



**From Watch-Dogs to Nation-Builders:  
The Dilemmas of Diaspora Engagement  
in Post-Conflict Burundi**

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**ABSTRACT**

This working paper explores the changing roles of Diasporas in post-conflict Burundi in terms of contributing to development, reconciliation and peace building. Burundi is in a state of post-conflict recovery after decades of civil war and widespread ethnic violence. Due to repressive regimes and to extensive violence, a large proportion of the country's Hutu population left the country to take refuge in neighbouring countries or in Europe and North America where they involved themselves in political activities. The evolving new situation with better security has led to a diversification of Diaspora engagements. First, it is now possible for members of the Diaspora to invest in the country, either with the prospect of returning in the future or simply to make a profit. Second, the Diaspora is increasingly involved in development projects. A third area of Diaspora engagement after conflict is the return or circulation of 'brains'.

In this working paper, we explore the various initiatives that have been taken by various actors in order to try to engage the Diaspora in peace building and development. Such initiatives are taken at all levels from local grassroots and individual entrepreneurs to states and international organizations. They include private and public sectors and may be initiated both inside Burundi and among the Diaspora.

The paper demonstrates that it is a great challenge for the conflict-generated Diaspora to redefine its role from being in political opposition to the home country to being part of the development process. We argue that the Burundian Diaspora is very heterogeneous and that the various 'Diasporas' react differently to the new situation. Furthermore, we argue that the initiatives to engage the Diaspora are precarious and not always in tune with the needs and preoccupations of a conflict-generated Diaspora. In particular, the majority of initiatives lack awareness about the political engagement and identity of Burundians in exile, thus often alienating them from the process.

## INTRODUCTION

Only recently has Burundi started recovering after decades of massive ethnic violence and political conflict. The conflict between Hutu and Tutsi, between various regions and between different political factions has cost tens of thousands of lives and forced hundreds of thousands into exile – either in camps in neighbouring countries or farther afield in Europe (most notably Belgium) and North America. In exile, the Hutu Diaspora developed strong political views and organized themselves against the regime in Burundi. Their main *raison d'être* was to create alternative visions of society and to attempt by all means to influence and change the political system in Burundi, by lobbying host society governments and civil society organizations and more directly by supporting the rebel armies operating in Burundi. The recent peace process and democratic reforms in Burundi have created challenges to the traditional role of the Diaspora, as the Diaspora no longer is unequivocally in opposition to the regime. Likewise the government is reaching out to the Diaspora, encouraging it to take part in developing the country.

This working paper explores the various initiatives that are taken, not only by the post-conflict state in Burundi but also by a number of other actors, in order to engage the Diaspora in peace building and development. Furthermore, it explores how the Burundian Diaspora is reacting to these 'post-conflict-changes'; to the fact that it no longer is in opposition and that it may in fact assist in peace-building efforts. By exploring various concrete initiatives whereby the Diaspora engages in peace building and development, the paper explores how segments of the Diaspora are transforming from a hostile and sceptical position to a position of positive engagement with the home country. However, the different waves of refugees have different characteristics and

therefore different potentials for engagement in the present peace-building process, and the Diaspora is therefore far from united or homogeneous. Finally it is clear that the strong politicization of the Diaspora must be taken into account in a post-conflict setting as the one in Burundi. Consequently, we explore the political engagement taking into account the belief that the diaspora still has a vital role to play as watchdogs.

Only little systematic research has been done on the role of Diasporas in conflict and post-conflict situations (exceptions are Smith and Stares, 2007; Wayland, 2004; Skrbis, 1999; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). There is a tendency in international relations and security studies to perceive Diaspora populations generally as viabilities, fanning the flames of ethnic hatred (Wayland, 2004; Byman et al., 2001; King and Melvin, 1999). On the other hand, studies on transnationalism and transmigration (Guarnizo, 1997; Guarnizo and Smith, 1998; Schiller et al., 1992, 1995; England, 1999) have the livelihood aspect of transnational relationships at their focus and tend to pay much less attention to the conflict-prone political nature of these. Similarly, recent research on migration and development perceives Diasporas as agents of change in international development (de Haas, 2007; World Bank, 2006) not giving primacy to the possible conflictual relationship between migrant and country of origin.<sup>1</sup> However, rather than making a normative assessment of whether the 'impact' has been 'positive' or 'negative' in the Burundian case, this paper takes a slightly different approach in two ways. First, we explore the process of transformation; what happens to the Diaspora, when a country goes from war to peace? Second,

<sup>1</sup> For critical perspectives on this approach, see Kunz, 2008; Mercer et al., 2008.

rather than explore the effects of Diaspora engagement on the homeland, as is common in the literature on Diaspora and conflict, we explore the various initiatives that have been taken by the homeland and other actors in order to engage the Diaspora in developing the homeland and how these initiatives interact with the ambitions and strategies of the members of the Diaspora.

We explore the various actors involved in engaging the Diaspora through a mixture of methods, relying primarily on the written documents of the organizations/actors themselves together with interviews with representatives. The majority of these interviews took place in Bujumbura in March 2008. The analysis of the historical emergence of several Burundian Diasporas – mainly in Belgium – is based on previous field research in Belgium, Nairobi, Denmark and Tanzania (Turner, 2007a, 2008b, 2010). It is important to keep in mind that the vast majority of Burundians in exile have been based in neighbouring countries – most notably the refugee camps in Tanzania – and that these ‘close Diasporas’ have played a vital role in local politics (Turner, 2008b; Salehyan, 2007). Data from the Database on Immigrants in OECD countries (DIOC)<sup>2</sup> tell us that only 10 000 Burundians live in the OECD countries. However, the Burundian state and international organizations such as IOM target the Diaspora in the North in their policies and consider it most important for development. It is therefore these initiatives that will be the centre of attention in this paper.

2 <http://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?lang=eng>

## THE EMERGENCE OF CONFLICT-DRIVEN DIASPORAS

Every outburst of large-scale violence in Burundi has produced new groups of refugees. Likewise, each wave of democratic reform has created new dynamics between the home country and the Diaspora (Turner, 2008b). This has had the effect of creating a Diaspora that was fragmented and heavily politicized (Turner, 2007a). This means that it makes no sense to speak of ‘the Burundian Diaspora’. Rather there are different types of Diaspora groups who now relate differently to the home country’s attempts to engage the Diaspora in peace building and development in Burundi. In the following, four types are outlined, vaguely according to time of arrival, but also characterized by level of education, success in Europe and motive for migration.<sup>3</sup>

### 1972: Young Hutu Radicals

The first group to arrive was the political Hutu exiles after the 1972 ethnic massacres.<sup>4</sup> Although relatively few in number, this small group of radical Hutu with Marxist and revo-

3 The following typology is mainly based on the Burundian Diaspora in Belgium which has the largest Burundian population outside Africa. It must be kept in mind, however, that the Diaspora in Belgium is more divided than in any other country in Europe.

