

Creating spaces for peace?  
Civil society, political space, and  
peacebuilding in post-war Burundi

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# Abstract

This thesis examines civil society, political space, and peacebuilding in post-war Burundi by critically engaging with international discourses and considering the extent to which they reflect the experiences and perspectives of activists on the ground. It is based on qualitative research with civil society groups and the individuals that work for them in Burundi. Fieldwork took place over five months between July 2014 and April 2015. This was a period of crisis in which civil society faced mounting restrictions, from the introduction of legislation that banned public gatherings, to the harassment and intimidation of prominent activists. The thesis analyses the extent to which civil society groups were able to navigate these constraints to create and maintain spaces for peace that transform dominant social norms which produce violence and repression. It also considers the factors that frustrated these efforts, from the sustained influence of past violence and trauma, to the climate of fear and uncertainty that emerged following the 2015 elections, and the divisive elite politics that continues to disrupt everyday peace in Burundi.

It finds that emerging policy discourses on political space fail to engage with the historical, political, and discursive nature of government restrictions in Burundi, and the temporal and relational dimensions of violence, especially the ways in which it shapes the everyday lives of activists and their ability to challenge the institutions and structures within which violence is reproduced. The research situates these experiences in historical context – a process that enables it to consider broader questions about the evolution of civil society and the extent to which it becomes embedded in post-conflict contexts once international funding and attention decreases and external peacebuilding activities conclude. Civil society groups in Burundi received significant support from the international community in the post-war years, yet increasing restrictions suggest that the Burundian government has not accepted the presence of certain organisations which it views as a threat to its political authority and legitimacy. This leads the thesis to argue that curbs on civil society should be seen as part of a broader pattern of resistance to international peacebuilding in Burundi.

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# Map of Burundi



Source: United Nations, Department of Field Support, Geospatial Information Section (Map No. 3753, Rev. 9, February 2016)

# Acronyms

|          |                                                                                                                |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ABUCO    | <i>Association Burundaise des Consommateurs</i>                                                                |
| ACAT     | Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture                                                              |
| ACPPP    | Africa CSO Platform for Principled Partnership                                                                 |
| AFSC     | American Friends Service Committee                                                                             |
| AMEPCI   | <i>Association pour la Mémoire et la Protection de l'Humanité contre les Crimes Internationaux Gira Ubuntu</i> |
| APD      | Action for Peace and Development                                                                               |
| APDH     | <i>Association pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme</i>                                                       |
| APFB     | <i>Association pour la Promotion de la Fille Burundaise</i>                                                    |
| ASB      | <i>Association des Scouts du Burundi</i>                                                                       |
| ASBL     | <i>Associations sans buts Lucratifs</i>                                                                        |
| APRODH   | <i>Association pour la Protection des Droits Humains et des Personnes Détenues</i>                             |
| BNUB     | United Nations Office in Burundi                                                                               |
| CAFOB    | <i>Le Collectif des Associations et ONGs Féminines du Burundi</i>                                              |
| CB-CPI   | <i>Coalition Burundaise pour la Cour Penale Internationale</i>                                                 |
| CDJP     | <i>Commission Diocésaine Justice et Paix Bujumbura</i>                                                         |
| CEJP     | <i>Commission Episcopale Justice et Paix Burundi</i>                                                           |
| CENAP    | <i>Centre d'Alerte et de Prévention des Conflits</i>                                                           |
| CENI     | <i>Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante</i>                                                            |
| CNDD-FDD | <i>Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie</i>             |
| COSOME   | <i>Coalition de la Société Civile pour le Monitoring Electorale</i>                                            |
| CSO      | Civil society organisation                                                                                     |
| CUREC    | Central University Research Ethics Committee                                                                   |
| EBA      | Expert Group for Aid Studies                                                                                   |

|            |                                                                                                          |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ECDPM      | European Centre for Development Policy Management                                                        |
| EEI        | Enabling Environment Index                                                                               |
| EHAHRDP    | East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project                                                   |
| FCO        | Foreign and Commonwealth Office                                                                          |
| FIDH       | International Federation for Human Rights                                                                |
| FNL        | <i>Front National de Libération</i>                                                                      |
| FOCODE     | <i>Forum pour la Conscience et le Développement</i>                                                      |
| FORSC      | <i>Forum Pour la Renforcement de la Société Civile</i>                                                   |
| FRODEBU    | <i>Front Pour La Démocratie au Burundi</i>                                                               |
| FTB        | <i>Fédération des Travailleurs du Burundi</i>                                                            |
| GONGO      | government owned nongovernmental organisation                                                            |
| ICNL       | International Center for Nonprofit Law                                                                   |
| IDP        | Internally displaced persons                                                                             |
| INGO       | International nongovernmental organisation                                                               |
| INTRAC     | International NGO Training and Research Centre                                                           |
| ISHR       | International Service for Human Rights                                                                   |
| Mi-PAREC   | <i>Ministère paix et Réconciliation Sous la Croix</i>                                                    |
| NGO        | Nongovernmental organisation                                                                             |
| OAG        | <i>Organisation d'Action Gouvernementale</i>                                                             |
| OMCT       | World Organisation Against Torture                                                                       |
| PALIPEHUTU | <i>Parti Pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu</i>                                                           |
| REJA       | <i>Réseau des Organisations des Jeunes en Action pour la Paix, la Réconciliation et le Développement</i> |
| RFP        | <i>Réseau des Femmes et Paix</i>                                                                         |
| SCIAF      | Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund                                                                 |
| UBJ        | <i>L'Union Burundaise des Journalistes</i>                                                               |
| UNEBA      | <i>Union Nationale des Etudiants du Burundi</i>                                                          |

|        |                                                |
|--------|------------------------------------------------|
| UNDP   | United Nations Development Programme           |
| UPRONA | <i>Parti de L'Unité et du Progrès National</i> |

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# Introduction

On 21 December 2016, the government of Burundi shut down the oldest and one of the most prominent human rights organisations in the country. Founded in 1991, during a brief period of political liberalisation, the *Ligue Burundaise de Défense des Droits de l'Homme*, which was also known as Ligue ITEKA, worked to defend human rights and to promote peace in a nation traumatised by mass violence and ethnic conflict. Speaking back in 2014, a member of Ligue ITEKA told me the organisation was established ‘at a moment of democratisation across Africa’, when they saw an opportunity ‘for the creation of spaces for the exercise of freedom and rights’ (Interview, 30 September 2014). Operating through a network of volunteers, it raised awareness of human rights in communities across the country and provided services, such as legal support and counselling, to victims of abuses.

The organisation continued to function during the twelve-year-long civil war that began after the assassination of the first democratically elected Hutu president in 1993. Along with many other civil society organisations, Ligue ITEKA sought to monitor and support the implementation of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, which was signed in 2000. The accord eventually brought an end to the conflict and provided for the establishment of a power-sharing government and the first post-war elections, which were held in 2005. Although the Arusha agreement and the international peacebuilding that followed it helped to reduce the saliency of ethnicity in Burundi, they failed to transform dominant social norms such as violence, exclusion, and militarism. Human rights violations also persisted throughout the post-war period. Ligue ITEKA documented these abuses and became increasingly implicated in advocacy, which sought to hold the post-war state to account.

In November 2016, Ligue ITEKA published a high-profile report alongside the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) that accused the regime of mass repression and crimes against

humanity. The report contained a record and analysis of human rights violations perpetrated by the Burundian authorities since widespread protests had erupted on the streets of Bujumbura in April 2015 after the announcement that the president, Pierre Nkurunziza, would run for a controversial third term. The authorities met this dissent with violence and repression, which sparked a sustained political and humanitarian crisis in Burundi. The government responded to these allegations contained in the report by banning Ligue ITEKA, which had already been suspended two months earlier along with five other civil society groups on the grounds that their activities were not in line with their stated objectives and might disturb order and security.<sup>1</sup> In a statement announcing the ban, the Minister of the Interior, Pascal Barandagiye, said that the organisation had ‘tarnished the image of the country and sought to divide Burundian society’.<sup>2</sup>

Civil society groups such as Ligue ITEKA and the human rights activists that work with them have been at the forefront of the crisis that has gripped Burundi since April 2015. In a statement to the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council in February 2017, Amnesty International described the situation that faced civil society following the protests:

Many journalists and human rights defenders have been forced to flee the country since the start of the crisis. For those that remain, their work has become more difficult and dangerous, with increased surveillance having a chilling effect and victims and witnesses of crimes under international law and human rights violations terrified to speak out.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Other organisations suspended by the Minister of the Interior in October 2016 included the Civil Society Coalition for Electoral Monitoring (*Coalition de Société Civile pour le Monitoring Electorale*, COSOME), the Burundian Coalition for the International Criminal Court (*Coalition Burundaise pour la Cour Penale Internationale*, CB-CPI), the Burundian Union of Journalists (*Union Burundaise des Journalistes*, UBJ), and SOS-Tortures Burundi

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Interior and Patriotic Training, Ministerial Order no 530/2356 of 21/12/2016 quoted by FIDH, 6 January 2017, ‘Ban of the ITEKA League: Another blow to Burundian civil society’, on FIDH website, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/burundi/ban-of-the-iteka-league-another-blow-to-burundian-civil-society>. Accessed 6 March 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, 13 February 2017, ‘Burundi: Further Crackdown on Civil Society Unacceptable. Item 4: Amnesty International’s written statement to the 34<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council (27

In October 2016, the government ordered the permanent closure of five prominent organisations<sup>4</sup>, all outspoken critics of the Burundian authorities, which were involved in the *Halte au Troisième Mandat!* (Stop the Third term!) Coalition, which campaigned against a third term for the president and played an active role in the protests. Other tactics deployed to silence critical voices and outspoken associations included the introduction of new laws placing strict controls on national and international nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), the disbarment of lawyers involved in human rights advocacy, the seizure of assets and freezing of bank accounts, and most concerning of all, the forced disappearance of activists and journalists.

This research explores civil society, political space and peacebuilding in Burundi through examining the experiences and perspectives of civil society groups, such as Ligue ITEKA, and the activists that worked with them. The direction of this research was profoundly influenced by the political crisis that began in April 2015, and the events that preceded it. This is because the fieldwork upon which it is based took place in the run-up to the elections, and was bookended by two significant moments, the detention of one of the country's most vocal human rights defenders, Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, in May 2014, and the beginning of the anti-third term protests. The forthcoming elections, and the rising political tensions and government restrictions that preceded them, were the main concerns for activists working on the ground. Worries were also mounting about political space for civil society at the global level at this time, particularly among organisations promoting international human rights and democracy, as well as parts of the peacebuilding community. These organisations argued that restrictions on basic rights and freedoms

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February – 24 March 2017). Available online at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr16/5678/2017/en/>. Accessed 6 March 2017.

<sup>4</sup> These organisations include the Forum for the Strengthening of Civil Society (*Forum pour le Renforcement de la Société Civile*, FORSC), Forum for Consciousness and Development (*Forum pour la Conscience et le Développement*, FOCODE), Christian Action Against Torture (*Action Chrétienne pour l'Abolition de la Torture*, ACAT), Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons (*Association pour la Protection des Droits Humains et des Personnes Détenues*, APRODH), and the Network of Honest Citizens (*Réseau des Citoyens Probes*, RCP).

were increasing and political space for civil society was closing around the world. Campaigners pushed the issue up the global policy agenda. This advocacy was supported by hundreds of policy papers and research reports that track how one government after another has enacted restrictive legislative and regulatory frameworks and harassed and intimidated activists.

The study reflects this particular moment in time, both in Burundi and at a global level. The result is a much stronger and more explicit focus on political space for civil society than originally planned. However, it attempts to situate this period and the concerns that it raises within a broader, historical perspective. It does this through analysing the evolution of civil society in Burundi over the course of the post-war decade, from the first post-war elections in 2005, which saw Nkurunziza and the former rebel group turned political party, *Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD-FDD), come to power through the ballot box, to the President's decision to run for a third term at the 2015 elections. The main problem that this research seeks to address concerns the extent to which civil society becomes embedded in post-conflict societies, once international support and attention begin to tail off, and peacebuilding activities start to wind down. Burundian civil society received a great deal of support from the international community in the immediate post-war years, which resulted in an exponential increase in the number of organisations. While many of these groups existed in name only, a handful became increasingly active, working to support the implementation of the peace process on different scales across the country, often with the aid of the international community. Some sought to create and sustain spaces for participation at the national level to monitor the implementation of the Arusha peace accords and hold the post-conflict government and the Burundian authorities to account. Others supported grassroots peacebuilding initiatives which attempted to create spaces for dialogue and reconciliation within communities divided by violent conflict. However, in the eighteen months leading up to the 2015 elections, the government moved to close many of these spaces and constrain the associations and activists that created them. Restrictions were often targeted at the most outspoken organisations and vocal individuals as the government sought to silence its critics, especially those that challenged the political authority and legitimacy of the regime at a time when

the president sought a controversial and, as many civil society actors argued, unconstitutional third term in office.

It is important to note that the harassment and intimidation of activists and the presence of government restrictions are not a new phenomenon in Burundi. Very few independent organisations were permitted to operate under the single-party state, which lasted from 1965 until 1992. The voice and influence of the institutions that did exist during this period, such as the Catholic Church and customary authorities, were suppressed and any opposition that appeared to emerge from within these spaces was met with violence. Although the current situation is different in many ways, there is much to be gained from exploring historical continuities and how individual and collective memories of past violence continue to shape political space for civil society. This is very much at the heart of what this thesis seeks to do. The situation facing civil society in Burundi following the 2015 elections is desperate. Situating the experiences of civil society in the historical perspective reveals that there was arguably a lot more space for civil society in the post-conflict decade, including the 18 months leading up to the 2015 elections, than at any other time. In one sense, what we are seeing today is a regime that is intent on clinging to power attempting to reassert itself. One way it is doing this is through moving to close the spaces for participation and dissent, within which its political authority and legitimacy has been challenged, in an ever more violent, authoritarian, and repressive manner.

### **Aims and questions**

The aims and questions that underpin this research evolved also in response to the particular national and international context that I found myself in. This study originally set out to compare peacebuilding discourses among domestic and international civil society groups, and examine the relationship between these discourses and the spaces for peace these organisations sought to create in Burundi. The political situation in Burundi meant that the study ended up with a much stronger focus on political space than originally intended. Consequently, the final thesis also seeks to deconstruct dominant discourses on political space as well as those on peacebuilding, and compare

them to the experiences and perspectives of civil society activists on the ground. It analyses the extent to which these individuals and the organisations they work with can create and maintain spaces for peace amid rising political tensions, government restrictions, and human rights violations in a country where the scars of past violence and injustice have not fully healed.

