, it should be noted that this UN mission is largely seen as a failure and resulted in the death of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, whose plane crashed en route to cease fire negotiations.

Paper on the Real Causes and Consequences of the Attempt Genocide Against the Tutsi Ethny [sic] in Burundi" a week before the Waldheim conference, in an attempt to answer harsh criticism in the international press (particularly the Belgian press)¹⁰². In reaction to the Waldheim conference the GOB released an angry rebuttal and maintained, as stated in the "White Paper," that 50,000 *Tutsi* have been killed in the course of the *Hutu* rebellion. The GOB claims that it seized maps and documents which "more than prove[d] the fact that the aggressors were not only desirous of overthrowing the institution of the Republic, but had a minutely drawn up plan of systematically exterminating a complete ethny [sic]—Tutsi."¹⁰³ The GOB claimed that, in opposition to its actions, it was "aware that every man is responsible only for himself. Only the guilty were punished."¹⁰⁴ The GOB directly confronted claims of genocide against the Hutu by clearly stating: "Certainly a plan of genocide was established by certain traitors of the nation, a genocide of Tutsi. All Tutsi, men, women and children who crossed the path of the rebels were massacred."¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the GOB even defended its violent repression by declaring it does "not speak of repression but of legitimate defense because [Burundi] was at war."¹⁰⁶ In the first few week of reporting, the private press in the United States repeated the lines of the GOB found in this report. It would not be until June that the actual reporting of events, based off of missionary accounts and witness testimony (the GOB forbid reports access to the area devastated by the killing), occurred.

The United States & the Genocide:

¹⁰² Particularly the Belgian newspapers "*Le Soir*" and "*Cité*" were known for their harsh criticism of the GOB during the Genocide.

¹⁰³ Embassy of the Republic of Burundi, "The White Paper on the Real Consequences of the Attempted Genocide Against the Tutsi Ethny in Burundi" (Washington DC, June 26th, 1972), 4. (Hereafter: "White Paper")

¹⁰⁴ "White Paper," 6.

¹⁰⁵ "White Paper," 8.

¹⁰⁶ "White Paper," 12.

The information being relayed to Washington by Melady and Hoyt was not totally ignored and, though strategic interests would prove to be more important, limited discussion did occur within the State Department regarding how to end the killings. This discussion did not produce policies that were eventually pursued and the US government continued the policy formulated and articulated by Melady in the first days of the killing. During this alternative policy discussion two State Department officials—Assistant Secretary David D. Newsom and Country Director for Central Africa Affairs Herman Cohen—were critical in coordinating the limited action the State Department did take to control and limit the killing.

At some point during the summer of 72', these men developed an "alternative policy...an embargo, or threatened embargo, on the significant American purchases of Burundian coffee." This eventually became known as the "Coffee Option." The US-based multinational coffee company Folgers bought 80% of Burundi's coffee and an "extraordinary 65 percent of the small country's commercials earnings" came from this trade. The US Government could have initiated discussion with Folgers and requested that they voluntarily forgo purchasing Burundian coffee. Another possible option did exist. The US-Burundi coffee trade occurred under a annual waiver requested by the GOB excepting it from regulation under the 1968 International Coffee Convention. The United States could have vetoed the waiver request and thus eliminated the possibility of trade.¹⁰⁷ This policy would have produced an "economic disaster" with two possible effects. First, it could have made an already poor country poorer and life much more difficult for everyone—including the victimized Hutus that were still alive.¹⁰⁸ Or second, the embargo would have only hurt the Tutsi elite because they controlled coffee production and kept

¹⁰⁷ Morris, *Passing By*, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Morris, *Passing By*, 15.

most of the profit. The average Hutu farmer received a very small percentage of the profits and may not have been hurt too much by such a policy.¹⁰⁹

Eventually the policy was dismissed by the State Department because, as one Foreign Service Officer stated, “if we'd involved ourselves in this we'd be creamed by every country in Africa for butting into an African state's internal affairs.”¹¹⁰ This is may have been true and such direct intervention could have validated claims of “imperialist” plots, thus accelerating the killing. No other options appeared to be discussed and the idea to scarp this coffee option was made well after the OAU proclaimed solidarity with Micombero—well after the State Department understood that other African states were not going to prevent the Genocide. Even after the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust and the international laws put in place to prevent this type of horror, the State Department was willing to file away this Genocide as an “internal affair” and not intervene.

Within Congress, the first time the Burundi genocide was discussed was in the Subcommittee on Refugee Affairs, headed by Senator Edward Kennedy. Though the internal conditions generating refugee populations were discussed, no specific policy was proposed by the subcommittee. On June 12, with the death toll in Burundi already in the tens of thousands, Senator John Tunney of California introduced “Sense of the Senate” resolutions urging the UN and OAU to investigate.¹¹¹ Though this token effort is worth noting, these resolutions were not at all divergent from the US' original policy of non-engagement articulated by Melady in the first days of the killing. Senator Kennedy informed the US Senate that Hutus were being “slaughtered at a rate of 3,000 per day.” He then asked the chamber: “should not governments condemn the

¹⁰⁹ Morris, *Passing By*, 4.