4 In 1972 a small Hutu revolt in the southern part of the country resulted in massive retaliation by government troops that systematically killed up to 150 000 Hutu. Burundi is said to be comprised of three ethnic groups; the Hutu (85%), the Tutsi (14%) and a small group of marginalized Twa (1%). Shortly after independence a small group of low-caste Tutsi from the southern part of the country monopolized political power in the country, breaking with the traditional Tutsi elite and introducing a strongly modernist and anti-colonial ideology. They followed a double-sided policy of keeping power tightly in the hands of the small Tutsi elite while claiming that ethnicity was invented by the colonial administration in order to divide and rule the Burundian people (Lemarchand, 1996; Chrétien, 2003).

lutionary inclinations was very organized and became relatively influential in setting the agenda in exile. They integrated culturally and economically into the host societies, and most are now homeowners and have decent positions if they have not yet retired. Their children are born in exile and speak little or no Kirundi. However, even the second generation is engaged in the political struggle and active in various transnational organizations, often creating websites concerned with 'the struggle' (Turner, 2008a), remaining more or less in the mindset of the 1970s, mistrusting any compromise with the Tutsi with whom they have no contact in exile. The recent political changes have put this group in a dilemma, because their political parties no longer have any influence and their ideas of fighting the Tutsi no longer carry any weight in Burundi. At the same time, they are so well integrated into European society that return is out of the question. In other words, they often end up in a time pocket outside any real influence (Turner, 2007a). However, some of them are diverting their passion for the home country away from politics and into various philanthropic actions in development projects and Home Town Associations.

### **1980s: Boursiers**

The refugees from 1972 were joined in the late 1980s by a number of Hutu post graduate students who arrived in Europe – in particular Belgium and France – on government grants. Due to the gradual reforms in Burundi in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Hutu were increasingly given such government scholarships that had previously been the privilege of the Tutsi. From the beginning, there was mutual suspicion between them and the first generation of Hutu refugees, who were convinced that these Hutu were 'sell-outs' at best and spies for the regime at worst. The new wave of students, on the other hand, perceived the '1972s' as radi-

cal extremists. With the reforms in the early nineties, some of these Hutu scholars returned to Burundi. However, following the violence in 1993,<sup>5</sup> many since applied for asylum and remained in Europe. They share many of the characteristics of the *Exilés* (see below), especially in terms of education and frustration with the lack of career opportunities in Europe, but tend to be more pragmatic and more willing to political compromise.

5 In June 1993 Frodebu (Front Démocratique du Burundi), a newly created moderate 'Hutu party' with several Tutsi in the leadership, won a landslide victory in the country's first multi-party elections. However after only three months in office, the newly elected president – Melchior Ndadaye – was abducted and killed by Tutsi officers, plunging the country into ethnic violence, civil war and political chaos, causing hundreds of thousands of Hutu to leave the country once again. An estimated 30 000 Tutsi were killed by angry Hutu following the assassination of the president. An equal number of Hutu are estimated to have been killed by the army and Tutsi militias (Reyntjens, 1993).

### 1993: Exilés

After the violence in 1993 a new wave of – mostly Hutu – refugees left the country.<sup>6</sup> As opposed to the students, they were often involved in party politics in one way or another. However, their political views were different from those of the 1972 refugees. Shaped by the democratic reforms in the early 1990s and the moderate ideology of Frodebu, they no longer adhered to the kind of ethno-nationalism of the first wave. Even to this day, Hutu refugees from 1972 and from 1993 rarely mix; they even have separate troupes for traditional drummers in Brussels. The refugees from after 1993 and the *boursiers*, on the other hand, often mix and in practice often overlap, as individuals who arrive on scholarships often apply for asylum after their studies. They also make up much the same age group and come from the same elite background (Turner, 2007a).

The *exilés* are often well educated and politically active. Many held important positions in the administration in Burundi – and it was often due to these influential positions that they were forced to flee the country. They feel a sense of loss and blockage in terms of personal career in Europe, and as refugees they are only in Europe for reasons of personal security. They do not see their future there – and have always been actively involved in long-distance politics. Therefore, they have an intention to return home and help rebuild their country – at least at the ideological level. At the practical level, however, there are a number of reasons to remain in Europe; they have lived in Europe for a long time, and their children have in

particular become accustomed to a European lifestyle, making return difficult.

However, a large number of these political exiles did return to Burundi during the transition period, taking up positions in government. However, as a safety precaution many retained their EU citizenship and left their families in Europe. So, whereas they may choose to remain in Europe for practical livelihood reasons, they are gradually engaging with the homeland, politically, culturally and economically. They no longer perceive the conflict in purely ethnic terms but may be critical of the present regime's human rights record and the high levels of corruption and mismanagement.

### 2000s: Mixed Flows

It has been argued (Betts, 2010) that in practice it rarely makes sense to distinguish sharply between refugees and other types of migrants, since motives for migration are complex and interrelated. This was, for instance, the case with the 1993 'boursiers' who later became refugees. Since ca 2000 this picture has become even more blurred as the conflict in Burundi became less bi-polar and more complex.<sup>7</sup> The deteriorating security situation in the late 1990s also resulted in a deteriorating economy which resulted in a number of young Tutsi and Hutu leaving the country and seeking asylum in Europe and North America, blurring the

6 While poor, uneducated Hutu fled wide-scale violence and ended up in refugee camps in neighbouring countries (Malkki, 1995; Turner, 2010), the elite fled due to their political opinions and their positions in society, and could afford to travel to Europe in search of asylum.