Burundi is treated as a case study for exploring broader questions about the evolution of civil society in post-conflict contexts. It seeks to answer three questions:

1. To what extent does civil society become embedded in post-conflict contexts, especially those that continue to be characterised by violence and repression.
2. To what extent do international discourses on political space and peacebuilding relate to the everyday experiences and perceptions of civil society activists working on the ground in post-conflict contexts characterised by violence and repression?
3. To what extent are civil society activists and organisations able to create and maintain spaces for peace that transform dominant norms and support everyday peace in post-conflict contexts characterised by violence and repression?

These questions inform the overall direction of this research, and will be picked up at different times and engaged with in different ways throughout the thesis. Each of the substantive chapters within this thesis (Chapter 5 to Chapter 9) seek to address one or more of these questions. Broadly speaking, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 relate to the first question. The second question is picked up in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 consider the final question.

## **Concepts and definitions**

Much of this thesis is concerned with challenging existing conceptualisations and definitions of civil society and political space, especially those within the policy literature, as well as dominant understandings of peace and peacebuilding. It draws on and seeks to contribute to a number of different bodies of literature across several disciplines, meaning that the research is inherently interdisciplinary and speaks to a wide range of audiences. With regard to *civil society*, it primarily

draws on the political geography and African studies literature on civil society in Africa (Death and Gabay, 2014; Lewis, 2002 & 2013; Mamdani, 1995; Mercer, 2002 & 2003; Mohan, 2002; Obadare, 2011 & 2014; Williams and Young, 2012 & 2014). Much of this writing seeks to tease out the differences between civil society as a concept and as a reality. The confusion between these two is one of the many reasons why so many meanings of ‘civil society’ exist. Edwards (2004) identifies three definitions of civil society; while most view it as the space between the individual and the state (‘the public sphere’), some define it as a group of organisations (‘associational life’), and others as a set of values (‘the good society’). McIlwaine (1998 & 2007) argues that there are two broad schools of thought, the liberal approach, which views civil society as a sphere of freedom and association that is both distinct from, and often positioned in opposition to, the state, and Gramscian perspectives, which view civil society as a space characterised by cooperation and conflict, where the prevailing hegemony is both produced and contested.

This research adopts a Gramscian perspective on civil society, and views it as an assemblage of different organisations, mobilisations, and individuals, the offices they inhabit and the activities and programmes they run, as well as individual and collective agency and the values that drive them, along with the various discourses they challenge and reproduce. It is a space characterised by negotiation and resistance, where the dominant hegemony is sometimes supported and at other times subverted. Within geography the term ‘assemblage’ denotes a process where dissimilar elements come together in a diverse grouping (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011). This research uses the term because it captures the difference and agency that characterise civil society in Burundi, but also emphasises its fragility, its tentative and contested emergence over many decades, and ultimately its vulnerability in face of government restrictions and dominant social and political norms.

On *political space*, the research has two aims. First, it seeks to critically engage with the emerging literature on civil society space in development studies and international politics (van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012 & 2014; Beswick, 2010; Christensen and Weinstein, 2013; Carothers, 2006; Chahim and Prakash, 2014; Sidel, 2010; Wood, 2016). The thesis challenges existing

conceptualisations within this literature, and seeks to develop a more dynamic and nuanced understanding which emphasises the relational dimensions of political violence and explores how this shapes experiences and perceptions of political space among activists in Burundi. In doing so, it draws on the writings of Doreen Massey (1994, 2005), who advances a relational understanding that views space as the product of interactions, as fundamentally heterogeneous, and characterised by multiplicity. This thesis argues that viewing space as something that is relational can help us to understand how individual and collective memories of violence as well as contemporary experiences shape current and future perceptions of political space for civil society.

The research also seeks to deconstruct emerging policy discourses on political space, and considers whether these discourses can engage with the ways in which violence shapes the everyday lives of these activists and their ability to challenge institutions and structures within which violence is reproduced. It argues that dominant discourses on political space tend to rely on a relatively simplistic characterisation of what constitutes the political. Here the thesis draws on the work of Swyngedouw (2011), who establishes a clear theoretical and conceptual distinction between politics and the political. Where ‘politics’ refers to government institutions and policymaking processes and associated procedures through which individuals and groups pursue their interests; ‘the political’ concerns the intrinsic heterogeneity that characterises society, and the continuous debates and disagreements that result from this difference. Here ‘the political’ is conceptualised as a space of dissent, where discussions about possible alternatives can take place. Swyngedouw views it as a radical and egalitarian space, which has the potential to be emancipatory and transformative. This research considers whether dominant discourses on political space are more concerned with space for civil society in politics, rather than space for the political.

The thesis also draws on the work of Cornwall (2002 & 2004) and Hickey and Mohan (2004) on spaces for participation, an approach which reconceptualises participation to include a more political sense of agency. My research is particularly focused on the extent to which activists can create and maintain spaces for participation that transform dominant power relations and prevailing social norms in Burundi, such as violence, militarism, and exclusion. It considers the factors that

prevent activists from doing this, from the continued influence of past experiences of violence and trauma, to the climate of fear and uncertainty that emerged following the 2015 elections, and the divisive and violent elite politics that continue to disrupt everyday peace. The research also seeks to build a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the relationship between political space and legitimacy in violent and divided contexts, such as Burundi, and examines how processes of delegitimisation are used to restrict political space of organisations.

On *peacebuilding*, this research draws on and seeks to contribute to the critical peacebuilding literature within international politics, peace studies, and African studies (Curtis, 2012; Mac Ginty, 2006, 2010, & 2011; Nadarajah and Rampton, 2015; Richmond, 2011a & 2011b; Richmond and Mitchell, 2012). Within this literature, ‘peacebuilding’ refers to the processes by which peace is constructed, through building the capacity of societies to address the underlying causes of conflict and prevent further violence (Galtung, 1975; Boutros-Ghali, 1992). The dominant form of peacebuilding is liberal peacebuilding, which promotes a certain model of social, political, and economic organisation known as ‘the liberal peace’. Multilateral, bilateral, and civil society actors are all implicated in liberal peacebuilding, and tend to pursue a relatively consistent approach which combines multi-party elections, institution building, and constitutional reform with economic liberalisation and the introduction of pro-market reforms. In practice, domestic actors and even some international ones may question, undermine, or re-appropriate peacebuilding policies and practices, meaning that interventions and programmes are often complicated and messy (Curtis, 2012a).

Civil society is an important part of liberal peacebuilding, but the relationship between them is characterised by contradictions and inconsistencies. Civil society performs a number of functions within the liberal peace model: it supports the establishment of a social contract between post-conflict populations and liberal institutions; strengthens the accountability and legitimacy of these institutions; holds the post-conflict state to account through the promotion of good governance and participation; changes community attitudes and the behaviour of individuals; and supports the expansion of core processes of securitisation, liberalisation, and marketisation to the scale of the

community and at the individual level. Despite this, the development of a vibrant and active civil society often receives less attention and fewer resources in practice than other dimensions of the liberal peace. Liberal peacebuilding also promotes an understanding of civil society, which is rooted in the ideas of De Tocqueville, who conceptualises it as an autonomous sphere that is distinct from and positioned in opposition to the state. This space is populated with independent voluntary associations, who protect and defend individual rights against authoritarianism through acting as a counterbalance to abuse of power, and work to instil a sense of duty, volunteerism, and tolerance in the population (Edwards, 2004). In practice, international peacebuilders also contract NGOs to deliver services to post-conflict populations, which critics argue has resulted in the marketisation and depoliticisation of civil society and supported the expansion of the neoliberal agenda (Mercer, 2002). Critics have also pointed out that liberal peacebuilding has resulted in the creation of an artificial and ‘externally-supported’ civil society, which is disconnected from communities and marginalises everyday voices (Richmond, 2011a; Pouligny, 2005). They argue that this liberal construct is incapable of producing an emancipatory peace, and contrast it with more ‘locally-based’ forms of organisation, which they see as more authentic and legitimate (Richmond, 2011a). This research questions the extent to which this dichotomy reflects civil society in post-war Burundi.

The thesis also draws on and seeks to contribute to the emerging literature on geographies of peace (McConnell, Megoran & Williams 2014; Williams and McConnell, 2011; Koopman, 2011; Megoran, 2011 & 2013; Loyd, 2012;). These authors view peace as something that is multiple, situated, and spatial. They also seek to disrupt assumptions about the relationship between violence and peace, through exploring how violence is embedded in peace, and how spaces for peace can emerge in the midst of violence. My study is particularly influenced by the work of Williams (2014), who seeks to understand the meaning of everyday peace in a situated context, through exploring the subaltern experiences and perspectives. This research focuses on the experiences and perspectives of civil society activists, and examines the role they play in peacebuilding on different scales within Burundi. The voices of civil society activists are not necessarily everyday or subaltern

ones. For post-colonial theorists such as Spivak (1988), the ‘colonised *subaltern* subject’ is one that exists outside colonial discourse on the margins of society. Civil society activists are not among the most marginalised in Burundi. While some do come from modest backgrounds, most activists are comparatively well educated, speak French as well as Kirundi (and sometimes even English), and live in middle-class neighbourhoods. Some are highly mobile individuals who had been educated or travelled abroad, and worked with or for international organisations.

However, many of these activists had a complex relationship with liberal peacebuilding. Located at the interface of the international and the local, and the elite and the everyday, they mediate between liberal discourses and vernacular understandings of peace, and are perhaps best described as the ‘brokers and translators’ of peacebuilding (Lewis and Mosse, 2006). They are the subjects of liberal peacebuilding discourses as well as their intermediaries. As members of post-conflict populations, they are exposed to the harsh realities of neoliberal market reforms and electoral violence, which has become a common feature of many post-conflict contexts. Even those activists that work for organisations that could be regarded as liberal constructs can be deeply ambivalent and even openly critical about certain aspects of the liberal peace and its implementation. This research is particularly engaged with the role played by civil society activists in the production of hybrid forms of peace, and the struggle to create and maintain spaces where more emancipatory and transformative thinking on peace can appear. It questions the ability of these spaces, whether that means the spaces for participation that seek to challenge political violence and division among elites, or the spaces for dialogue and mediation that seek to support peaceful cohabitation within communities, to transform dominant social norms and support the emergence of everyday peace.

### **The case study: Burundi**

Burundi constitutes an interesting case for the study of civil society, political space, and peacebuilding for three reasons. First, a wide range of peacemaking and peacebuilding initiatives have been implemented within Burundi, including both top-down and bottom-up approaches. The most significant top-down intervention was the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, which

was signed under huge international pressure in 2000. Inclusion and power sharing was central to the deal, which paved the way for a new constitution and the establishment of a government based on consociationalism and ethnic power-sharing, as well as the reform of the Tutsi-dominated army and police (Curtis, 2012b; Vandeginste, 2009, 2011, & 2014; Lemarchand, 2006). It also provided for the first post-conflict elections, which took place in 2005. The international community (including several bilateral, multilateral, and regional actors) invested huge amounts of resources in the immediate post-war years to create a peace-dividend that would make peace pay and prevent a return to violent conflict. However, peacebuilding encounters between international, regional and domestic actors became characterised by friction and resistance as Burundian elites renegotiated and reinterpreted the institutions and practices promoted by interveners (Curtis, 2012b; Wodrig and Grauvogel, 2016). This meant that peacebuilding in Burundi became about stability and control, and it did little to address dominant social norms such as violence, exclusion and militarism, which persisted throughout the post-war period (Curtis, 2012b; Daley, 2008). International and domestic actors have also supported the emergence of grassroots and bottom-up approaches to peacebuilding in Burundi, such as the establishment of peace committees and creation of mechanisms for resolving conflict within and between communities. In practice, the distinction between top-down and bottom-up approaches can be more difficult to ascertain for some interventions. Those that are considered as grassroots initiatives are often funded by international actors. They may also be based on models developed elsewhere and are shaped by and shape international discourses as well as traditional ones. Activities considered top-down, such as electoral monitoring, often rely on the support of locally-based networks like church groups or community-based activists for their implementation.

Secondly, from looking at the various policy papers written by human rights groups, it is evident that Burundi had a vibrant and active civil society in the run-up to the 2015 elections despite the presence of government restrictions, yet very little academic research has been published on this subject in recent years. Several studies took place following the signing of the Arusha agreement, which examined the proliferation of organisations in the post-war period (Palmans, 2006; De Reu,

2004; Ntakarutimana and Ntsimbiyabandi, 2004; Sebudandi and Nduwayo, 2002). This research is concerned with what happened next, that is, how civil society evolved over the post-conflict decade, and considers the extent to which it became embedded during this period. The method employed for this is the examination of ‘actually existing civil society’ (Mohan, 2002; Mamdani, 1995) in Burundi, in other words, the civil society that is present rather than that which is presumed to exist. It looks at the various organisations that were active prior to the elections and explores the ways in which these groups and the activists that worked with them bridged the divide between the global and the local. Many had both domestic and international constituencies, that is, they were accountable to the communities that they worked with, the national and local governments that they were registered with, and the transnational organisations that funded them. They used various discourses to engage and communicate with these audiences including liberal discourses, religious discourses, and specifically Burundian and African ones. They also negotiated more critical government discourses, which sought to discredit and delegitimise civil society and justify the use of violence against them.

Thirdly, Burundi is often seen as a paradigmatic example of ‘shrinking space’ according to international human rights groups (Amnesty International, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2010). The government introduced several restrictions designed to weaken the influence of civil society and limit dissent in the years following the 2010 elections. This included a law on public gatherings which essentially banned spontaneous demonstrations, and the harassment and intimidation of prominent activists. Pressures on civil society increased following widespread protests in 2015. The government suspended prominent civil society organisations and froze the bank accounts of outspoken activists in the months after the controversial and contested elections. One of the country’s leading human rights defenders was shot and seriously wounded in August 2015, while his son and son-in-law were killed in separate incidents just a few months later. The government went on to ban the most outspoken organisations, and disbarred human rights lawyers. Activists and journalists have also disappeared.