¹¹⁰ Morris, *Uncertain Greatness*, 267.

¹¹¹ Morris, *Passing By*, 7.

killings?"¹¹² The State Department eventually assured Senator Kennedy that "civil strife in Burundi was ending, that law and order were being restored" and that the State Department has "avoided taking a public positions [against the killing] for fear that it might jeopardize the catalytic and supportive efforts" the United States was making."¹¹³ After June, both congressional and public interest regarding the killing dwindled, with State department official puzzled over how "public attention should now flag while the killing continued."¹¹⁴

The White House had very little to no involvement in the US' policy towards Burundi. It appears that, according to recently US National Security Archive-released conversation between Nixon and Henry Kissinger, Melady and Hoyt's reports were not passed on by the State Department. Nixon appeared to have only learned about the killing from the news: "Henry, ah, in the whole Burundi business—I've been watching it in the press—did you know that State has not sent one memorandum over to us on it?" A question to which Henry Kissinger responded with "No, no, they have not."¹¹⁵ Once Nixon was informed of the killing and that neither of the USSR or the People's Republic of China posed a threat in the conflict, he flew into a rage and wrote:

This is one of the most cynical, callous reactions of a great government to a terrible human tragedy I have seen...Tell the weak sisters in the African Bureau of State to give a recommendation as to how we can at least show moral outrage. And let's begin by calling our Ambassador immediately for consultation. Under no circumstances will I appoint a new Ambassador to present credentials to these butchers."¹¹⁶

Though the above is notable, nothing constructive occurred within the Nixon administration to turn this outburst into an implementable policy.

¹¹² Benjamin Welles, "Burundi Reported Continued Executions and Reprisals Against Ethnic Majority," *New York Times*, June 25, 1972.

¹¹³ State Department letter to Senator Kennedy dated August 21, 1972 in Morris, *Passing By*, 43. Welles, "Burundi Reported Continued Executions and Reprisals Against Ethnic Majority," *New York Times*, June 25, 1972.

¹¹⁴ Morris, *Passing By*, 7.

¹¹⁵ Watt, "Biography of a Small African Country," 37.

¹¹⁶ Nixon's Note to Henry Kissinger, September 20, 1972, "Burundi: Vol. 1, Box 735," Country Files, Africa, National Security Council (NSC).

Nixon became aware of the killing only through the American press, which, in reality, rarely performed accurate or extensive reporting of the killing. Only the *New York Times*, which published twenty-three articles about the Genocide between from May 1, 1972 to October 27, 1974, did any substantial reporting within the American press. It is unclear if the *Times* had any reporters on the ground or if they were getting their information from Belgian and French news sources. The first of these articles were based off of information provided to the *Times* by the Government of Burundi and portrayed the killing as an suppression of rebellion—not Genocide. The *Times* even quoted GOB officials, such as Burundi's UN representative Nsanze Terence, who justified Burundi's harsh repression by arguing that: “the Government's response was stern, as it should be, but not excessive or revengeful.” By June 3 when it was reported, it was clear that Terence was stating a blatant lie.

Throughout the *Times* articles written during the Genocide, the actual word “genocide” only appeared three times—and not once was it used to morally or legally condemn the actions of the GOB. The first time “genocide” appeared was when the *Times* reported that Belgian Premier Gaston Eyskens declared the killings in Burundi a “veritable genocide.”¹¹⁷ However, this article, written well into the Genocide, portrayed the killing as fratricidal and reciprocal—not Genocide. The next two times the word “genocide” appears, it was used by GOB officials to describe a Hutu-led genocide against Tutsi or to describe lists, i.e. “genocide lists,” of Tutsi targets found in the homes of prominent “Hutu plotters.”¹¹⁸ Throughout the remainder of the *Times* reporting, words like “bloodbath,” “slaughter,” “horrors,” “civil strife,” or “ethnic conflict” would be used in the place of Genocide. The little reporting of the killing that occurred

¹¹⁷ “Belgian Chief Sees Burundi 'Genocide,’” *New York Times*, May 21st, 1972.

¹¹⁸ “Burundi Radio Puts Massacre's Toll at 50,000,” *New York Times*, May 31st, 1972. “Imperialist Plot Charged,” *New York Times*, June 25th, 1972.

would cease after June and July as both governmental and public interest in the killing waned.

The Killings Ends & Forgetting Begins:

By the end of June, twenty-seven years after the horrors of the Holocaust and twenty-two years before the bloodbath of Rwanda, the Burundian Hutu community was left, against international law and international commitments to human rights, to the mercy of its own genocidal government. The Burundian Tutsi community feared a Rwandan-style Hutu Revolution and thus supported Micombero's aggression. Outside of Belgium and US suspensions of aid and an extremely limited number of newspaper articles, the Western World saw genocide in this small corner of the world as inconsequential. The major powers in this region—the USA, Belgium, and France—deferred to the United Nations or the African Community through the OAU. All countries on the African continent and the OAU expressed “total solidarity” with Micombero's actions and approved of his aggression; and continued to support his actions even though it was clear that genocide was unfolding. Without any domestic, continental, or international pressure, the Micombero government continued the slaughter.