7 In August 2000, the Arusha peace accords were signed by no less than seventeen parties. The Arusha accords initiated a transition period with various reforms and power-sharing agreements. A free and vibrant press emerged, heavily supported by international NGOs. One after one the rebel movements signed ceasefires and were demobilized, many of their soldiers being integrated into the national defence force and *gendarmerie* which had so far been dominated by the Tutsi. In 2005 elections were held, giving a former hard-liner rebel movement, CNDD-FDD (Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie) led by Pierre Nkurunziza, an overwhelming victory (Reyntjens, 2005).



borderline between refugees and economic migrants. They have less education than earlier waves of refugees and have typically been less politically active. These young Hutu and Tutsi left the country due to lack of opportunities and the general insecurity in the country rather than personal persecution. While previous refugee and migrant groups often chose the old colonial power, Belgium, as their destination, due to established networks, education opportunities and the opportunity to engage in politics, the young Burundians who left since 2000, are less interested in politics and prefer the liberal multi-cultural societies in Canada, UK and USA which are portrayed as 'places of opportunity', and where they are not forced to take sides in the political exile milieu in Belgium or France. They have no desire to return as long as their opportunities remain poor in Burundi due to the continued economic crisis. Although they may not have held important positions prior to leaving Burundi, they still have elite backgrounds, allowing them to afford the journey to Europe. Rather than directing their frustrations into political projects, they are adventurers seeking individual success. Their life trajectories are very mixed; some take degrees in areas such as banking, management and finance, while others are keen simply to get a job and earn money. Often they marry non-Burundians. However, they continue to take some interest in their home country and might volunteer in fundraising and cultural events.

## THE DIASPORA AS WATCHDOG

During the conflict and during the oppressive 'Tutsi' regimes of the 1970s and 1980s, the state controlled the media tightly and cracked down on any critical voice – in particular anything that mentioned ethnicity. While Burundian Hutu, living in camps in neighbour-

ing countries were more or less isolated from the outside world, the Hutu living in Europe and North America saw it as their main *raison d'être* to provide reliable information about the problems in the home country. This information was targeted at other Burundians in the Diaspora and inside Burundi, whom they believed were being fed with one-sided propaganda by the Tutsi regime. It was also targeted at 'the international community'.

Exiled Hutu used to get 'reliable' information about the situation in the country through phone calls, faxes, letters and eyewitness accounts by new arrivals. Every time new refugees arrived in Europe, the established Diaspora would meet with them in order to be briefed on the conflict and the political situation. The information was then circulated in the Diaspora in various printed bulletins or by word of mouth at meetings, in 'bistros' and private homes (interviews Tanzania 1998, Brussels 2003, Nairobi 2005). There was also a complex communication network between the rebel movements, operating in Burundi, the refugees in the camps in Tanzania, the refugees in Nairobi and Dar Es Salaam and the Diaspora in Belgium and the rest of Europe. In recent years, the internet has greatly eased this kind of information flow, as people can email to and from Bujumbura, Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi swiftly, safely and fairly inexpensively. At the same time, Hutu in exile now have an efficient means to distribute their news and analyses to a large audience. An abundance of internet sites are created and run by committed Burundians in the Diaspora, commenting on the political situation, providing critical analyses of the conflict, etc. (Turner 2008a, Kadende-Kaiser 2000). In recent years, however, the position of the Diaspora as providers of alternative information about the conflict has been challenged for three reasons.

First, the spread of information technology has not only undermined the Burundian state's

monopoly on information. It has also to some degree undermined the privileged position of the politicized Hutu Diaspora as provider of information. Now Burundians in exile or at home may get information about the conflict and the political situation directly from those involved rather than through the bulletins of the Diaspora watchdogs. Access to mobile phones and email has made it easier for Burundians to communicate directly, whether they are in a village in Burundi, a refugee camp in Tanzania or a university in Brussels. In other words, they need no longer go through the organized networks of the Hutu politicians in Belgium and elsewhere who now lose their ability to control the exile narratives. Secondly, the character of the conflict inside Burundi has changed dramatically over the past years, forcing the Diaspora to redefine its role as information providers. Burundi has experienced a shift from a binary conflict between two irreconcilable positions based on ethnicity to a complex conflict between a multiplicity of opinions and alliances where ethnicity no longer is the main fault line. This challenges the old Hutu Diaspora's perception of ethnicity and conflict. Finally, vibrant media, NGOs and civil society organizations inside Burundi are very vocal and highly critical of state institutions and the political process, making the Diaspora superfluous.

While the present reforms challenge the position of the Diaspora as the sole provider of unbiased information, certain groups in the Diaspora continue to take on the role as watchdogs, never trusting the peace process and never taking the good news coming out of Burundi at face value.<sup>8</sup> They believe that their position as outsiders helps them steer clear of

the corrupting forces in Burundi and provide level-headed analyses, and that their distance from the events helps them see the broader picture.<sup>9</sup> They also believe that behind the surface of democracy, a corrupt elite is pulling the strings. Some of them fear that this elite is planning another genocide – either against the Hutu or the Tutsi. They continue to run various websites that air political opinions banned inside Burundi because they incite ethnic hatred (Turner, 2008a). Furthermore, while it used to be the Hutu in Diaspora who saw it as their obligation to provide such alternative information, it is increasingly disenchanted Tutsi in exile who presently take this position.<sup>10</sup> This makes the position of the Diaspora more fractured and complex than ever.

## LOBBYING HOST SOCIETIES

One of the ways in which Diasporas can influence the conflict in the home country is by influencing the policies of governments and NGOs in the host society (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001). In some cases the presence of a large minority group in certain countries has led to that country putting pressure on the sending state, as is the case with the Armenians in France and the US (Tölölyan, 2007). In such situations the Diaspora has seen it as its duty to provide decision makers with its version of the truth about the conflict. Similarly, the information that the Burundian Diaspora created, was not only meant for home consumption; an important objective of creating news bulletins, internet sites, conferences, and discussion

<sup>8</sup> This is common for conflict-generated Diasporas. Cf Lyons, 2007; Wayland, 2004; Whitaker, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Cf Burundi-AGNews ([www.burundi-agnews.org](http://www.burundi-agnews.org)), Arib News ([www.arib.info](http://www.arib.info)) and [www.burundi-info.com](http://www.burundi-info.com).

<sup>10</sup> E.g. SurviT-bangunka ([www.tutsi.org](http://www.tutsi.org)) based in Switzerland and UK.

groups was to try to reach the international community (Turner, 2004, 2008a). Behind this objective lies an assumption that information is central to power and that the Tutsi were sticking to power by controlling information. The Hutu in exile believed that the regime in Burundi was able to control the information leaving the country concerning the nature of the conflict and in this manner 'feed the international community with lies'. As long as the international community was ignorant about the 'true' nature of the conflict, it would not intervene and stop the injustices taking place. Therefore, the Diaspora saw it as its utmost duty to provide the international community with balanced information about the conflict that the Burundian government was attempting to cover up.<sup>11</sup>

## **THE BURUNDIAN STATE – WOONG THE DIASPORA**

While the Burundian state under the one-party system and various military rules perceived the Burundians in the Diaspora with mistrust as potential dangers to national security, the present Burundian state – itself made up to a large extent by returnees from the Diaspora – is increasingly putting emphasis on engaging the Diaspora. Aware of the dangers of an antagonistic Diaspora, the state is doing its best to appease the Diaspora and take it on board. For the Burundian state the Diaspora in Europe and North America represents a big potential resource for developing the country, not only in terms of financial remittances and investments but in particular in terms of skills. Many Burundians abroad have Master

and Ph.D. degrees from European universities in subjects such as economics, development, business administration, law, etc. while years of war and economic hardship have reduced the number of educated people inside the country. Although this is a common problem in post-conflict situations, the Burundian case has the added dimension of decades of ethnic discrimination in the educational system as well as in the civil administration and the armed forces, which means that there is an even greater shortage of qualified Hutu in the public sector in general and in the justice system in particular. The Burundian state is, in other words, very keen on winning the sympathy of the Diaspora for three reasons; to ease political tensions, to attract human resources, and finally to rectify historical injustices towards the Hutu ethnic group.