The policy literature argues that organisations that work on issues such as human rights and democracy promotion are more likely to experience government restrictions and pressures. The research challenges this narrative. Although the Burundian government targeted prominent human rights and democracy promotion organisations, evidenced by the fact that most of the organisations banned by the government in October 2016 were human rights groups, this research finds that some organisations could work on these issues in the run-up to the 2015 elections without experiencing violence and intimidation. This leads to the consideration of why organisations and activists working on similar issues in the same country can have such different experiences of political space. The research explores the ways in which activists sought to negotiate restrictions and create new spaces for participation and dissent, such as protests and social media, amid rising political violence and government repression in months preceding the 2015 elections.

## **Methodology**

The research deconstructs discourses on civil society, political space, and peacebuilding using critical discourse analysis (CDA), a form of discourse analysis that combines linguistic and political approaches, through locating the study of texts within a broader analysis of social relations. CDA is concerned with the relations between discourse and power, that is, how discourses legitimise and sustain dominant power relations, and how subjects may discursively challenge and transform the prevailing hegemony (Fairclough, 2010). This research adopts a multi-scalar approach to CDA which examines how various discourses were reproduced and contested at global and national levels, and at a local scale within Burundi. This research is also influenced by the work of Foucault on the relations between discourse, knowledge, and power, as well as his archaeological method, which is concerned with the identification of statements, the rules and practices that govern their production, and their functions and effects. Consequently, this research views discourse as both language and practice, and regards it as something that is functional rather than descriptive. It uses a range of data collection methods including individual and group interviews, and the textual analysis of organisational materials, social media, and policy documents. Both the methodological approach and data collection tools used will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 3.

The primary subjects of this research were civil society groups in Burundi and the activists who either worked or volunteered for them. I also spoke to individuals who worked for multilateral institutions and international NGOs present in the country. I was unable to conduct an interview with anyone from the Burundian government, despite repeated attempts to contact them. The research focused on groups and individuals concerned with peacebuilding and political space for civil society in Burundi. Some chapters focus on the experiences and perspectives of organisations (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6), while others focus on those of activists (Chapter 7, Chapter 8, and Chapter 9). Individual informants are not named in this thesis owing to the heightened political situation in Burundi at the time of publication. Organisations are not named in the chapters that have been submitted for publication in academic journals, although a list of groups that participated in the research can be found in Chapter 3.

Fieldwork took place over five months between July 2014 and April 2015. I made two trips to Burundi, the first from July to October 2014, and the second from February to April 2015. The primary fieldwork site for this research was Bujumbura, Burundi, although some trips were made outside the capital to visit organisations based in other towns in Burundi such as Gitega. Bujumbura was chosen as the main fieldwork site because it is where most Burundian civil society groups and the international actors that support them are based. It is the largest urban settlement in Burundi and is where most government and state institutions are located. The city of Bujumbura also has its own particular history and is often thought of as the place where political turbulence and violent conflict begins before spreading throughout the country (Uvin, 2009). Bujumbura was also chosen for logistical reasons. At the time of field work it was considered safe to travel to by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and would have been easier to evacuate from during unrest than more rural fieldwork sites.

## **Chapter overview**

This thesis takes the paper route, meaning that its each of its main chapters has been written up as an article and submitted to different academic journals (see Table 1). As mentioned previously, this

research is inherently interdisciplinary, meaning it has several audiences, something that is reflected in the diverse range of publications to which these chapters have been sent.

**TABLE 1: CHAPTERS SUBMITTED AS JOURNAL ARTICLES**

| <b>Chapter</b>   | <b>Title</b>                                                                                                                                   | <b>Journal</b>                                |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Chapter 5</b> | Civil society and peacebuilding: reconceptualising civil society in post-conflict contexts                                                     | Third World Quarterly                         |
| <b>Chapter 6</b> | Civil society, legitimacy, and political space: understanding processes of legitimisation and delegitimisation in violent and divided contexts | Voluntas                                      |
| <b>Chapter 7</b> | Shrinking space: deconstructing international discourses on political space for civil society                                                  | The Journal of Civil Society                  |
| <b>Chapter 8</b> | Spaces for participation: rethinking political space for civil society in post-conflict contexts                                               | Political Geography                           |
| <b>Chapter 9</b> | Spaces for peace: listening to experiences and perspectives of civil society activists                                                         | Environment and Planning B: Space and Society |

Chapter One, *Theorising civil society, political space, and peacebuilding: a conceptual framework*, sets out the theoretical framework that underpins this research. It critically explores existing theories on civil society, political space, and peacebuilding, drawing out and analysing the connections between these concepts. Liberal perspectives dominate policy and practice towards civil society, political space, and peacebuilding in Africa. The chapter begins by interrogating these perspectives and contrasts them with more critical views situated within political geography and African studies. It also examines emerging geographical literature on legitimacy, violence, and peace, which views these phenomena as social and political processes. It argues that these processes are critical to understanding civil society, political space, and peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts such as Burundi, where elite divisions and political violence continue to disrupt prospects for everyday peace.

Chapter Two, *Understanding civil society, political space, and peacebuilding in Burundi: context and background*, examines the evolution of civil society within Burundi from precolonial times

through to the post-war decade, and explores what civil society looks like today. It analyses the relationship between civil society and the state in historical perspective, and argues that previous governments have also limited space for civil society and opposition parties, and met dissent with violence and repression. Although there are many differences between the current situation and previous experiences, there is much to be gained from exploring historical continuities and how individual and collective memories of violence and injustice continue to affect possibilities for everyday peace and shape contemporary perspectives on political space. It analyses significant events and developments that have contributed to the reproduction of violence, exclusion, and militarism in the post-independence period, and questions the extent to which civil society has challenged these dominant social norms.

Chapter Three, *Deconstructing discourse using critical discourse analysis (CDA): theoretical and methodological approaches*, discusses CDA and the advantages of using an approach that combines linguistic and political approaches for deconstructing discourses on civil society, political space, and peacebuilding. The chapter begins by reviewing the existing literature on discourse, and considers some of the main challenges associated with discourse analysis, such as finding a balance between structure and agency, and language and practice. It discusses how CDA responds to these debates, through viewing language as a form of social practice, and examining the dialectical relations between discourse and power. It explores the scalar dimensions of CDA and sets out an approach which examines the relations between global discourses and power relations in particular places, and explores how dominant discourses are contested and reproduced at different scales. The final section outlines the data collection methods used and the sources consulted in greater depth. It reflects on some of the challenges of working with grey literature and social media, and ways in which they contribute to the production and reproduction of discourses.

Chapter Four, *Researching politically sensitive topics in violent and divided contexts: lessons and reflections*, considers the practical and ethical challenges of conducting research in violent and volatile contexts. It situates a personal reflection on the difficulties encountered during this research within an analysis of the existing literature on doing research in conflict-affected and post-conflict

settings. Although the situation in Burundi could not be described as a conflict zone, it shared many features of such environments including political violence, human rights abuses, political divisions, limited rule of law, poor access to information, and high levels of uncertainty and volatility. This chapter explores how these factors influenced the research and discusses some of the particular issues that can arise when working with civil society activists and organisations in violent, divided, and volatile contexts. It covers ethical considerations in and out of the field, challenges with establishing access, designing flexible and resilient methodologies, safety and security for researchers and participants, positionality and subject positions, difficulties with being critical, and sharing research findings in an ethical manner that protects research participants.

Chapter Five, *Civil society and peacebuilding: reconceptualising civil society in post-conflict contexts*, questions the conceptualisation of post-conflict civil society articulated within post-colonial critiques of liberal peacebuilding. These critiques view liberal peacebuilding as a hegemonic and governmental discourse that restricts emancipatory thinking about peace. They focus on sites of resistance where the liberal peace is contested and reworked, and hybrid forms of peace can emerge. They argue that international interveners have created an ‘artificial’ and ‘externally-supported’ civil society, and contrast this liberal construct with forms that are more ‘locally-based’, which they considered to be more ‘authentic’ and ‘legitimate’ (Richmond, 2011a & 2011b). This chapter argues that these critiques are inaccurate and problematic. Exploring actually existing civil society reveals a much more complex and profoundly interesting landscape. Civil society in Burundi is populated with hybrid entities situated at the interface of the global and the local. Three examples are discussed, which challenge the understanding of post-conflict civil society established in post-colonial critiques: peace committees, the Catholic Church and faith-based organisations, and the *bashingantahe*. It argues that this conceptualisation is problematic because it reproduces the international–local binary that the concept of hybridity seeks to disrupt, and it also questions its understandings of authenticity, legitimacy, and resistance. This chapter has been submitted as a journal article to Third World Quarterly.

Chapter Six, *Civil society, legitimacy, and political space: understanding processes of legitimisation and delegitimisation in violent and divided contexts*, critically examines the relationship between legitimacy and political space. Dominant discourses on political space for civil society argue that groups that work on democracy promotion and human rights are more likely to experience restrictions. This research found that although government restrictions were targeted at prominent human rights and democracy promotion groups, there were a number of organisations that were able to work on these issues without experiencing restrictions in the lead up to the 2015 elections. It asks why some organisations that work on human rights and democracy promotion are more vulnerable to restrictions than others, and considers whether legitimacy might help to explain these different experiences of political space. Legitimacy and political space for civil society are often connected to broader struggles for power and authority in violent and divided contexts, and governments whose own political legitimacy is contested may seek to weaken perceived opposition to their regime through undermining the legitimacy of those civil society groups it sees as a threat (Walton, 2013). It explores how the Burundian government responded to the protests by systematically challenging the legitimacy of vocal civil society groups, using anti-civil society discourses to stigmatise them, and even banning organisations it perceived as a threat.

Chapter Seven, *Shrinking space: deconstructing international discourses on political space for civil society*, uses CDA to deconstruct emerging policy discourses on civil society space. Based on a systematic review and textual analysis of over one hundred policy documents, it identifies discursive statements and practices that reproduce dominant narratives about what is happening to civil society space, and map where it is happening. They construct an imaginative geography which locates restrictions and violence in particular places, namely partial democracies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Drawing on the work of Foucault, it argues that discourses are functional rather than descriptive. It goes on to discuss the functions and effects of these discourses, and examines the impact they have in places such as Burundi. It argues that shrinking space narratives position civil society in opposition to the state, and have unintentionally contributed to the discursive construction of civil society activists as political opposition, foreign agents, and even insurgents –

labels that are used by the Burundian government to justify the implementation of restrictions on civil society and justify the use of violence against activists. This chapter has been submitted as a journal article to The Journal of Civil Society.

Chapter Eight, *Spaces for participation: rethinking political space for civil society in post-conflict contexts*, explores the relational dimensions of political violence, namely the harassment and intimidation of activists, and the ways in which this shapes their experiences and perspectives of political space. It argues that international discourses neither reflect the diverse experiences of activists in Burundi, nor engage with the ways in which violence shapes their everyday lives and their ability to challenge the institutions and structures within which it is reproduced. Only through viewing space as something that is relational can we begin to understand how individual and collective memories of violence, as well as contemporary experiences, shape current and future perceptions of political space. It considers whether ‘spaces for participation’, an approach towards participation that reconceptualises it to include a more political sense of agency, might be more helpful. It looks at two spaces for participation that emerged in the run-up to the 2015 elections: protests and social media. It raises important questions about the extent to which activists are able to create and maintain spaces for participation that transform dominant power relations and prevailing social norms amid rising political violence and government repression.

Chapter Nine, *Spaces for peace: listening to experiences and perspectives of civil society activists*, critically explores perspectives of violence and peace among civil society activists in Burundi. It finds that the views of activists are hybrids, which blend liberal values with traditional norms and embody vernacular understandings of peace as well as international ones. Their views are also situated, and traverse multiple scales from that of the body to the global. It discusses how perspectives on violence and peace among activists mediate the past and the present through exploring their relational and temporal dimensions, particularly how they relate current experiences to individual and collective memories of past violence and how this affects their hopes and concerns about the future. The next section explores how these perspectives negotiate the liberal and the local through examining the way they reflect both the liberal peace and vernacular understandings, and

how they draw on traditional values as well as western values and religious teachings. Finally, it looks at how activists find themselves situated between the elite and the everyday, their concerns about the relationship between elite politics and everyday violence, and their attempts to create spaces for peace that challenge violence at the level of the elite and the everyday.

The *conclusion* considers the extent to which the thesis has answered the two research questions set out in the introduction, and explores its contribution to the literature on Burundi, as well as the theoretical literature on civil society, political space, and peacebuilding. It also considers the broader significance of the research and looks at some of its possible practical implications. The chapter begins by looking at the main research findings in relation to political space, civil society, and peacebuilding. It then considers the extent to which civil society groups have been able to create spaces for peace in Burundi, whether that is spaces for participation and dissent, or spaces for mediation and reconciliation. The chapter ends with a reflection on what might have been done differently, and discusses some of the questions that have emerged from the research and remain unanswered.

# Chapter 1

## *Theorising civil society, political space and peacebuilding: a conceptual framework*

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework for this research. It is split into two parts. The first half interrogates liberal perspectives on civil society, peacebuilding, and political space, and then contrasts these perspectives with more critical ones emanating from political geography, African studies and international politics. It argues that liberal perspectives dominate policy and practice towards civil society, political space, and peacebuilding in Africa, and that the promotion of civil society, the defence of political space, and the establishment of the liberal peace are all integral components of the liberal project in Africa (Death and Gabay, 2014; Williams and Young, 2012). The second half of the chapter looks at geographical perspectives on legitimacy, violence and peace; three concepts that appear throughout this research that are integral to understanding civil society, political space, and peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts.

### Civil society, political space, and peacebuilding

#### **Civil society**

The concept of civil society has a long theoretical tradition within Western political thought and philosophy (Edwards, 2004; Kaviraj and Khilnani, 2001). There are two broad perspectives within this tradition: the liberal approach, which sees civil society as a sphere of freedom and association that is both autonomous and in conflict with the state, and is largely influenced by the work of De Tocqueville; and post-Marxist or Gramscian interpretations, which view civil society as a contested and fragmented space that reflects the broader social and political context within which it is situated (McIlwaine, 1998 & 2007). The concept gained enormous popularity in the early 1990s among international development policymakers who saw it as vital to the provision of basic services to

populations in developing countries and the implementation and consolidation of democratic and ‘good governance’ reforms. Liberal perspectives on civil society are overwhelmingly influenced by the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville on democracy in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America, and his concept of associational life. De Tocqueville (1945) saw civil society as an autonomous sphere populated by independent, voluntary associations. These associations protect and defend individual rights against tyranny and authoritarianism by acting as counter-balance to a centralised state and a check on the abuse of power, as well as instilling a sense of duty, volunteerism, and tolerance among the population (Edwards, 2004; McIlwaine, 2007). In other words, liberal perspectives view civil society as a sphere that is separate and distinct from the state, which is populated with organisations. Its primary functions are to hold the government to account, and inculcate liberal values among the population. In doing so, civil society supports the emergence of a social contract between the state and the individual. Liberal perspectives also position civil society in opposition to the state.