The exact end-date of the slaughter is unclear, but sometime between August and September, the mass executions/round-ups of Hutu ceased and the Genocide ended. After these months, the GOB could rest easy knowing that it had eliminated the Hutu elite and effectively transformed all branches of the government and military, as well as important education and civil society institutions, into Tutsi monopolies. Even after the Hutu elite had been eliminated, the remainder of the Hutu Community (still a majority in the country) were repressed so as to remove all Hutu from positions in society in which they could possibly access some form of substantial employment, property, education, or the general chance to improve their lives.¹¹⁹ The

¹¹⁹ US Embassy Cables, July 25th, Bujumbura 1028.

Micombero regime played to its political base and successfully eliminated “all future threats to the republican regime and at the same time reinforced its legitimacy in the eyes of the Tutsi population, including its Tutsi rivals.”¹²⁰ Internationally, except for the bad press and the canceling of aid programs (most of which were later reinstated), the GOB suffered little and was still an active member of the UN and OAU. For the GOB, the events of 1972 could not have been more successful and for almost two decades the Tutsi-Hima controlled Burundi with ruthless repression.

The US government's policy proved to be equally as successful because it maintained the US' primary goals: protecting American citizens and US economic interests. The lack of Washington's interferences prevented GOB forces and the more uncontrollable pro-Tutsi elements, the JRR for example, from attacking American embassy workers or missionaries. In fact, no Westerner was killed throughout the Genocide. The lack of interference also allowed US corporations to profit lucratively from the Burundi coffee crop and, two years later, access the nickle deposits discovered within the country. Thus in 1972, the US protected its citizens, maintained current economic relations, and did not interfere to the point of souring future economic agreements.

For those those guilty of perpetrating the Genocide, this may be one of the most successful in modern history. In the aftermath of most other genocides, there have always been some attempts to punishing the guilty or remembering the victims. For example, during the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early 1990s and after the genocide in Rwandan in 1994, the UN Security Council established two Ad Hoc tribunals as attempts to deter killing and/or punish the guilty. After another genocide, the 1975-1979 Cambodian Genocide, a hybrid,

¹²⁰ Lemarchand, “Burundi 1972,” 42.

national-international court, named the “ Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia,” was established. Though it was established twenty-four years after the end of the killing, the Court is an attempt to punish the crimes committed by the most senior Khmer Rouge officials during the Genocide.¹²¹ No official of the Micombero regime who helped to plan and execute the genocide have been subject to similar national or international judicial prosecution.

In some countries where there have been massive human rights abuses and genocide it has not always been possible to punish the guilty in formal international criminal tribunals or a hybrid national court. In these cases, many countries have established truth commissions to reveal, through witness, perpetrator, and victim testimony, past wrongdoings by governments in an attempt to resolve the conflicts in the past. Truth commissions have been established in places such as Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Ghana, Guatemala, Morocco, East Timor, and, famously, South Africa.¹²² These commissions serve many purposes, among two of which are to condemn the past wrongdoings and to establish a history of the events that is truthful and accurate. No attempts have been made to rescue the 1972 Genocide from the dustbin of myth and inverted discourse and create an authoritative account of the Genocide. Nor have there been attempts to punish the guilty that are still alive or attempt to resolve past conflict that could serve as a catalyst for modern-day conflict.

The genocide eliminated all threats to the Tutsi-Hima domestically and did not cause widespread international condemnation. There were no economic or arms embargoes and most of the suspended international aid programs were reinstated in a matter of years. Moreover, occurring before the age of international Ad Hoc tribunals or the International Criminal Court,

¹²¹ Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 370.

¹²² Jones, *Genocide*, 377-378.

the Genocide did not result in an international trial of those guilty. Perhaps most importantly, not only have those guilty never been punished, but academics, intellectuals, historians, government officials, and the general public have largely forgotten this genocide. Outside of the limited number of scholars, the memories of those killed are hold maintained in the minds of Burundian Hutus and an authoritative history of the genocide has never been written. This lack of historical investigation and historical condemnation of the GOB during the genocide has allowed the genocidal killers to be successful in both their attempt to reduce the Hutu community to serfdom-status as well as in the history books.

After 1972, the Tutsi-Hima comfortably controlled all important institutions throughout Burundi and would maintain this control until the late 1980s when ethnic conflict would again erupt. Burundi continues to be on the most underdeveloped, crisis-prone states in Africa and, even after the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, Burundi and the 1972 genocide continued to be understudied and ignored. The United States, so often held in remiss for its inaction in the preventing genocides in Cambodia, Iraq, and Rwanda, is almost never criticized for its Burundian policy.¹²³ This lack of criticism contributed to a policy of inaction that has been the hallmark of US foreign policy in relation to genocide around the world. The continued lack of criticism and lack of scholarship on this genocide, as well as other forgotten genocides, will not only allow continued inaction in the face of genocide, but also maintain policies of economic enrichment over obligations to uphold and protect international human rights.

¹²³ See Samantha Power's "*A problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*" for a detailed analysis of US policy (post-WWII) towards genocide in Cambodia, Iraq, Bosnia, Rwanda, Srebrenica, and Kosovo.