There are basically two ways in which the Diaspora can contribute to countering these imbalances: Either through return migration, as has happened to some degree with some politicians, army officers and other government officials, following the peace agreement, or through temporary return – or circular migration – to support the educational capacity.

Following the peace agreement in Arusha in August 2000, substantial numbers of Hutu who had been living in exile either in Europe, North America or other African countries, were given positions in parliament, the army and other places in the administration. Many others are contemplating return to a position in the civil service, especially since many of them held such positions before being forced to leave the country. The Burundian government has on several occasions encouraged the Diaspora to return and help rebuild the country. Ministers frequently travel to Europe and North America as well as to African countries with substantial Burundian communities to convince the refugees to return. However, security concerns and difficult living conditions

<sup>11</sup> For analyses of the relationship between secrecy and power in Burundi, see Turner, 2005.

make it difficult to make the move. Hence, many are hesitant and often choose to move back gradually. Some choose to return for short visits in order to assess the situation before taking the step of returning. Often they choose to leave their spouse and children in Europe to begin with in order to keep both options open; in the literature this is called ‘staggered return’ (Hansen, 2007). Their choice whether or not to return depends firstly on what ‘wave’ of migrants they belong to, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Furthermore, it depends on the situation in the host and sending societies. Generally, the 1972ers tend to be well established in the new country of residence and rather out of touch with everyday realities of today’s Burundi, while later arrivals tend to feel that they are wasting their talents in Europe<sup>12</sup> and are still connected with politics in Burundi. However, they are concerned about the security situation and with the possibility of making a living that is compatible to their European lifestyles.

The Burundian state is aware of these constraints and of the political instability that a hostile Diaspora may create. However, not much has been put in place in terms of concrete policies, apart from allowing dual citizenship. It appears that the initiative is being taken elsewhere – among international organizations, Diaspora groups and local associations and entrepreneurs, engaged in everything from remittances to political debates.

<sup>12</sup> The phenomenon of ‘reduced social status’ is common among elite migrants – mostly among political refugees (Kleist, 2007).

## EASING THE REMITTANCE FLOW

Although heavily politicized and internally split, Burundians in the Diaspora have always remitted to their families. With a 140 USD GNI per capita, Burundi ranges among the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Because Burundi has been affected by conflict, ethnic violence and political instability, very few investments have been made, neither by domestic nor foreign investors.<sup>13</sup> Under such circumstances remittances – although modest in quantity – can make a large difference for individual livelihoods by having what the literature terms a consumption-smoothing effect and/or by being what is phrased as “counter-cyclical” (Chami et al., 2005).<sup>14</sup> Often, remitters respond to homeland crisis (Hysenbegasi and Poza, 2002) by remitting in spite of difficulties connected with finding for instance the appropriate channels. Even though recent research shows that the absolute amount of official remittances to fragile states or countries affected by conflict is not larger than to other countries (Hansen, 2008b), the effect of remit-

<sup>13</sup> In some periods and regions the security situation was so bad that peasants would not even invest in planting because they knew that chances were that the harvest would be stolen or destroyed by either rebel or government soldiers or that they would have to leave their homes before the harvest (Ndikumana, 2000; Ngaruko and Nkurunziza, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Remittances from abroad can help families to survive during conflict and sustain communities in crisis. In conflict-torn societies, the scope for investment in ‘productive enterprises’ may be limited under conditions of great insecurity. However, investment of remittances in social activities may be seen as reconstruction of the social fabric, in which ‘productive’ activities are embedded. By facilitating the accumulation of repair of social capital, such investment may lay the foundation for later reconstruction and development (Goodhand et al., 2000; Van Hear, 2001)

tances may still be higher, when other sources of income decrease due to conflict.

Concrete information about different aspects of remittances is limited in Burundi. According to the Central Bank of Burundi (CBB)'s own estimates, remittances to Burundi are lower than the average for sub-Saharan Africa. And in 2007 the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (UN Peacebuilding Support Office paper, 2007) even estimated that remittances leaving Burundi offset the inflow, leaving a very marginal net macroeconomic effect. Nevertheless, the World Bank (World Bank, 2011) has estimated that the official amount of inflowing remittances has been around 3 million USD in 2009 and 2010, down from 4 million in 2008<sup>15</sup> (for comparison: Burundi received net Overseas Development Aid USD 0.5 billion total; international reserves 0.3 billion in 2008). And in a World Bank Working Paper (World Bank, 2010) Burundi was listed in the group of remittance-receiving countries that reported requiring firms specializing in money-transfers to operate in partnership with banks to receive remittance-inflows, leading to the conclusion that although remittances appear modest in officially reported volume, easing remittance flows is an area of importance for the Diaspora engagement in post-conflict Burundi.

According to an IOM study<sup>16</sup> (de Bruyn and Wets, 2006) most of the inflowing Burundian remittances are remitted in order to assist family households and live up to family obligations. The amounts remitted by the individual in this regard range between 60 and 100 Euros per month. The director of a local

money transfer arrangement named Mutualité d'Épargne et de Crédit - Mutec (will be described in detail below) has mentioned an amount closer to 100-200 Euros per month (personal interview with Director of Mutec, Brussels, May 2005). Under all circumstances the individual recipient family seems to receive a relatively substantial amount of money compared to average net income.

These remittances are mainly used to satisfy the basic needs of family members, for educational purposes and health care. Other important objectives for these types of remittances are important lifetime events such as marriages, funerals and baptisms. Consequently, according to the IOM study, the amount of money remitted tends to increase with the beginning of the school year and during Christmas periods. Some of the single largest sums of remittances in Burundi are used for constructing a house or buying property. In the literature this is sometimes referred to as 'life-cycle investment' (Cliggett, 2003, 2005). There seems to be a tendency that it is the higher educated and wealthier among the Diaspora, who choose to do so. Other migrants remit money to start an enterprise or for other economic purposes. Finally, there are some examples of collective remittances that finance various development projects and charities, while a few go to financing political parties. The amount going to the latter purpose seems to be decreasing (de Bruyn and Wets, 2006).