It is this version of civil society that has had the most influence on donor discourses on civil society, a dominance is that often implicit rather than explicit, given that ‘it is unlikely that a development practitioner will either know or care about the theoretical perspective that drives their use of the term’ (McIlwaine, 2007: 1260). Political geographers have argued that donor discourses invariably entail a series of assumptions about the role of civil society in the democratisation struggle and its autonomy and independence from the state, which critical scholars have shown are rarely borne out in practice (Mohan, 2002; Mercer, 2002; McIlwaine, 2007). Donor discourses also tend to focus on one particular form of civil society, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs); organisations that are often criticised for their lack of accountability and legitimacy and their tendency to maintain rather than transform the status quo (Hearn, 1998; McIlwaine, 1998 & 2007; Mercer, 2002 & 2003; Mohan, 2002).

These policy discourses have also been criticised by Africanist scholars who see the promotion of civil society as a core part of ‘the liberal project’ in Africa (Allen, 1997; Williams and Young, 2012; Death and Gabay 2014). For Williams and Young, ‘the liberal project’ is a particularly useful term because it moves beyond viewing liberalism as a body of theory ‘to understanding it as a project of

social transformation that is at work in the concrete practices of political agents' (Williams and Young, 2012: 7). They argue that western governments seek to construct and defend a civil society that reflects liberal values and is able to hold the state to account in places where it does not already exist, through 'a kind of two-pronged strategy on the one hand to inculcate good (liberal) practices and on the other to at least gradually eliminate bad (illiberal) practices' (2012: 17). Civil society is integral to this project and it is through these practices that a civil society, which reflects liberal values and is able to hold the state to account, is constructed and defended.

However, it is important to note that the development of the liberal project is not a single, consolidated enterprise. According to Death and Gabay, international interventions that support its expansion, such as civil society capacity building programmes, 'are not homogenous or unified (or even coherent) projects' (2014: 2). It is met with varying degrees of friction and resistance in different places, and is contested and reworked in a variety of different ways across the continent. Lewis (2002) notes that at the heart of many critiques of civil society lies a tension between using it as a policy tool, a theoretical and analytical construct, and as an empirical reality. While some scholars have rejected the concept entirely as a western liberal construct (Allen, 1997), the majority accept that the term retains some conceptual value despite these criticisms (Chandhoke, 2001, 2003, & 2010; Lewis, 2002). Many critical Africanist scholars have sought to explore the complexities and diversity of 'actually existing civil society' in Africa (Mamdani, 1995: 19; Obadare, 2011 & 2014), and the ways in which such an influential and predominantly Western idea has been modified and adapted in different places around the world (Kaviraj and Khilnani, 2001).

Political geographers have also stressed the need to differentiate between civil society as a concept and as an empirical reality in Africa, and concentrate on the diversity and complexity of 'the civil society that exists rather than what is presumed to exist' (McIlwaine, 2007: 1254; Mohan, 2002). In practice, civil societies are often sites of resistance, negotiation, and contestation where global norms interact with local ones. Consequently, many political geographers draw on Gramscian perspectives, which outline a much more complex vision of civil society where it 'is simultaneously the terrain of hegemony and opposition to hegemony' (Buttigieg, 2005: 38). Gramscian

perspectives appeal to political geographers because they emphasise the differentiated, fragmented, and even contested nature of civil society, problematise the relationship between civil society and the state, and stress the importance of power relations. Drawing on the ideas of Gramsci, McIlwaine conceptualises civil society as ‘a domain of contention in which hegemony is negotiated, struggled over or conceded to’ (2007: 1255) and as ‘a site of resistance, counter-hegemony and revolutionary praxis depending on the context’ (2007: 1257).

Geographers have also emphasised the importance of taking a multi-scalar approach towards the analysis of civil society, which explores its transnational dimensions and the ways in which civil society and activism are shaped through encounters between transnational and local actors as well as ‘translocal encounters’, where there is no transnational interaction and only ‘encounters between different local worlds’, (Soyez quoted in Walton, 2016; McIlwaine, 2007). As a result, civil society is seen as something that is both temporal and spatial, situated within particular social and political contexts, and shaped and informed by its own specific historical trajectory and experiences, as well as its encounters with the transnational and the global (McIlwaine, 1998 & 2007; Mercer, 2002 & 2003; Mohan, 2002; Walton, 2016). In doing so, geographers approach civil society as both a political project and an empirical reality, and explore how the relations (and tensions) between the two materialise in particular places. This research draws on this scholarship and seeks to examine ‘actually existing civil society’ in Burundi, and the ways in which it interacts with various discourses on civil society on different scales, including global and predominantly liberal discourses as well as government discourses that are more critical of civil society.

It argues that civil society in Burundi constitutes a complex assemblage of different organisations, individuals, and mobilisations, as well as the offices they occupy and the programmes and activities they implement, individual and collective agency and the values that drive them, and the discourses they both challenge and reproduce. Many different definitions of the term ‘assemblage’ exist, and it is used to describe a broad range of phenomena. For example, Tania Murray Li argues that development programmes draw upon and are ‘situated within a heterogeneous assemblage that combines “forms of practical knowledge, with modes of perception, practices of calculation,

vocabularies, types of authority, forms of judgement, architectural forms, human capacities, non-objects and devices, inscriptions techniques and so forth”,’ (Rose quoted by Li, 2007: 6). For Anderson and McFarlane, the term ‘assemblage’ denotes a process where ‘heterogeneous elements come together in a non-homogenous grouping’ (2011: 125). They find that:

The term is often used to emphasise emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy, and connects to a wider redefinition of the socio-spatial in terms of the composition of diverse elements into some form of provisional socio-spatial formation. To be more precise, assemblages are composed of heterogeneous elements that may be human and non-human, organic and inorganic, technical and natural. (2011: p124).

The term often refers to several interrelated processes: practices of gathering and dispersing; coming together to form groups and collectives, with emphasis on emergence rather than the formation that results from this process; and the ‘fragility and provisionality; the gaps, fissures and fractures that accompany processes of gathering and dispersing’ (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011: 125). This research uses this term because it captures the difference that characterises civil society, as well as its agency and its ever-changing nature; and the processes of coming together, establishing coherence, and then dispersal that define it. Assemblages can also include non-human and abstract elements, such as discourses. Perhaps most importantly, the term emphasises the fragility of civil society in Burundi, its tentative and contested emergence over many decades, and ultimately its vulnerability in the face of elite power and dominant social and political norms such as violence, militarism, and exclusion.

## **Peacebuilding**

Despite widespread use of the term, there is no agreed definition of peacebuilding. Within the peace studies literature, it is broadly defined as the means by which peace is constructed, through building the capacity of societies to address the underlying causes of conflict and prevent further violence (Galtung, 1975; Boutros-Ghali, 1992). The dominant form of peacebuilding today is liberal peacebuilding, which promotes a particular model of social, political, and economic organisation known as the liberal peace. A number of multilateral, bilateral, and civil society actors are involved

in liberal peacebuilding, all largely pursuing the same strategy of securitisation, institutionalisation, and political and economic liberalisation on the assumption that this will create the optimum conditions for peace and prevent a return to violent conflict.

However, the liberal peace and liberal peacebuilding are not monolithic and there are often differences (sometimes slight and at other times and in other places more considerable) in its approach and implementation. Richmond argues that liberal peacebuilding is based on four main schools of thought: the victor's peace (which is about promoting security reform), the institutional peace (which involves institution building and reform), the constitutional peace (which relates to governance, democratisation, and constitutional reform), and the civil peace (which concerns the promotion of a vibrant and active civil society), which 'combine to form the liberal peace model' (2011a: 5). He notes that in practice, it is the first three aspects (security, institution building, and constitutional reform) that dominate liberal peacebuilding and the civil peace is often neglected despite the fact that it is a key part of the liberal peacebuilding agenda.

Curtis views liberal peacebuilding in Africa as 'both a normative agenda, as well as a framework for understanding the diverse activities and initiatives to promote peace on the continent' (2012a: 10). It is assumed by its proponents to have 'universal relevance', which means that practices and techniques developed in one conflict setting can be applied to others with only minor adaptations. This has resulted in the development of 'a standardized approach that includes multiparty elections and institution-building, constitutional and legal reform, and economic pro-market reform', which is implemented across the continent (Curtis, 2012a: 10). Curtis argues that there is actually a much greater diversity in peacebuilding practices and outcomes across Africa:

[T]here is no consensus about the role, aims, and efforts of continental and international peacebuilding programmes and initiatives in Africa...[A]lthough the local, regional, and global spaces for peace in Africa have been altered through discourses and practices of peacebuilding, these practices play out differently in different locales. Peacebuilding ideas and initiatives are at various times reinforced, questioned, subverted, or reappropriated and redesigned by different actors. Thus, the trajectories of peacebuilding programmes and initiatives tend to be messy and multifaceted. Procedures and practices established in one

venue or by one institution are subjected to a thorough reworking as they play out in another venue, such as Somalia, Sierra Leone, or the DRC (2012a: 3).

Liberal peacebuilding has been widely criticised. Some criticisms are more moderate, such as those of Paris (2004) who argues that interveners should focus on building institutions before embarking on political and economic liberalisation, while others are more fundamental. Within this latter group, a diverse range of views exists. These include critical international theory approaches that are deeply suspicious of international interventions and regard liberal peacebuilding as a hegemonic and governmental discourse that seeks to discipline post-conflict populations and render them compliant; these include the approaches advanced by Chandler (2002 & 2006) and Duffield (2001 & 2007). There are also what Tadjbakhsh and Richmond (2011) call ‘post-colonial critiques’, which focus on the agency of local actors and highlight the hybrid nature of peacebuilding outcomes, such as those of Mac Ginty (2006, 2010, & 2011) and Richmond (2005, 2009, 2011a, & 2011b). Another cluster are ethnographic critiques, which focus on deconstructing and problematising the social world inhabited by international interveners and liberal peacebuilders, are exemplified by authors such as Autessere (2014) and Smirl (2015). Campbell, Chandler, and Sabaratnam (2011) argue that there is actually a large degree of political consensus between those who are more sympathetic to the liberal peace and those who are more critical of it. They all emphasise the binary division between liberal interveners and a-liberal recipients; regard liberal universalist assumptions as a core problem of post-conflict peacebuilding and argue for it to become more context sensitive; and they all support international intervention of some kind in post-conflict societies (Campbell et al., 2011).

Geographers have also begun to critically engage with peacebuilding in recent years. Laliberté (2016) argues that peacebuilding has become increasingly dominated by neoliberalism, which prioritises individual responsibility and reinforces governmentality. When combined with racialised and orientalist discourses, this results in peacebuilding interventions that ‘are based on the assumption that the behavior of the conflict-affected population is the problem.’ (Laliberté, 2016: 28). Laliberté finds that this ‘downscaling of responsibility to the site of the individual in combination with international Orientalist narratives’ has come to define peacebuilding in certain

parts of Africa (2016: 28). Together, they produce ‘uneven geographies of intervention – geographies in which racialized bodies and intimate spaces are associated with war and thereby seen as appropriate sites for peacebuilding’ (Laliberté, 2016: 24). Many of these peacebuilding programmes are conceived and implemented by civil society organisations that seek to change the community attitudes and individual behaviours among post-conflict populations. Other geographers are concerned with the creation and maintenance of spaces for peace in conflict-affected contexts. Koopman explores international protective accompaniment, a grassroots peacebuilding strategy that seeks to make spaces for peace in Colombia through ‘putting internationals who are less at risk literally next to locals who are under threat because of their work for peace and justice’ (Koopman, 2014: 95). She seeks to analyse the relational dimensions of the spaces for peace created through accompaniment and investigates how they are shaped by and shapes social relations. Drawing on the work of David Harvey (2006) and others, she argues that space is shaped also by memories and emotions, which influence people’s behaviours and actions towards that space.

### ***Hybrid peacebuilding***

Of these critiques, those that regard liberal peacebuilding as a hegemonic and governmental discourse that restricts emancipatory and transformative thinking about peace are of most interest to this study. Heavily influenced by the work of Foucault, these authors do not present an alternative to the liberal peace. Rather they call for a focus on sites of resistance and friction, and on bottom-up, everyday, and hybrid approaches to peacebuilding (Richmond, 2011a & 2011b; Mac Ginty, 2010 & 2011; Belloni, 2012; Millar et al., 2013). Richmond (2011a & 2011b) argues that the liberal peace constitutes a disciplinary framework based on coercion, lack of consent, and conditionality, which constructs local communities as the political subjects of peacebuilding. He seeks to reassess liberal peacebuilding through adopting a localised perspective that focuses on sites of resistance to dominant peacebuilding approaches, where the liberal peace is contested and reworked. What he and others are particularly interested in is how local agency interacts with liberal peacebuilding to

produce hybrid forms of peace (Richmond, 2011a & 2011b; Mac Ginty, 2010 & 2011; Belloni, 2012; Millar et al., 2013).

Hybridity here is understood as a social process, or to quote Mac Ginty, ‘a constantly moving piece of variable geometry’ (2011: 77). It denotes the composite forms of thinking and practice that emerge as the result of social interactions between different groups. This process is often a gradual one, where norms and practices evolve and adapt over time (Mac Ginty, 2011). In doing so, these critiques of liberal peacebuilding draw explicitly and implicitly on the work of Homi Bhabha (1994) and other post-colonial theorists who ‘read hybridity as forms of “inbetweenness” that break with, challenge, and transgress essentialist and binary ideas of identity, and destabilise the hierarchical and exclusionary relations that rest on and reproduce these’ (Nadarajah and Rampton, 2015: 55). For Bhabha, hybridity explains the process by which two different cultures intersect with each other to produce a third, which ‘displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives’ (Bhabha quoted in an interview with Rutherford in Rutherford, 1990: 211). This space is imbued with certain characteristics; it is ‘not only irreducible to its constitutive elements, but is creative, assertive, and productive of agency’ (Nadarajah and Rampton, 2015: 55). Subversion and resistance are fundamental to Bhabha’s notion of hybridity, which he sees as ‘the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal’ (Bhabha, 1994: 159).