The Burundian remitters are in line with general findings (World Bank, 2006) regarding preferences, when it comes to remittance intermediaries. High remittance costs stand out as one of the most important factors mentioned by families making use of remittances: The remittance costs affect the choice of service provider, instrument and amount of remitted money. In practice, the remittance method most often used by the Burundian Diaspora in Belgium is cash-based transfers via Money

15 Representatives from the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of Burundi estimate that most remittances are sent from Europe, the USA and Canada.

16 Based on interviews conducted over a two-week period in Burundi, mainly in the capital.



Transfer Operators (MTOs), such as Western Union and MoneyGram. The advantages cited by users are speed, security and ease of use. Although the costs of sending remittances through MTOs are not the highest, they are nevertheless rather high for each singular remittance transfer. Account-to-account transfers via banks are less frequently used, because of the high costs of transfer and because they are not a very appropriate method, when money is needed quickly. Additionally the client must open an account, which is quite costly (see de Bruyn and Wets, 2006). A third option is to use “paper transfers”, including cash-based transfers via Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs), which could be cheaper than using the established MTOs. However most MFIs are still rather weak in the market, and only one initiative stands out:

### **Mutualité d’Epargne et de Crédit (Mutec)**

In order to reduce the costs of sending remittances through banks and money transfer offices and reduce the uncertainties of informal methods, an association of Burundians in Belgium took the initiative to create Mutualité d’Epargne et de Crédit (Mutec).<sup>17</sup> Mutec opened its first office in Bujumbura in July 2004 and has since expanded astronomically with offices all over the country as well as in five other countries in Africa. Mutec is a pioneering institution, meeting many of the requirements of the senders and receivers. It is a private initiative – a particular kind of micro savings and credit institution – engaged in

facilitating the remittance flows coming from the Burundian Diaspora in Belgium by reducing the costs of remitting for the individual Burundian. Emerging in Brussels in 2001, a group of enthusiastic Burundians established these initiatives with the overall objective in mind to strengthen the Diasporas possibilities to help rebuild the country.

Mutec operates around a composition between Mutualité des Grands Lacs (MGL), Mutualité d’Epargne et de Crédit (Mutec), the Cooperative de la Diaspora Burundaise (Codibu) based in Belgium, a Belgian Bank and the Société Burundaise de Financement (SBF) in Burundi. This system uses economy of scales by only transferring one large sum of money once a week, thereby keeping the transfer costs low. In the period between the weekly transfers, the individual client’s transactions are carried out between Codibu and Mutec with a delay of maximum two days between sender and recipient. Membership of Codibu requires a monthly deposit of EUR 5 and entails an unlimited access to remit without extra costs regardless of the size of the amount – making it much cheaper than other channels, particularly for little sums. Credit worthiness is obtained after half a year. In order to receive money, the recipient must have an account at Mutec, which costs around 400 FBu (0.25 Euro) per month and must pay one lump sum up-front of 7 000 FBu (3.75 Euro), also considerably lower than the costs at the regular banks.

Mutec’s other services include ‘Codibu Agence Plus’, which addresses the otherwise high costs of remittances in kind and efforts to get cheap and direct flights (they have apparently managed to get a 25 percent reduction on airfares and have negotiated a direct flight from Brussels to Bujumbura with SN Brussels). The head of the organization explained (interview May 2005) that he wanted to make it easy for the Diaspora in Belgium to visit the

<sup>17</sup> This section is based on interviews with the founder of Mutec, Mr Jean-Marie Rurimirije, in Brussels, May 2005 and with Mr Jean-Marie Sindayigaya in Bujumbura, March 2008, as well as interviews with Mr Rurimirije on Arib.info (7 July 2009) and Mutec’s own homepage ([www.Codibu.org](http://www.Codibu.org)).

country so that they might be convinced that the country is actually safe. In other words he has a political mission to remove what he perceives as myths in the minds of the old Diaspora in Europe and let them see 'the reality' with their own eyes. Although Mutec is based on Diaspora initiative, the Burundian government is keen to promote the project due to its apparent success. Thus, for instance, the first offices of Mutec in Bujumbura were inaugurated by no less than the minister of development. The relationship between the Burundian government and Mutec is complex. The leader of Mutec, Jean-Marie Rurimirije, is known as a wealthy businessman. However, it is also well known that he has strong relations with the current president and has had so since before the president was elected, which obviously causes a number of rumours about his personality and his business deals. In 2009 he became the personal advisor to the president. The mixture of entrepreneurship, a strong commitment to engaging the Diaspora through a number of activities apart from Codibu and Mutec, and good political connections has made Rurimirije an influential individual and challenges any rigid distinction between private business, development work and politics.

## LURING DIASPORA INVESTMENTS

During the conflict, the Diaspora invested neither in property nor in production. Remittances were either sent to relatives for private consumption or to various political factions. Since the peace accords and increasingly since 2005, the improved security situation in the country has meant that investments slowly are picking up pace, and attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) is now part of Burundi's development strategy, as exemplified by the recent creation of an investment promotion

agency. According to UNCTAD figures, FDI in 2004 was USD 3 million (0.4% of GDP) (UNCTAD, 2007). In 2008 the total stock of FDI in Burundi was almost 48 m. USD equivalent of 4.4 percent of the GDP.<sup>18</sup> Investment is, however, still relatively weak in comparison to neighbouring countries.

First and foremost investments are being made in real estate, and whole new districts with expensive housing are mushrooming in Bujumbura and other big towns. Much of this investment is being made by Burundians who have returned from the Diaspora in Europe or from neighbouring countries, many of whom were given seats in parliament, the army and the administration as part of the Arusha Peace Accords. For this reason, Mutanga Nord, a new suburb on the northern outskirts of Bujumbura, is popularly known as the 'Quartier d'Arusha', jokingly referring to the generous allowances that the politicians were given during the lengthy peace negotiations in Arusha, Tanzania.

Members of the Diaspora who are not part of this political elite are also known to gradually and increasingly invest in property in the home country. Interestingly, they do not necessarily invest in property in the village or even the province from where they originated. Often they prefer to buy property in more prosperous neighbourhoods in and around Bujumbura and other big towns – as these are places that they believe would suit better their European/North American life styles, if they should decide to return one day.