Richmond and Mac Ginty seek to promote ‘a positive hybrid – and therefore emancipatory and socially just – peace’, which would involve the gradual resolution of problems ‘from the perspective of those caught up in them from a marginal position’ (2016: 230). Much of the existing work on hybrid peacebuilding remains focused on the liberal peace rather than critically engaging with the empirical reality of what constitutes the everyday or the local in particular places. An interesting exception is Heathershaw (2007), who explores the reproduction of alternative peacebuilding discourses across different scales in post-conflict Tajikistan. As well as international understandings, he identifies the elite discourse of *mirostroytelstvo*, which is the Russian for peacebuilding, and the vernacular discourse of *tinji*, which means ‘wellness’ or ‘peacefulness’ in

Tajik. He analyses the ways in which different actors draw upon these narratives and reproduce them through everyday practice of building peace.

In their critique of hybrid peacebuilding, Nadarajah and Rampton ask ‘why is it, given the always already hybrid constitution of social existence, the focus on hybridity intensifies at particular historical junctures and in particular ways?’ (2015: 55). In the case of critiques of liberal peacebuilding, they argue that the notion of hybridity has resurfaced at a time when the liberal peace is in crisis and is being met with significant resistance both in war-zones and in the academy. The authors do not deny the empirical existence of hybridity within peacebuilding encounters, but argue that the current focus on hybrid peace overlooks historical relations of power across multiple scales that contribute to the production of hybridity over time in particular places (Nadarajah and Rampton, 2015). They argue that proponents of the hybrid peace have a ‘selective engagement with hybridity’, which means that they neglect ‘the multilectical character of hybridisation and the *longue durée* timeframe’ over which hybridity is constructed (2015: 51). It also serves to reproduce a problematic binary between the global and the local in post-conflict contexts rather than exploring the dynamic and porous boundaries between them, and the diversity and heterogeneity within them. Nadarajah and Rampton contend that supporters of the hybrid peace position the local as ‘the antithesis of the international’, which obscures ‘the role of hybridity, the local and the everyday in the reproduction of oppression, contestation, and violence’ (2015: 51).

### ***Civil society and peacebuilding***

The development of a vibrant and active civil society is seen as critical to the establishment of a lasting peace following the end of violent conflict among the international peacebuilding community (Pearce, 1998 & 2011; Pouligny, 2005; Richmond, 2011a & 2011b). Civil society is a core element of liberal peacebuilding and international interveners have invested a huge amount of resources in capacity-building in post-conflict contexts. Richmond argues that the civil peace, which he defines as the construction of a vibrant and active civil society, represents a central part of the liberal peace agenda ‘because it supports the liberal peace’s overall emancipatory claims... and offers grounded legitimacy, being derived from local agency as well as international liberal

norms' (Richmond, 2011a: 5). Its core functions are to facilitate the expansion of the liberal peace within post-conflict societies, support the establishment of a social contract between post-conflict populations and liberal institutions, and in doing so, strengthen the accountability and legitimacy of these structures. It bears a strong resemblance to the vision of civil society advanced by de Tocqueville, who conceptualises it as an autonomous sphere populated by independent associations that protect and defend individual rights against authoritarianism by acting as a counterbalance to the state and a check on the abuse of power, as well as imparting liberal values among the population.

Paffenholz (2010) argues that civil society actors make a substantial and systematic contribution to peace. Based on an empirical analysis of civil society and peacebuilding, she finds that civil society has an important supportive role to play during all stages of conflict. She identifies seven primary functions for civil society in peacebuilding: the *protection* of civilians from violence, *monitoring* human rights violations or the implementation of peace agreements, *advocacy* for peace and human rights, *socialisation* to values associated with peace and human rights, promoting *social cohesion* by bringing people together, *facilitation* of dialogue and mediation between individuals and groups, and *service delivery* to create entry points for peacebuilding. The relevance and effectiveness of these functions differs according to the phase of conflict, that is, whether a country is at war or on the road to peace. During war or armed conflict activities related to advocacy and protection or the monitoring of human rights violations are extremely relevant, whereas those aimed at promoting socialisation or social cohesion are less so. Paffenholz (2010) finds that it is only after the end of large-scale violence that these latter functions have any effect.

Much of the critical peacebuilding literature is highly sceptical of civil society and its role in the liberal peacebuilding project. There are those who criticise liberal peacebuilding for promoting a homogenous conception of civil society that overlooks the diversity of local civil societies (Pouligny, 2005), and for creating externalised and donor dependent civil societies as opposed to locally rooted ones (Richmond, 2011a & 2011b) as well as those that see the discourse on civil society as a means of justifying and legitimising intervention in post-colonial societies (Chandler,

2010). Richmond (2011a) argues that international support has created a civil society that is often highly artificial, externalised, and donor dependent. This contrasts with what he refers to as a more ‘locally-based civil society’ or elsewhere a ‘post-colonial civil society’, which is more authentic and representative (Richmond 2011a & 2011b). Where externally supported civil society marginalises authentic voices and is unable to promote radical social change, ‘post-colonial civil society’ is rooted in local legitimacy (Richmond 2011b). Authors such as Richmond and Mitchell (2012) and Mac Ginty (2011) are particularly interested in the ways in which these more local forms of civil society exercise agency and engage in resistance to liberal peacebuilding in order to produce a more emancipatory and transformative form of peace. This research will argue that most post-conflict civil societies are complex and heterogeneous assemblages populated with hybrid entities that are both liberal and local, which are situated between and transcend the elite and the everyday. Civil society activists are both the intermediaries and the subjects of liberal peacebuilding. They are, to quote Lewis and Mosse (2006), the ‘brokers and translators’ of the hybrid peace, who traverse multiple scales from the international to the elites and the everyday, and mediate between the various discourses that circulate at each of these levels. In doing so they encapsulate both the agency and ‘in-between-ness’ associated with hybridity and the production of alternative forms of peace.

### **Political space**

There are several definitions of the term ‘political space’, and each discipline has a slightly different perspective on the concept. Political scientists tend to define political space in relation to the state. For example, Bratton adopts a liberal perspective that views political space as that which exists ‘beyond the state’ which is populated by ‘a bevy of institutions for protecting collective interests’ (1989: 411). It is brimming with associational life, which is where ‘independent interests can be expressed and combined’ (1989: 418). He argues that relations between associational life and the state are either congruent or conflictual. Conflict can arise if ‘civil actors try to engage the state in political space that state elites have already occupied and intend to hold’, but congruence will prevail ‘when voluntary bodies or social movements occupy space which the state has never

penetrated or from which state elites have decided to retreat' (1989: 429). Beswick argues that this portrayal of political space is exclusionary, because it implies that parts of the space can be occupied only by one actor at a time. It is also, she argues, a depiction of space 'in which authority and power over a particular issue or set of debates is defined', where the state will 'allow others to occupy certain spaces, in effect ceding a measure of authority to them' (2010: 227). Perhaps the most problematic aspect of this view of political space is that it is absolute; it implies that there is a certain amount of political space available, which can be carved up between certain actors.

Critical geographers, on the other hand, view space as something that is inherently relational. For example, Massey understands space 'as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny' (2005: 9). She argues that space is fundamentally heterogeneous and characterised by multiplicity, and that viewed in this way it becomes 'the sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist, as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity' (Massey, 2005: 9). It is also a process, which is active and continually evolving: space is 'always under construction... it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed' (Massey, 2005: 9). In an interview, conducted in 2013, Massey elaborates a little further:

A lot of what I've been trying to do over the all too many years when I've been writing about space is to bring space alive, to dynamize it and to make it relevant, to emphasize how important space is in the lives in which we live, and in the organization of the societies in which we live. Most obviously I would say that space is not a flat surface across which we walk; Raymond Williams talked about this: you're taking a train across the landscape – you're not traveling across a dead flat surface that is space: you're cutting across a myriad of stories going on. So instead of space being this flat surface it's like a pincushion of a million stories: if you stop at any point in that walk there will be a house with a story... I want to see space as a cut through the myriad stories in which we are all living at any one moment. Space and time become intimately connected. (Massey, 2013).

This exciting and dynamic view of space is radically different to that which underlies Bratton's definition of political space, which is decidedly fixed and flat in comparison.

Bratton's understanding also relies on a relatively simplistic characterisation of what constitutes the political, which critical geographers have sought to deconstruct. Swyngedouw (2011) establishes a clear theoretical and conceptual distinction between politics, or *la politique*, which is always concrete and particular, and the political, or *le politique*, which is more abstract and universal. Here, 'politics' refers to the institutions of government, the political actors that populate and engage with them, the strategies and tactics they use, and the everyday rituals and routines they follow; essentially, the processes of policymaking and associated procedures through which individuals and groups pursue their interests. 'The political', in contrast, 'expresses the non-existence of society, stands for the absent ground of society' (Swyngedouw, 2011: 373). By this Swyngedouw means the intrinsic heterogeneity and the continuous debates and disagreements that result from this difference, which constitute the social. It has the potential to be both radical and egalitarian, but this is disrupted and undermined by politics. Swyngedouw argues that:

It is through politics that society comes into being in the form of a functioning, a socio-spatial distribution and allocation of people, things, and activities, quilted through forms of institutionalization, modes of representation of the social order, and routinized or ritualised practices of encounter, relating and exercising power. But it is also this procedure that sutures or colonizes the space of the political, and through this, disavows the political origins of politics (2011: 373).

The institutions and technologies of government and the everyday practices that sustain them systematically silence and exclude those who disagree with the prevailing hegemony and seek to disturb the dominant 'socio-spatial configuration' (Swyngedouw, 2011: 376). He argues that has led to 'the erosion of democracy and of the public sphere, and the contested emergence of a post-political or post-democratic socio-spatial configuration', one that is increasingly dominated by neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus (Swyngedouw, 2011: 370). While the distinction that Swyngedouw draws between the politics and the political is useful, I would not go so far as to argue that we are living in a post-political society. Critics such as McCarthy argue that the description and analysis of the contemporary world as 'post-political' is 'analytically flat, totalising, and inadequate' (2013: 19). This is because these arguments are situated ones, which relate to certain

places such as the UK or the EU and not others. ‘That is not to say that they are therefore incorrect; it is simply to urge more modest and consciously situated claims regarding the state of contemporary “politics” writ large,’ states McCarthy (2013: 23). Neoliberalism is also subject to disruption and resistance in different places around the world – it is ‘the ongoing forms and sites of resistance to and disruption of that common sense’ that are of more interest to McCarthy (2013: 20).

Countries such as Burundi have never been ‘post-political’ in the sense that they never became dominated by neoliberalism. Various researchers have described how international interventions in Burundi have been met with friction and resistance (Daley, 2008; Curtis, 2012b; Wodrig and Grauvogel, 2016). That said, I think the distinction between politics and the political retains some conceptual and analytical value. This research argues that existing definitions of political space, such as that advanced by Bratton, and many of those which follow, are referring to the space for civil society in politics, rather than space for the political. This thesis will argue that when taken together, Massey’s relational view of space and Swyngedouw’s work on politics and the political can provide a powerful geographical critique of current thinking on political space for civil society, which is discussed below. The distinction between politics and the political can also help us to analyse what is happening in Burundi, where politicians who are intent on clinging to power are moving to disrupt and close spaces for the political, which they see as a threat to their political authority – an argument that I will explore in greater depth throughout this thesis.

### ***Political space for civil society***

There has been a significant increase in grey and academic literature on political space for civil society in recent years, which reflects growing concern about restrictions on civil society in different parts of the world. Much of this is concerned with exploring the restrictions and pressures placed on civil society in different places. The policy literature contains a detailed analysis of the various ways in which governments seek to restrict political space for civil society, from the introduction of legislative and regulatory frameworks that limit the creation and operation of civil society groups to arbitrary arrest and detention of civil society activists, and the use of harassment,

intimidation, and targeted violence (ACT Alliance and CIDSE, 2014; Carothers and Brechenmacher, 2014; Civicus, 2013b). There is also a growing body of academic writing that explores the restrictions and pressures experienced by civil society in partial democracies and hybrid regimes (See Wood, 2016 on Kenya; Dupuy, Ron, & Prakash, 2015 on Ethiopia; Obuch, 2014 on Nicaragua; and Beswick, 2010 on Rwanda).

One of the most comprehensive studies is that of Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2014), who compare political space for civil society in Guatemala, Honduras, the Philippines, and Indonesia. The authors identify a number of pressures on civil society, which are often interlinked and ‘occur in a certain order or cycle of escalation’ (van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014: 42). They find that political space for civil society is ‘not systematically repressed’ and that some organisations are more vulnerable to pressures than others. Pressures are more likely to occur when the political authority of government or other influential elites is challenged, and restrictions are often targeted at organisations and individuals that these groups view as a threat to their power. In practice, this is often organisations that engage in claim-making against the state, work on issues considered to be sensitive or political issues, and use confrontational advocacy strategies (van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014). They find that:

The political space of NGOs is indeed not systematically repressed in partial democracies as it is in more authoritarian regimes. Even though a number of NGOs faced strong stigmatisation, threats and even killings, many other informants argue that the political space actually increased in the past decades. This is also the case for organisations that are most vulnerable to pressures - those making claims vis-à-vis other actors, such as the state, corporations or religious elites. Thus, even NGOs that touch on more sensitive topics do not necessarily experience pressures. Moreover, where they do experience pressures there are marked differences in the type of pressure and the intensity. (van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014: 164-165).

Whereas van der Borgh and Terwindt focus largely on the political challenges facing civil society, Obuch (2014) discusses how economic, social, and cultural obstacles can also affect political space for civil society organisations (CSOs) in hybrid regimes. Her study of civil society in Nicaragua

identifies a range of economic and cultural challenges, as well as political ones, that ‘deeply influence the Nicaraguan CSO sector’s general strength and quality to act as agents of change and democratisation’, from widespread poverty and the presence of a small and underdeveloped middle class, to the lack of democratic values within the CSO sector and society as a whole (2014: 16).