There are no exact data on the investments being made by the Diaspora, but some initiatives have been made in order to help Burundi-

<sup>18</sup> The same year the total stock of FDI represented 6.1% of GDP in Burundi, 6.6% in Kenya, 25.3% DRC and 37.2% in Tanzania.

ans abroad invest in property. The most remarkable of these is an initiative by a private bank, BCB (Banque de Crédit de Bujumbura<sup>19</sup>), which has started two initiatives to aid the Diaspora in its transnational financial activities. Firstly, it has made it possible for the Diaspora to open savings accounts in the bank and deal with their banking needs via internet banking. The objective is not to support remittances in the traditional sense by transferring money to relatives in Burundi. Rather, the objective is to aid members of the Diaspora who have the means to create liaisons with their country of origin, so that they may have sufficient funds when on vacation in Burundi or to invest – in particular in property. The second initiative aims at helping Burundians in the Diaspora invest in real estate in Burundi. If a member of the Diaspora has a savings account in BCB, he/she can take a mortgage loan and invest in a house in a particular neighbourhood that is to be created along Lake Tanganyika, south of Bujumbura. The government has donated land for the project, and the bank has made plans for the plots and the types of houses to be built.

As with many other initiatives to involve the Diaspora in peace building and development in Burundi, these initiatives are the result of one person's initiative and resourcefulness. The projects were conceived by Léon Nkeshimana, in charge of the bank's department on logistics, research and strategic planning. Once he had conceived the ideas, he travelled to Belgium, France and Canada to meet with the Burundian Diaspora there and learn about their needs as well as to inform them about the projects. So where it is often assumed in the literature on the migration-development nexus that migrants are the prime movers in

such initiatives, the BCB initiatives were made by a private bank and initiated by a resident of Burundi. However, although the initiative was taken by Mr. Nkeshimana of BCB, the Burundian state agreed to donate land in order to promote its own visions of attracting Diaspora investment and was able in effect to piggyback on Mr. Nkeshimana's idea.

Despite initiatives like these, investment by the Diaspora in business and production remains very modest. There may be several reasons for this. Firstly, the majority of Burundians in the Diaspora has not made the transformation from conflict to post-conflict engagement. Furthermore, several informants emphasized the fact that many Burundians in the Diaspora are not wealthy. The Burundians in Europe and North America are mostly intellectuals with elite backgrounds, who have, if anything, experienced a decline in their material standard of living. Furthermore, they are not entrepreneurs. As opposed to for instance Senegalese or Congolese migrants, they did not migrate in order to improve their standard of living or to 'do business'. However, the Burundian Diaspora is not heterogeneous and there are some Burundians – especially the younger generation and the latest arrivals – who have succeeded in making a career and earning money in Europe and North America and who are now keen to invest in their country of origin. They get involved in a mixture of development work, business and charity, as we saw in the case of Mutec, and as we will now illustrate with the example of Mr. Bapfumukeko's business.

Bapfumukeko is in his thirties and has lived for some years in Belgium with his Burundian wife and their only child. He has a Belgian passport and a Belgian degree in law and some training in information technology. When we first met him in Brussels in 2003, he worked in a bank and was the executive director of CIAD that focused on peace building and human

<sup>19</sup> [www.bcb.bi](http://www.bcb.bi)



rights in the Great Lakes region.<sup>20</sup> We met him again in Bujumbura in 2008, where he was running a successful business. He claimed that he at one point realized that organizing symposia on human rights was not solving the most important problems in Burundi, and that the primary concern of Burundians was poverty, not human rights.

Therefore he created CeCe (Centre pour la Commerce Equitable)<sup>21</sup> which sends second-hand computers, mobile phones and other electronic equipment from Belgium to Bujumbura where it is sold at reasonable prices. CeCe used to be supported by Brussels City Council through CIAD, but soon it became a private enterprise, and Bapfumukeko openly claims that he has two objectives: one is to help his country, another is to earn money. In just a few years his business has grown rapidly. Now he works full time with it – sharing his time equally between Belgium, Burundi and Dubai, where he also buys equipment. By March 2008 he had 15 employees in his shop in Bujumbura and had opened a branch in Ngozi and was in the process of opening another in Nyanza-Lac. At the time of writing (October 2010) CeCe is also offering web design and money transfer services.

Bapfumukeko sees Burundi as ‘virgin soil’ – a land where there are plenty of business opportunities – not for big multinationals but for small entrepreneurs like himself.<sup>22</sup> The security situation has kept many Burundians in the Diaspora from investing but now it is just a question of daring, he claims. He complains that the Belgian government is willing

to donate large sums to conferences on human rights while not being keen to support small businesses with loans etc.

Bapfumukeko is an example of a group of (younger) Burundians in Europe and North America, who have managed to integrate into the European job market but who retain an urge to ‘make a difference’ in their country of origin. Because they have ‘succeeded’ in Europe in terms of jobs etc., they are not willing to return to Burundi for good. However, they are willing to return to Burundi for short periods of time in relation to their projects.<sup>23</sup> The project has enabled Bapfumukeko to live transnationally, combining the material advantages of living in Belgium with the satisfaction of spending much time in Burundi.

## **INITIATIVES BY INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES – CIRCULATING BRAINS**

While the government is keen to encourage return, it does not presently have a clear policy on temporary or circular migration. There are, however, several initiatives in place to assist Burundians in the Diaspora to return for short periods of time so that Burundian society may benefit from their skills without them having to make the difficult choice to return home once and for all. The MIDA Great Lakes program, run by IOM-Belgium<sup>24</sup>, focuses on Burundi, DRC and Rwanda – all countries recovering from conflict and all countries with large migrant populations in Belgium. The programme aims at reinforcing human capacities without

20 Coalition International des Association pour les Droits Humains et le Développement, established in 2001. [www.ciad.info](http://www.ciad.info)

21 [www.cece.be](http://www.cece.be)

22 For a fascinating analysis of the gendered vision of the Diaspora and the homeland, see Hansen, 2008a.

23 Kleist similarly argues that it is the successful and ‘well integrated’ migrants who are the most active transnationally (Kleist, 2007).

24 [www.midagrandlacs.org](http://www.midagrandlacs.org)

imposing a return condition. The prospect is to develop potential synergies between skills profiles of African migrants and the needs of countries of origin (not the least when it comes to needs in human resources) based on an in-country coordination process, which takes into account the long-term development strategies and poverty reduction goals of the country as described in the relevant strategy papers and country legislation as well as the international donor strategies. The means is to transfer competencies and resources from the African Diaspora back to the benefit of the country of origin.