Much of this literature is focused on the relationship between foreign funding and political space for civil society. In particular, there are a growing number of studies concerned with restrictions on external support for NGOs and how this affects civil society space (Chahim and Prakash, 2014; Christensen and Weinstein, 2013). Christensen and Weinstein (2013) map the scale and scope of restrictions placed on foreign support to civil society through constructing a dataset of NGO laws around the world that covers 98 countries. They found that 51 countries either prohibit or restrict the foreign funding, and that this overwhelmingly occurs in partial democracies: ‘most countries with unhindered oppositions and free and fair voting impose no restrictions on foreign funding for NGOs. Conversely, of the countries that engage in electoral manipulation, a majority prohibit or restrict external support for NGOs’ (Christensen and Weinstein, 2013: 81). Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2015) find that 86 of 195 countries have passed restrictive legislation on NGO funding since 1955, most introduced following the end of the Cold War (69 countries between 1995 and 2012). They focus on the ‘regulatory offensive’ against foreign-funded NGOs in Ethiopia, and analyse which organisations survived and which disappeared in the years following the introduction of the 2009 Proclamation for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies (Dupuy et al., 2015: 419). They find that most briefcase NGOs, as well as most externally-dependent human rights groups, in Ethiopia, have disappeared following the introduction of legislation that regulates foreign funding. Surviving organisations ‘have “rebranded” their activities by abandoning their explicit interest in human rights, or “restructured” operations into less sensitive domains’ (Dupuy et al., 2015: 420).

Others discuss how foreign funding creates dependency and limits local accountability and legitimacy. Chahim and Prakash (2014) argue that foreign funding in Nicaragua has enhanced the ‘visibility and prestige’ of professional NGOs over more traditional grassroots associations. This is

damaging for the sector, because ‘foreign funded NGOs tend to be more accountable to donors than beneficiaries and are more focused on service delivery than social change-oriented advocacy’ (2014: 487). This leads them to conclude that the ‘NGOisation’ of civil society and associated accountability and representation challenges has resulted in ‘the demobilisation and depoliticisation’ of civil society in Nicaragua (2014: 508). Obuch (2014) argues that this has created a dependence on external funding, which, along with other political and cultural factors, has limited political space for Nicaraguan civil society. Wood discusses how the actions of the international community may have unintentionally contributed to the recent ‘backlash against CSOs’ in Kenya (2016: 533). She argues that past support for human rights and democracy reform has contributed to growing hostility between civil society and the Kenyan government, while increasing concerns about counter-terrorism and their prioritisation of the private sector over civil society is reducing Western governments’ willingness and ability to defend civil society space in Kenya. Furthermore, an increased focus on CSO accountability among international donors has indirectly provided ‘fodder for the [government of Kenya]’s rationale to restrict CSO space in the name of addressing gaps in CSOs’ local accountability and legitimacy’ (2016: 535).

This research identifies two main problems with this literature. First, political space is often poorly defined within these studies. Most simply refer to it as the environment within which civil society exists. Van der Borgh and Terwindt define political space for civil society as ‘the very opportunities and threats that organisations or individuals experience in a political context, as well as the ways they use those opportunities’ (2014: 36). Consequently, the political and operating space of particular organisations is ‘not simply taken up... [but] is also made by these organisations and can be claimed or reshaped by NGOs themselves’ (van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014: 37). Instruments such as the *Civics Enabling Environment Index* and the *Civics Monitor* seek to capture and measure how much political space for civil society is present within a particular country at a specific moment in time. Beswick (2010) argues that approaches such as these are problematic because they seek to quantify something that is very difficult to measure. They attempt to calculate space by observing and evaluating the actions of civil society, and ‘aggregating the many individual

perceptions of those involved in political debate’ (Beswick, 2010: 228). However, ‘individuals’ perceptions of how much space there is are in a constant state of flux’, and it is therefore ‘impossible to claim there is an absolute political space, neatly fixed in a given location at a particular time, which can be objectively measured and scientifically analysed’ (Beswick, 2010: 228).

The clear majority of studies on political and operating space for civil society make no reference to the existing geographical scholarship on space, such as the works of Henri Lefebvre (1991), David Harvey (2006), and Doreen Massey (2005). Thus, they fail to get to grips with the more temporal and relational aspects of space and how pressures such as stigmatisation, harassment and intimidation, and physical violence shape the perceptions and experiences of political space over time among civil society actors, and ultimately their actions and abilities to create and maintain spaces. This research argues that it is very difficult to measure political space for civil society because it is inherently relational. It is shaped by individual perceptions, which are influenced by a person’s subjectivities as well as their experiences, and their emotions. Adopting a relational view of political space for civil society also highlights its temporal aspects, and how space is shaped by historical experiences as well as contemporary ones, just as fears or hopes about the future may also shape views about the present. Perceptions of political space for civil society are also highly subjective and are likely to fluctuate, and will also vary among activists, even those working alongside each other in the same place. Consequently, it might be more helpful to think of political space for civil society as a situated process that evolves over time in relation to perceptions and experiences of activists and organisations.

Secondly, much of this research neglects the discursive aspects of political space. While some recognise the role of stigmatisation and anti-civil society discourses, they rarely engage with the politics of these restrictions. This includes the ways in which they undermine the legitimacy of organisations that seek to challenge the prevailing hegemonic discourse that sustains the regime, and therefore its political authority and legitimacy. As Lewis (2013) notes, most authoritarian governments tolerate some civil society groups, while placing restrictions on others. He finds that repressive mechanisms ‘tend to focus on constraining discursive activity rather than on repressing

self-organizing associations, which can often be controlled, co-opted or used to legitimize the existing political order' (Lewis, 2013: 326). Here, 'discursive activity' is understood to mean any actions that contribute to the production of a more open public space, where civil society groups are able 'to develop and express alternative views, discourses, idioms, and imaginaries' that might challenge and eventually lead to the downfall of the regime (Lewis, 2013: 333). Liberal perspectives on political space are often more concerned with space for civil society in politics rather than space for the political where alternatives to the prevailing social and political hegemony can be discussed and developed.

### *Spaces for participation*

Instead of talking about political space for civil society as a fixed and singular entity, it might be more helpful to look at spaces for participation; an approach that reconceptualises participation to include a more political sense of agency and understands participation as a process that is both temporal and spatial (Cornwall, 2002 & 2004; Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Hickey and Mohan argue that viewing participation as something that is temporal helps us to understand how political processes, institutions, and political agencies have evolved over time, and 'how spaces of participation may overlap [in ways that] sometimes reinforce one another and at other times are antagonistic' (2004: 16). Seeing participation as a spatial practice, on the other hand, allows us to understand the complex social contexts and 'situated practices' within and through which participation occurs, and to 'unpack places' so that we are able to identify 'the different forms of political action that occur and how these relate to concepts and practices of participation' (Hickey and Mohan, 2004: 17-18). Talking in terms of spaces for participation also emphasises the ways that participatory practices are embedded within particular places, and 'conveys the situated nature of participation, the bounded yet permeable arenas in which participation is invited, and the domains from within which new intermediary institutions and new opportunities for citizen involvement have been fashioned' (Cornwall, 2004: 76).

Cornwall (2004) and Gaventa (2004) both distinguish between 'closed', 'invited', and 'popular' or 'claimed/created' spaces, which exist on a continuum. Whereas popular or created/claimed spaces

‘are chosen, fashioned and claimed by those at the margin’, invited spaces are ‘spaces into which those who are considered marginal are invited’, and closed spaces are those where the marginalised are excluded entirely (Cornwall, 2004: 78). Closed or invited spaces are concerned with securing participation in politics, whereas claimed or created spaces are ones where the political can flourish, they are spaces of disagreement and dissent, where alternatives can be discussed and debated. Invited spaces are also associated with uncritical and instrumental forms of participatory development, which support the reproduction of dominant social relations and perpetuate the unjust and illegitimate exercise of power (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). However, these spaces are interconnected and constantly changing and evolving: ‘they exist in dynamic relationship to one another and are constantly opening and closing through struggles for legitimacy and resistance, co-optation and transformation’ (Gaventa, 2004: 35). The boundaries between these spaces are permeable and unstable, and participants will transport learning and experiences from one space to another as they move between them; ‘people carry with them experiences and expectations that influence how they make use of their agency when they are invited to participate or create their own space’ (Cornwall, 2004: 78).

They also highlight the political nature of participation and ask critical questions about its potential for transformation. Gaventa argues that adopting a spatial perspective helps us to gain a better understanding of the relationship between participation and power relations: ‘spaces for participation are not neutral, but are themselves shaped by power relations that both enter and surround them... power relations help to shape the boundaries of participatory spaces, what is possible within them, and who may enter, with which identities, discourses and interests’ (Gaventa, 2004: 34). They seek to assess the transformative and democratic potential of spaces for participation, arguing that to do this we must also understand ‘their production, the actors, policies and interests giving rise to them, and the configuration of other spaces surrounding them’ (Cornwall, 2004: 78). Cornwall raises the possibility that spaces for participation may also be regulatory and disciplinary. Both invited and created spaces are ‘infused with existing relations of power, [and] interactions within them may come to reproduce rather than challenge hierarchies and

inequalities' (Cornwall, 2004: 81). Analysing spaces for participation as opposed to civil society space highlights the situated and political nature of civil society participation in violent and restrictive societies, and focuses on the political agency of civil society actors as opposed to disempowering them. It also encourages us to ask critical questions about the character of the spaces created by civil society, namely whether they are more transformative or disciplinary in nature.

## Legitimacy, violence and peace

### **Legitimacy**

Generally speaking, political legitimacy relates to the acceptance of an authority as just and proper. For Weber (1964), a political authority is considered as legitimate when its subjects have faith in it and consequently, are willing to obey it. Political legitimacy is 'the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige' (1964: 382). Weber is interested in understanding how legitimacy is produced, that is, the practices and processes through which a particular authority, in this case the state, establishes its political legitimacy. Consequently, his definition of legitimacy is strictly descriptive, but the concept also has strong normative dimensions. Here, an authority is considered to be legitimate when it meets certain standards or embodies particular norms. However, purely normative definitions can neglect the processes through which legitimacy is constructed and reproduced, as well as the ways in which it is eroded and undermined. Within the Weberian tradition, legitimacy is associated with the state, which is considered to be the primary source of political legitimacy.

However, legitimacy is also produced in structures and spaces outside the state. Jeffrey, McConnell, and Wilson discuss these alternative sites of legitimacy in order to 'shine a light on the wider arena of political actors, forms of agency and sites of contestation through which legitimacy is produced' (2015: 177). Through focusing on sites such as defacto states, governments-in-exile and liberation movements they seek to 'unsettle an image of political legitimacy that has often foregrounded the sovereign state as the sole arbiter and provider of legitimacy' (Jeffrey et al., 2015: 177). Civil

society has the potential to be an alternative site where political legitimacy is produced and contested. Organisations and individuals within civil society may have legitimacy in their own right, and have the potential to both reinforce and challenge the legitimacy of the state. They may challenge the state's legitimacy in a direct or an indirect way; civil society may openly contest the legitimacy of elites and institutions through advocacy and claim-making, or it may challenge the legitimacy of the state simply through being an alternative site of legitimacy.

Jeffrey, McConnell and Wilson argue that there two broad schools of thought with regard to legitimacy: the first relates to political obligation, that is the normative right to govern which is bestowed upon the government by the people; whereas the second defines it as conformity to the law and observance of external moral and legal standards. The authors do not subscribe to either of these schools; rather they argue for 'a more nuanced and critically attuned engagement with the notion of legitimacy' (Jeffrey et al., 2015: 179). They identify three features of legitimacy that are of particular interest to political geographers. First, when it is 'disentangled from the state, recognition and legality', legitimacy becomes a hugely productive concept 'precisely because of its breadth and its ambiguity' (Jeffrey et al., 2015: 179). Legitimacy is not something that you either have or you do not; instead, it is possible to think of legitimacy in terms of degree (Byrne and Klem, 2015; Walton, 2013). This is why Jeffrey, McConnell and Wilson regard it as 'a concept which offers flexibility and thus a more subtle framework for dealing with the complexity of international politics' (2015: 179). Secondly, they view legitimacy as a relational concept, which has supply and demand sides. Consequently, 'it also shines a spotlight on the role of audiences for legitimacy claims, it encourages a disaggregating of those who seek and those who grant legitimacy, and it offers important insights into the relationship between politics and the political' (Jeffrey et al., 2015: 179). Third, they regard it as something that is constantly in production, a view that is shared by Walton (2013) who looks at processes of legitimisation and delegitimisation in post-conflict and conflict-affected contexts.

The existing literature on civil society legitimacy is focused primarily on the legitimacy of organisations; either nongovernmental organisations (Atack, 1998; Edwards, 1999; Brown, 2001;

Lister, 2003; Brown and Jagadananda, 2007; Walton, 2008 & 2013) or international nongovernmental organisations and transnational civil society networks (Collingwood and Logister, 2005; Brown 2008; Ossewaarde et al., 2008; Walton et al., 2016). Several definitions of organisational legitimacy exist within the literature, the most prominent of which is that of Suchman, who defines it as ‘a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions’ (1995: 574). Most definitions contain a strong normative dimension. Organisations that are considered to be legitimate are those that ‘are seen to be appropriate and accepted actors whose activities can be justified in terms of the values, norms, laws and expectations of their social contexts’ (Brown, 2008: 2) and ‘enjoy the support of an identifiable community’ (Edwards, 1999: 258). For these writers, organisational legitimacy is closely connected to accountability and transparency, and can be generated through improving their technical performance, building stronger relationships with their constituencies, and increased transparency. Walton et al. argue that these definitions can be rather technical and tend to ‘view legitimacy challenges in terms of technical deficiencies’ (2016: 2776). The focus on organisational accountability, performance, and representativeness within technical and practitioner perspectives often obscures much deeper and more political questions about legitimacy (Lister, 2003; Walton, 2013). As with other normative approaches to legitimacy, they may also neglect the ways in which civil society legitimacy is constructed and reproduced.