The MIDA programme supports this exchange of knowledge and resources through (1) the transfer of skills by means of repeated short-term (2-6 months) and medium-term (6-12 months) missions, (2) the development of distance and e-learning courses, and (3) the long-term use of remittances to enhance development in the Great Lakes region. On the one hand, IOM establishes an overview of the need for expertise, transferable knowledge and investments, which could possibly be met by persons in the Diaspora, who have residency permits in Europe and who are active in the fields rural development, education and health. On the other hand, the programme identifies and organizes the people in the Diaspora, who have the necessary skills and/or financial means and an interest in contributing. In the second phase of the program, which ran from 2005 to 2006, a total of 87 people were physically transferred back to their countries of origin – 77 for a short-term mission (2-6 months), 5 for a period of 6-12 months and 5 returned permanently. In an add-on project, which has run from 2006 to 2010, the MIDA activities have continued – now with a more explicit focus on ensuring local ownership of the processes. As part of this work the MIDA concept was integrated into the Framework Strategy to combat poverty in Burundi in 2007.

According to a joint evaluation report from IOM and the Belgian Development Agency (IOM, 2004), the programme has – apart from the actual transfers of what could be termed social remittances – a positive multiplication effect on the reconciliation process between the Diaspora and the country of origin. The possibility for members of the Burundian Diaspora to be able to go back to the country on a temporary basis with a clear-cut legal status allows those involved to get more familiar with realities ‘on the ground’ and modify stereotypes, thus providing an opportunity to build more confidence between the country and the Diaspora, which in the long run could lead to more permanent return and political stability and reconciliation, the report claims.

The philosophy of the MIDA programme rests on a number of assumptions concerning knowledge and mobility. First, it assumes that knowledge is something that can be acquired and then stored, to be used at some later point in time. However, many Burundians in Europe are unemployed or working in menial jobs, despite their degrees in psychology, mathematics or linguistics, and have therefore lost their skills over time. Secondly, and more fundamentally, such programmes as MIDA assume that the members of the Diaspora have a desire to partake in rebuilding their home country and support the present regime. As we saw in the analysis of the various waves of migration, this is far from always the case; either because the migrants are more concerned with creating a new life for themselves or because they are highly politicised and sceptical of the regime in place. This does not mean that they are a negative Diaspora per se, but simply that they may be critical of the government and do not wish to contribute to it. The MIDA programme reinforces in other words the state’s attempts to depoliticise and developmentalise the Diaspora.

## **DIASPORA INITIATIVES: DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND COLLECTIVE REMITTANCES**

Despite the lack of institutional backing, there are a number of development initiatives made by the Burundian Diaspora. However, they are few and far between and depend mostly on the initiative of enthusiastic individuals – either in the Diaspora or in Burundi. Among the projects that we found in Burundi were several examples of town twinning projects, where Burundians in a town in France, for instance, lobbied the local town council to ‘twin’ with a town in Burundi. Concretely, this results in small funds being sent to Burundi in terms of school materials (including second hand computers), hospital equipment, etc. Small Home Town Associations also exist, where a group of people in the Diaspora from the same region in Burundi sends money home for a project like building a school. Often these associations also include native Belgians, Swiss, etc. from the host country. Although they are mostly funded by members, some of them appear to receive small amounts for particular projects from city councils and the like. In this manner, for instance, the city of Brussels paid the travel costs, when the governor of Gitega visited a hometown association in Brussels. Other development initiatives include Compétences Sans Frontières (CSF), who attempt to involve the Burundian Diaspora in the development of their country of origin. One of the largest Diaspora organizations is the Communauté Burundaise de Belgique (CBB)<sup>25</sup>, which aims amongst other things to promote the participation of the Burundian population in Belgium in the socio-economic development of Burundi and to act as an interface between Belgian

and international development actors on the one hand and local NGOs in Burundi on the other. Other initiatives taken by Burundians in the Diaspora include CIRID (Centre Indépendant de Recherches et d’Initiatives pour le Dialogue or Independent Centre of Research and Initiatives for the Dialogue) based in Geneva. Although the primary objective of CIRID is to promote peaceful dialogue, it has also been involved in various more concrete development projects. Finally, individuals in the Diaspora have started small projects. One such example is a Burundian living in France who is a trained pharmacist and who in 2007 created a dispensary in his natal village. Here they hand out free medicine to disadvantaged groups.

The exact number of development projects supported by the Diaspora is not known, but according to the interviews that we did with central actors, it appears that the total figure is less than a dozen. Although the figures are too small to draw any decisive conclusion, it appears that the Burundians in the Diaspora that engage in these activities, belong to all types of Diaspora groups. Although the projects so far are too few and too small to have any significant impact on the economy, they bear witness to the Diaspora’s growing confidence in the security situation in the country. It also shows how the Diaspora is gradually readjusting itself to the new roles that it may play in the country; rather than being in political opposition and supporting armed conflict, Burundians in the Diaspora are beginning to take on the role of supporting the development and reconstruction process. Interestingly, it is often the same individuals, who were engaged in politics, who later became active in ‘development activities’. Due to their high levels of education, their dedication to the homeland and their tradition of creating organizations (for political use), they have potential as development agents. These are individuals who feel an urge to make

25 [www.Burundaisdebelgique.be](http://www.Burundaisdebelgique.be)

a difference in their homeland and who make the best of the opportunities that are available; be it through politics and armed resistance in the 1980s and 1990s or through development initiatives in the 2000s.

## POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Often overlooked in the debate on the development impact of Diasporas is their engagement in politics. As mentioned earlier, the Burundian Diaspora has always been particularly politicized, whether in the camps in Tanzania (Turner 1998, 2010) or further afield in Europe and North America (Turner, 2007a, 2008b). The response by political actors and institutions in the home country is often sceptical, attempting to depoliticize the Diaspora in order to engage it in more technical development activities. However, there have also been a few attempts in Burundi to engage the Diaspora in the political debate, thus contributing positively to a democratic political culture of debate in the country of origin.

Radio Isanganiro or 'Meeting Point' was established in Bujumbura in 2002 with the objective to promote peace and reconciliation through dialogue<sup>26</sup>. Every Sunday afternoon since 2003 Radio Isanganiro has broadcast a direct, interactive programme called 'Diaspora' where members of the Diaspora can phone in and comment on recent events in the country. The objective of the programme, according to its organizer, is to create liaisons between members of the Diaspora and the population inside Burundi (interview Arcade, Radio Isanganiro, Bujumbura, March 2008). Three phone lines are open, so that Burundians in Norway, Canada and Belgium may all be on at the same

time and comment on each other's points of view. The programme is broadcast nationwide on FM radio and live on Radio Isanganiro's website. An average of 160 people enters the website each time. In the beginning the organizers attempted to have specific themes for the day but gave up on this and now the participants simply comment on recent events. Popular themes are disarmament, women's issues and corruption. On some occasions the radio station invites a minister to the studio so that the Diaspora may pose him/her questions about his/her area.