This research views civil society legitimacy as a political rather than a technical issue. It is a situated process that is embedded within and shaped by social and power relations. Writers such as Lister (2003) and Walton (2008 & 2013) adopt an approach to civil society legitimacy which views it as something that is socially constructed. They contend that civil society legitimacy relates to the perceptions of different stakeholders about whether an organisation or its behaviour conforms to their values and expectations for civil society. These expectations are rooted within specific normative frameworks. Consequently, different constituencies (such as the national government, international donors, and local communities) often have different expectations of civil society, and

what constitutes a legitimate actor or behaviour. This means that organisations may be considered legitimate by some groups and not others. Legitimacy may even be directly contradictory. Being seen to possess legitimacy by one constituency may actually undermine an organisation's legitimacy in the eyes of another. For example, being seen to possess a high degree of legitimacy with the international community may result in an organisation being seen as less legitimate by domestic stakeholders, such as the national government.

Furthermore, each group will privilege certain kinds of legitimacy over others. Broadly speaking, there are four kinds of legitimacy: regulatory, pragmatic, normative, and cognitive (Brown and Jagadananda, 2007; Lister, 2003). Regulatory legitimacy is where an organisation is seen to be compliant with legal frameworks and regulatory requirements concerning civil society, as well as all other laws governing a particular jurisdiction. An organisation may possess pragmatic legitimacy when it is perceived to meet or represent the interests and demands of a specific constituency. Normative legitimacy is where an organisation is seen by different constituencies to meet social norms, values, and standards about what civil society organisations can and should be doing. Organisations that possess cognitive legitimacy are seen as making sense within larger societal narratives and structures, and are recognised, accepted, and even taken for granted as being part of the way things are within a particular social context. Lister argues that these different kinds of legitimacy may come into conflict with each other and she urges us to consider the power relations implicit in legitimisation processes by asking 'which legitimacy matters' and 'for whom?' (2003: 184).

Walton argues that when thinking about civil society legitimacy in post-conflict and conflict-affected contexts it is important to consider processes of legitimisation and delegitimation. In violent and divided settings such as conflict zones, or those places where political space for civil society is under threat, these processes are often highly politicised and the context within which they are situated can be extremely dynamic and unstable. Walton finds that processes of legitimisation and delegitimation in conflict-affected environments 'are liable to fluctuation in relation to changes in the political climate and are likely to be instrumentalised by political actors'

(2013: 19). In Sri Lanka, violent conflict not only disrupted and strained the multiple relationships that organisations rely on to produce legitimacy, but also increased ‘political competition around what constitutes legitimate political behaviour’ (Walton, 2008: 143).

Perceptions about which behaviours are legitimate and which are not are closely related to prevailing societal norms, yet these are liable to change as the social and political landscape shifts during and after violent conflict. Byrne and Klem argue that ‘post-war transitions represent particularly fluid and precarious moments where new rules of the game are negotiated. This involves important shifts in the kinds of politics that are considered legitimate and those that are rendered out of bounds’ (2015: 225). In Sri Lanka and Nepal, this led to ‘a reduction in space for dissent and increased space for politicking’, as local political entrepreneurs redefined what constituted the ‘space for legitimate politics’ following the end of violent conflict (Byrne and Klem, 2015: 224). In other words, it has led to a reduction in the space for the political in post-conflict contexts, as political elites seek to establish their control over politics and strengthen their own political authority and legitimacy. Civil society legitimacy is linked to these broader struggles for political legitimacy in conflict zones. In some contexts, where the political legitimacy of the ruling regime is contested, government and political elites may see civil society organisations as a potential alternative source of legitimacy, and consequently, a threat to their own political legitimacy and authority, and even (in the case of governments) their state power and sovereignty (Wood, 2016; van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014; Walton, 2013). In these cases, a government may deliberately seek to undermine the legitimacy of those organisations and individuals that it views as a danger to its political fortunes and longevity, and limit spaces for the political.

## **Violence and peace**

Violence and peace are often viewed in opposition to each other, yet the relationship between them is intricate and complex. The emerging literature on geographies of peace and violent geographies has to deconstruct this binary through exploring how violence is embedded in peace, and how spaces for peace can emerge in the midst of violence and repression. Many post-conflict countries

remain dominated by institutions of conflict and the physical and structural violence associated with them, a situation that has become known as ‘no war, no peace’ (Mac Ginty, 2006; see also Daley, 2006, Richards, 2004, and Keen, 2000). Within peace studies the ‘no war, no peace’ paradox is often explained by distinguishing between positive and negative peace, a dichotomy that was first proposed by Johan Galtung in the late 1960s. Where ‘negative peace’ refers to the absence of war, ‘positive peace’ refers to a social condition where neither direct nor structural nor cultural violence exists (Galtung, 1969). Positive peace is not just about the absence of violence in all its forms, it denotes the presence of a just social order that promotes human well-being and flourishing (Galtung, 1969).

By ‘direct violence’, Galtung is referring to linguistic or physical violence, which involves the infliction of verbal or bodily harm. With direct violence, there is always a clear subject, object, and action, but this is less clear with structural and cultural violence, which are more abstract, subtle, and invisible forms of violence (Bourgois, 2004). The anthropologists Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois define structural violence as ‘the violence of poverty, hunger, social exclusion and humiliation’ (2004: 1). For Farmer, it relates to ‘the mechanisms through which large-scale social forces crystallize into the sharp, hard surfaces of individual suffering’ (1996: 263). This suffering ‘is structured by historically given (and often economically given) processes and forces that conspire – whether through routine, ritual, or, as is more often the case, these hard surfaces to constrain agency’ (Farmer, 1996: 263). Where ‘structural violence’ refers to the violence implicit in societal structures, ‘cultural violence’ relates to any aspect of a culture that legitimises direct physical or structural violence (Galtung, 1990).

One of the problems with the approach adopted by Galtung is that it continues to view violence and peace in opposition to each other. Geographers are interested in the relations between these two concepts. For example, Loyd (2012) argues that all too often, structural violence remains a ‘black box’, and that ‘left unspecified, [it] could contribute to the same undifferentiated landscapes of war and peace scholars and activists set out to critique’ (2012: 480). Instead, she seeks to explore how peace is connected to violence and nonviolence, and argues that viewing peace as a process

illuminates the full spectrum of violence and nonviolence embedded in and legitimised by peace. For Megoran, 'peace is not a once-for-all outcome, but a continuously negotiated social relationship' (2013: 203). Viewing peace as a process highlights questions of power, politics, and agency (Megoran, 2011 & 2013; Williams and McConnell, 2011).

The emerging literature on geographies of peace argues that it is multiple, situated, and spatial (Koopman, 2011; Loyd, 2012; Megoran, 2011; Williams and McConnell, 2011; McConnell, Megoran, and Williams, 2014). Koopman (2011) establishes that there are different ways of thinking about peace, and that understandings of the concept differ between particular groups and individuals and vary from one place to another and across different times and scales. This leads her to call on geographers to critically engage with peace and how it is connected to violence through taking 'peace to pieces' (Koopman, 2011: 194). Koopman also finds that the concept is highly context-specific and is shaped by both space and place: 'peace is shaped by the space in which it is made, as it too shapes that sphere' (2014: 109). She is interested in the production of spaces for peace and seeks to analyse the relational dimensions of the spaces for peace and how they are shaped by and shape social relations, as well as the memories and emotions that influence people's behaviours and actions within those spaces. Geographers are concerned with the role of agency in the construction and maintenance of everyday peace. Williams argues that 'to understand the (re)production of peace we must take into account the (differential) role of agency and the specific cultural economies within which they are inspired, interpreted, and ultimately gain legitimacy, or not' (2014: 195).

Geographers are also increasingly interested in the study of violence. At the heart of the emerging literature on geographies of violence, is an examination of the connections between violence, place, and space. Many critical geographers have sought to challenge the reproduction of imaginative geographies, which situate violence within particular places and 'erase the interconnectedness of the places where violence occurs' (Springer, 2011: 90). They contend that these imaginative geographies are profoundly Orientalist in character (Laliberté, 2016; Springer, 2011; Gregory, 1995). Laliberté argues that 'discourses which site violence in particular places and amongst

particular people are spatialized processes of othering' (2016: 26). They rely on racialized narratives which contribute to the reproduction of dominant power relations and the expansion of political and economic hegemony. She argues that examining these 'place-bound narratives of violence' enables critical geographers 'to expose constructions of difference that perpetuate inequality and sustain systems of violence' (2016: 27). Rethinking place as something that is relational is one way in which geographers such as Laliberté and Springer have sought to challenge the foundations upon which these narratives are based. Springer contends that while the manifestations of violence are perceived and experienced as localised and embodied, the idea that violence is innate or bound to particular places is challenged when place is viewed as a 'relational assemblage' (2011: 91). Thinking about place in this way 'opens up the supposed fixity, separation, and immutability of place to recognise it instead as always co-constituted by, mediated through, and integrated within the wider experience of space' (Springer, 2011: 91).

Critical geographers also argue that violence is inherently spatial, and are concerned with exploring how violence shapes space and 'the constitution of violence through space' (Springer and Le Billon, 2016: 2). Through drawing attention to the spatiality of violence, and critically exploring its relationship with place, these geographies aim 'to interrogate and demonstrate the ways in which violence is woven through everyday lives, institutions and structures' (Springer and Le Billon, 2016: 2). Several of these geographies draw on the work of Massey, and argue that viewing space in relational terms enables critical geographers to explore the co-constitutive nature of violence and space. It also has profound implications for how we conceptualise violence, which Springer argues 'can be more appropriately understood as an unfolding process, arising from the broader geographical phenomena and temporal patterns of the social world' (Springer, 2011: 91).

Writers such as Gregory and Pred (2007) and Thrift (2007a) have also highlighted the relational and affective qualities of political violence. As the social anthropologists, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, note, 'violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality – force, assault, or the infliction of pain – alone' (2004: 1). It is the cultural and social meaning attached to violence, as well as its emotional content, that gives violence its meaning and ultimately, its impact.

According to Thrift, the affective impact of political violence lies in its ability to create despair and hopelessness, and construct 'a particular appearance of the world in which the future itself becomes a casualty because any sense of anticipation is deadened' (Thrift, 2007a: 285). Viewed in this way, it becomes clear that political violence is also inherently relational and temporal. Harvey (2006) argues that something which exists at a particular point in space – in this case, political violence – cannot be understood only through looking at what exists at that point, it also relates to everything else that goes on around it. This is because 'a wide variety of disparate influences swirling over space in the past, present, and future concentrate and congeal at a certain point . . . to define the nature of that point' (Harvey, 2006: 274). Harvey is particularly concerned with how these influences are internalised within political subjects and used to support particular ways of thinking or acting. Consequently, the power of political violence lies not only in its ability to create fear and terror, but in the ways in which it shapes thoughts and behaviours both in the present and into the future.

## Conclusion

This chapter has set out the theoretical and conceptual framework that guides this study. This research is particularly influenced by those writers who dismantle liberal constructs (whether civil society or the liberal peace) and explore the extent to which they are reproduced, modified, and even subverted in particular places. On civil society, this includes scholars such as Mohan (2002), who have stressed the importance of differentiating between civil society as a concept and as an empirical reality in particular places, a process that illuminates both its diversity and its complexity. Political geographers often draw on Gramscian perspectives, which view civil societies as sites of negotiation, contention, and resistance. They have also emphasised the temporal and spatial dimensions of civil society, which they see as something that is situated within a particular social and political context that is shaped and informed by its own specific historical trajectory and experiences, as well as its encounters with the transnational and the global. Such an approach is particularly helpful when it comes to exploring civil societies in post-conflict environments, which

are conceptualised here as complex and heterogeneous assemblages situated at the intersection of the transnational and the local, and the elite and the everyday. This research seeks to build on these ideas and apply them to the Burundian context.

On peacebuilding, it builds on the work of scholars who have sought to examine how practices and programmes associated with liberal peacebuilding are adapted and resisted in different locales resulting in diverse outcomes, such as Curtis (2012a). The research is also influenced by writers such as Williams (2014), who seeks to understand violence and peace in a situated context through exploring the experiences and perspectives of ordinary people. It is particularly interested in the emerging literature on geographies of peace, which views peace as a process and as something that is multiple, situated, and spatial (Koopman, 2011; Megoran, 2011; Williams and McConnell, 2011; McConnell, Megoran, and Williams, 2014). Geographers also explore the ways in which violence is embedded in and legitimised by peace (Loyd, 2012). They emphasise the relational, temporal and affective dimensions of violence, something which is critical for the study of political space.

Much of the current literature on political space for civil society struggles to get to grips with the more temporal and relational aspects of space and how pressures such as stigmatisation, harassment and intimidation, and physical violence shape the perceptions and experiences of political space among civil society actors over time, and ultimately their abilities to create and maintain spaces. Adopting a relational view of political space for civil society also highlights its temporal aspects, and how space is shaped by historical experiences as well as contemporary ones, just as fears or hopes about the future may also shape views about the present. The existing literature also neglects its discursive aspects and fails to engage with the politics of restrictions, namely the ways in which they constrain discursive actions that contribute to the production of spaces where groups and activists are able develop and express alternatives. Understanding the relationship with political legitimacy, and the ways in which legitimacy is produced and contested in places where political space for civil society is under threat is particularly important here. The following chapter will pick up on many of these issues, and discuss them in relation to the existing literature on civil society, political space, and peacebuilding in Burundi.