The members of the Diaspora who call in, are very vocal in their critique of the political situation in their home country, and do not hesitate to openly criticize the authorities. Apparently, the programme is very popular in Burundi because the debates concern issues that preoccupy ordinary people, such as government corruption, and because people inside the country appreciate the sharp and critical analyses by members of the Diaspora, having opinions that most Burundians would not dare express openly. Due to the popularity of the programme, national politicians listen to it in order to be acquainted with the debates and criticisms. It is said that delegates informally debate the programme at the National Assembly on Monday mornings.

In this sense the political opinions and skills of the Diaspora are put to use and channelled into the process of post-conflict democratization, rather than being marginalized and criminalized. However, since it is only members of the Diaspora that can call in, their opinions stand unchallenged and they are only rarely confronted with the opinions of their fellow countrymen back home. Considering the fact that Burundians in exile tend to generate opinions that are detached from the reality on the ground, this means that their opinions are not challenged and modified in a truly two-way political dialogue. While Burundians inside

<sup>26</sup> [www.isanganiro.org](http://www.isanganiro.org)

the country may learn something from Burundians abroad – such as expressing one's opinion openly<sup>27</sup> – the latter could certainly also learn a lot about political compromise from their compatriots at home.

Although the radio programme is unique, it is far from the only forum for exchange of political ideas between the Diaspora and the home country. On various websites, mostly hosted in Europe or North America, but accessible to an ever-increasing number of citizens in Burundi, Burundians at home and in exile exchange opinions in lively debates. As in the case of Radio Isanganiro, members of the Diaspora here express opinions that are far too critical and often too radical to be expressed elsewhere (Turner, 2008a). Although these sites are dominated by members of the Diaspora, in principle anyone can join the chat forums, and hence a possibility of two-way dialogue exists – at least theoretically. We have followed the development of these internet sites over the past six-seven years and have found that many have shifted focus away from pursuing antagonistic ethnic politics to being concerned with broader societal issues as well as practical issues such as flights to Burundi, exchange rates and house rental, signalling a more pragmatic transnationalism (Turner, 2008a).

According to the programme organizer at Radio Isanganiro, Burundians perceive the Diaspora to be credible, honest and intelligent. Similar perceptions are found in other countries, such as Somaliland, where residence in Europe is assumed to have made the Diaspora more 'educated and developed' (Hansen, 2008a). However, Burundians have an am-

biguous perception of the Diaspora. On the one hand, they may respect the Diaspora as more 'educated' or 'developed'. On the other hand, however, they believe that the Diaspora is more radical and uncompromising in its approach to political disagreements. There is a sense – especially among the elite – that the Diaspora is unaccountable, that it is easy to criticize from afar when one does not need to feel the consequences of one's opinions and that compromise is a daily part of politics in Burundi. Furthermore, Burundians in the Diaspora are believed only to hear the dramatic news stories of violence, corruption and political infighting, and therefore have no sense of the everyday changes taking place in the Burundian society where Hutu and Tutsi are beginning once again to interact and live in the same neighbourhoods. The Diaspora has no knowledge about the unspectacular everyday life where people are getting along and things are changing slowly (Turner, 2008a).<sup>28</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This working paper has drawn a picture of the complex engagements that the Diaspora has in Burundi in the current post-conflict situation, where security is emerging and the country is recovering. It is a multifaceted picture, where the political and conflict-born aspects of the transnational relationship are very central. Large parts of the Burundian Diaspora are strongly politicized and sceptical towards any political compromise inside Burundi due to disappointments in the past – their identity being shaped by the repressive regimes and widespread violence, which they fled from. In

27 In Rwanda and Burundi, it is seen as a virtue to conceal one's feelings and opinions. While Rwanda has chosen the path of concealment (Ingelaere, 2007), the peace process in Burundi has been characterized by openness. Likewise the media in Burundi have been very vocal (Turner, 2007b).

28 For discussions of everyday forms of reconciliation and perceptions of justice, see Ingelaere, 2009 and Uvin, 2009.



exile, political positioning became an organizing principle of life, and this is not easily converted. Additionally, the Diaspora is not homogeneous due to the very different circumstances that brought them to Europe and North America.

The Burundian state is aware of these constraints and of the political instability that a hostile Diaspora may create and is therefore very concerned to engage the Diaspora in post-conflict recovery, reconstruction and reconciliation processes. However, not much has been put in place in terms of concrete policies, apart from allowing dual citizenship. It appears that the initiative is being taken elsewhere – among international organizations, Diaspora groups and local associations and entrepreneurs, engaged in everything from remittances to political debates. The international initiatives have focused on brain circulation, but have not been sensitive to the political nature of the conflict-induced Diaspora or the identity politics involved. Local initiatives by individuals, either in Burundi or in the Diaspora, appear to be more sensitive to the issues that concern Burundians in Burundi and elsewhere, from lowering the cost of money transfers, aiding wealthy members of the Diaspora invest in property in Burundi, giving Burundians access to affordable electronic equipment and opening spaces for public debate on the radio.

From the analysis of the Burundian Diaspora's concrete engagements, it stands out that it takes time for the Diaspora to reorient itself after conflict. During the conflict, the Diaspora was first and foremost preoccupied with politics, providing alternative information about the conflict and lobbying host societies as well as supporting their families financially. Today the various engagements underline that at least some actors are beginning to redefine themselves as being part of the development process. However, we must go beyond the concept of negative versus positive Diaspora. Being en-

gaged politically may be just as constructive as being engaged in other ways. Interestingly, it is often the same individuals that used to be engaged in politics who later became active in 'development activities'. They feel an urge to make a difference in their homeland and make the best of the opportunities that are available; be it through politics and armed resistance in the 1980s and 1990s or through development initiatives in the 2000s. We found that most of the Diaspora initiatives challenge any clear-cut distinction between private entrepreneurship, charity and development projects and political engagement in the home country. It is tempting to criticize the present process as a process of 'depoliticisation' or 'developmentalisation'. This might well be the case, but the empirical evidence points to a more complex picture where actors at home and in the Diaspora engage in any way possible in order to try to influence the situation. This is not only the case of the members of the Diaspora who are attempting to affect the home country, politically, economically and socially. Also the Burundian state is trying to influence the Diaspora so as to 'tame' its energy and avoid its potentially destabilizing effects. While this used to be done by marginalizing the Diaspora, the present state is doing its best to embrace the Diaspora in developmental terms.

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MIDA (reference to the 12/12/2009 information session):

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