## Chapter 2

### *Understanding civil society, political space, and peacebuilding in Burundi: context and background*

A small country located in the Great Lakes region of Africa, Burundi has experienced several cycles of ethnic conflict and genocidal violence since its independence from Belgium in 1962, which have scarred its social and political landscape (Daley, 2008; Lemarchand, 1994, 1996 & 2009; Uvin, 1999 and 2009; Watt, 2008). The assassination of the country's first democratically elected Hutu leader in 1993 sparked a civil war that gripped the country for over a decade, caused the deaths of at least 300,000 people, and resulted in widespread displacement (Daley, 2008; Uvin, 2009). A negotiated transition provided for the establishment of a power-sharing government, and the first post-conflict elections were held in 2005. The post-war decade (2005-2015) was also characterised by sustained violence and militarism, continued economic marginalisation and political exclusion, and increasing government restrictions and political divisions. Many of the activists that I spoke to felt that its growing civil society represented an important opportunity for change, a space where these prevailing social and political norms could be confronted and transformed. These hopes were dashed by the government response to protests, which erupted on the streets of Bujumbura following the announcement that the President would stand for an unconstitutional third term in April 2015. These protests culminated in widespread violence and were met with government

repression, which precipitated an on-going political crisis that resulted in the deaths of at least 430 people and forced 230,000 Burundians to seek refuge in neighbouring countries.<sup>5</sup>

Burundi constitutes an interesting case for the study of civil society, political space and peacebuilding for a number of reasons. Since 2010, international and multilateral organisations have come to see the country as a paradigmatic example of shrinking space narratives, which argue that governments around the world are restricting political and operating space for civil society and that this ‘pushback’ is a new and increasingly prevalent phenomenon (Carothers and Brechenmacher, 2014). However, even a cursory look at the history of Burundi shows that the government has limited political space for civil society and opposition parties to a much greater extent in the past, and that dissent has always been met with violence and repression. Although there are many things that are different about the current situation in Burundi, there is also much to be gained from exploring historical continuities and how experiences and memories of past violence and injustice continue to affect possibilities for peace and shape perceptions of political space today. While peace negotiations and peacebuilding have successfully limited the saliency of ethnicity over the past decade, political divisions remain and many promised and much needed reforms have not materialised. Peacebuilding encounters have been characterised by friction and resistance, and have privileged stability and control over reform and transformation (Wodrig and Grauvogel, 2016; Curtis, 2012b). Peacebuilding has at best done little to challenge the persistence of dominant norms such as marginalisation, coercion, and militarism, and has at worst contributed to them (Daley, 2008).

This chapter will explore the Burundian context in greater depth, with a focus on analysing the production and reproduction of dominant social norms (violence, exclusion, militarism) in the post-independence period; the ways in which experiences and memories of past violence and injustice

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<sup>5</sup> Statement of the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, on opening a Preliminary Examination into the situation in Burundi, 25 April 2016. Available online at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=otp-stat-25-04-2016>. Accessed 16 May 2016.

have affected possibilities for peace in the post-independence period; and the role of civil society in peacemaking and peacebuilding and the extent to which they have transformed dominant social norms. It will draw on existing academic and historical sources on violence, conflict and peacebuilding (Daley, 2008; Curtis, 2012b; Lemarchand, 1994, 1996, & 2009; Uvin 1999 & 2009; Vandeginste, 2009; Watt, 2008; Wodrig and Grauvogel, 2016). It is split into two main sections. The first will examine the significant events and developments in the post-independence period that contributed to the reproduction of exclusion, repression, and violence. The second will explore the evolution of civil society in Burundi and the extent to which it has challenged the reproduction of dominant social norms.

## Repression and violence in the post-independence period

The post-independence period was characterised by cycles of violence that were primarily driven by the political and economic exclusion of the Hutu majority by the Tutsi. According to Lemarchand ‘exclusion led to insurrection, and insurrection to repression’ (2009: xi). Daley argues that the domination and oppression that produced this genocidal violence, was ‘the outcome of the intersection of race, ethnicity, the patriarchal state, masculinity, the geopolitical economy, and militarism.’ (2008: 7). For Daley, genocidal violence is understood broadly to include all ‘forms of intentional violence with genocidal characteristics that have not been legally defined as such’ and it ‘encompasses all manifestations of direct and structural violence... anything that impacts on the wellbeing of an individual or group that relates to their membership of a group’ (Daley, 2008: 8). Both Lemarchand and Daley see ethnicity as something that is socially constructed and strategically mobilised - a political process that began during the colonial period and intensified following independence. Daley argues that initially under colonial rule and later under military rule, loose social groups were ‘politicized to be called ethnic groups and once the concept of ethnicity was internalized, these groups became a political force for genocide and the conditions for genocidal politics were laid’ (Daley, 2008: 13). For Lemarchand, ‘the crystallisation of group identities is not a random occurrence; it is traceable to specific strategies, pursued by ethnic entrepreneurs centrally

concerned with the mobilisation of group loyalties on behalf of collective interests' (Lemarchand, 1994: 77).

### **Genocidal violence in the post-independence period (1962-1987)**

From the mid-1960s until the introduction of multi-party democracy in the early 1990s, the country was governed by a series of authoritarian Tutsi-led regimes who created a 'genocidal state' that was dominated by the security forces and reproduced physical and structural violence against its citizens (Daley, 2008). Daley posits that the 'genocidal state' is characterised by domination, oppression, exclusion, accumulation of power. It is governed by genocidal politics, which is 'where the politics of exploitation, exclusionism, racism, eugenics, militarism, extremism and patriarchy intersect', (2008: 9) as well as genocidal institutions, which is 'where state institutions are 'developed for the reproduction of genocide' (2008: 9), as well as genocidal violence. For Lemarchand, the post-independence Burundian state served as both 'an instrument of group domination and as an arena where segments of the dominant group compete among themselves to gain maximum control over patronage resources' (Lemarchand, 1994: 77).

In 1972, a Hutu insurrection in the south of the country was violently repressed by Burundian Army and the *Jeunesses Révolutionnaires Rwagasore* (JRR), a Tutsi-dominated youth militia connected to the ruling party. After they crushed the rebellion in the south, the security services and associated militias began to systematically kill Hutu leaders and intellectuals, especially those in universities, schools, hospitals, and the Church. Lemarchand estimates that 200,000 to 300,000 people were killed in what he called a 'selective genocide' (Lemarchand, 1996). He contends that the killings took place in the context of intra-Tutsi competition and rivalries between different ethno-regional groupings (the Tutsi-Hima and the Tutsi-Banyaruguru), and that 'we should view the violence as the unanticipated outcome of persistent competition among Tutsi elites for control of the state' (Lemarchand, 1994: 76). Lemarchand argues that as the threat of Hutu insurgency increased, these ethno-regional divisions became less salient and the Tutsi-Hima-led government could realise its dual objectives of ensuring the long-term stability of the state and strengthening the Tutsi--Hima

hegemony through the organised elimination of educated Hutus and potential Hutu elites. Although the clear majority of victims were Hutus, several Tutsis were also killed. Many were simply caught in the crossfire, although it appears that the state also used the cover of genocide to suppress Tutsi opposition, executing 100 members of the Tutsi opposition in Gitega (Daley, 2008).

The 1972 killings had lasting humanitarian and political implications. They consolidated the Tutsi-Hima hegemony, which would go unchallenged for seventeen years, ensured the structural exclusion of the Hutu majority, and strengthened the Burundian state; 'from a fragile edifice threatened within and without, the state had now become the all-powerful, unchallenged instrument of Tutsi hegemony' (Lemarchand, 2009: 138). Although the government response to the killing brought about a period of relative stability, it also entrenched exclusion, marginalisation and militarism in the fabric of the Burundian state. While Lemarchand states that the country experienced 'unprecedented peace' during this period (2009: 138), Daley argues 'this apparent calm belies the militarization of society and the socialisation of violence into everyday life' (2008: 72). The 1972 killings resulted also in widespread displacement, with 140,000 refugees fleeing across the border into neighbouring countries such as Tanzania – a total that would be added to significantly in later years. As well as creating a humanitarian crisis, the creation of so many refugees also had lasting political consequences. Among these was the birth of radical Hutu parties, such as the *Parti Pour La Liberation Du Peuple Hutu* (PALIPEHUTU), in the refugee camps in Tanzania.

In 1976, the President of the First Republic, Michel Micombero, was overthrown in a successful coup d'état and was replaced by Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, who presided over a period of increasing restrictions on opposition voices and alternative sites of authority and legitimacy such as the Catholic Church. Bagaza was himself overthrown in 1987 in a coup d'état led by Pierre Buyoya who became the president of the Third Republic. The replacement of one president with another from the same clan in this way contributed to the reproduction not only of the Tutsi-Hima hegemony but also of genocidal violence, social and political exclusion, and militarism as prevailing norms.

## **Liberalisation, ethnic violence, and civil war (1987-2005)**

With the installation of Buyoya and came the promise of liberalisation. According to Lemarchand (1994), Tutsi extremists sought to stop liberalisation in its tracks, whereas Hutu extremists saw the advent of liberalisation as an opportunity to challenge Tutsi hegemony. Genocidal violence ensued in 1988, when the army intervened following localised unrest in two Northern provinces. Uvin tells the story:

Based on false rumours and a widespread dislike of corrupt local (Tutsi) administrators, Hutu farmers in the two northern villages of Ntega and Marangara killed up to 3,000 Tutsi. The army intervened to restore order, killing up to 20,000 Hutu and creating tens of thousands of refugees. (1999: 259).

Lemarchand notes that the killings were not coordinated, like the 1972 killings, but ‘a sudden outburst of rage, followed by intense fears of an impending re-enactment of the 1972 carnage’ (Lemarchand, 1994: 128). Under pressure from the international community, the Buyoya regime introduced limited democratic reforms in the early 1990s. A new multi-party constitution was drafted, a new legal and regulatory framework for civil society was established, and the first human rights organisations also emerged during this period. Multi-party elections were held in 1993, with the predominantly Tutsi *Parti de L’Unité et du Progrès National* (UPRONA) pitted against the primarily Hutu *Front Pour La Démocratie au Burundi* (FRODEBU). The latter won a resounding electoral victory and its leader, Melchior Ndadaye, was elected President. However, as Uvin notes, the elections took place ‘in a climate of growing ethnic antagonism and radicalisation’ (Uvin, 2009: 12). Ndadaye was assassinated after 100 days in power, along with the President and Vice-President of the National Assembly, in an attempted coup d’état. Although the coup failed, ‘the dynamics it had set in motion remained: a constitutional crisis that was to last for years, mass violence throughout the country, and further confirmation for both sides that the other was not to be trusted.’ (Uvin, 2009: 13). Reyntjens argues that in the following months, a ‘creeping coup’ began, which involved ‘the imposition of a de facto constitutional order which in effect consolidated the achievements of the coup’ (Reyntjens, 1995: 16).

Mass violence broke out in the days following the Ndadaye's assassination, leading to the killing of 50,000 Tutsis and some pro-UPRONA Hutus (Watt, 2008). The assassination of Ndadaye and the violence that followed sparked a civil war, known among Burundians as *la crise*. Lemarchand (2009) and Chrétien (2008) contend that the violence that occurred during this period was fuelled by memories of previous violence, especially of the 1972 killings. As Lemarchand puts it: 'memories of 1972 suddenly surfaced with an emotional charge made more potent by intimations of yet another massacre of Hutu populations' (2009: 140). Chrétien also argues that memories of 1972 continued to shape perceptions and actions during the civil war: 'for the adult population, the founding event of these years of crisis is no doubt represented by the crisis of 1972, it haunts their memories and marks their mentality' and 'it has become part of the memory of youth because of family upbringing or recent political propaganda' (Chrétien, 2008: 29).

The 1993 violence also had lasting repercussions. It led to the establishment of radical Tutsi groups, such as *Action Contre la Génocide*, which organised meetings on the 21st of every month in memory of the victims of the 1993 violence. Tutsi militias such as *Sans Echec* (the infallible) and *Sans Défaite* (the undefeated) also emerged and violently closed down urban spaces along with existing militias such as the JRR (Daley, 2008). Much of the violence was concentrated in Bujumbura, which according to Uvin 'continued to be rocked by extreme violence by mainly Tutsi and also Hutu militias. The years up to 1996 were years of absolute terror for the people of Bujumbura: no urban person has forgotten those days' (Uvin, 2009: 14). The country descended into a twelve-year civil war between the Tutsi army and a series of armed rebel movements including the CNDD, the *Front National de Libération* (FNL), which was the armed wing of the *Parti Pour La Libération Du Peuple Hutu* (PALIPEHUTU), and the FDD. Various rebel groups emerged and split during the war. The CNDD later eventually split into two factions, one wing becoming CNDD-Nyangoma and the other merging with the FDD to become the CNDD-FDD, led by Pierre Nkurunziza, who would later sweep to victory at the ballot box in Burundi's first post-war election.

During the war, Burundi became not only socially but also physically divided along ethnic lines. Bujumbura was divided into Hutu and Tutsi quarters. In Bujumbura Rurale, the military rounded up Hutus into inhumane regroupment camps, in a process where people were forced off their land and placed in camps ostensibly to protect them from rebel incursions. Tutsis living outside Bujumbura were protected by the military in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Roadblocks were also set up across the country, restricting the mobility of the population. Hundreds of thousands of new refugees were created as a further 500,000 people fled to camps in neighbouring countries and up to 800,000 people were displaced internally (Uvin, 2009). It is estimated that the conflict, which lasted over a decade, led to the deaths of at least 300,000 people, many of them civilians.

### **Peace negotiations and peacebuilding during and after the civil war (1998–2015)**

The international community sought a negotiated end to the violence. Peace negotiations began in 1998 in Arusha, Tanzania. The negotiations led to fragmentation and factionalism as the number of political parties proliferated, increasing from four in 1996 to seventeen in 2000. Within the negotiations these parties were split into the G-10, which was pro-Tutsi, and the G-7, which was pro-Hutu. Many were created by political entrepreneurs who saw the establishment of political parties as the best way of getting a seat in the post-war government. As a result, many of the parties lacked widespread support and legitimacy. Although they sought to be inclusive, the negotiations were also characterised by exclusion, notably the exclusion of more radical Hutu groups such as the CNDD-FDD and the FNL. In doing so, Lemarchand concludes that the talks legitimised the ‘fractiousness of the Burundi political arena in the name of inclusiveness’ while doing little to counter radicalism and extremism (2009: 142). The two main rebel movements, the CNDD-FDD and the FNL, did not participate in the negotiations and continued fighting. Ceasefires were signed with different parts of these movements in 2002 and 2003, although the largest part of the FNL held out until 2006.

Negotiators signed the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2000 under huge international pressure. Inclusion and power sharing are central to the agreement, which paved the way for a new constitution and the establishment of a government based on consociationalism and ethnic power-sharing, as well as the reform of the Tutsi-dominated army and police (Curtis, 2012b; Vandeginste, 2009, 2011, & 2014; Lemarchand, 2006). It also provided for the first post-conflict elections, which would take place in 2005. There are mixed views about Arusha within the scholarship on Burundi. For Uvin 'the Arusha agreement, warts and all, created incentives for collaboration and compromise, and provided a road map for the way ahead. The fact that ethnicity was becoming more openly addressed in society was real and positive' (2009: 19). Lemarchand, on the other hand, argues that Arusha produced a government whose main purpose was to provide as many jobs as are necessary to ensure political stability and provide an alternative to rebellion. However, it failed to offer 'a package of social and economic policies for the peasant masses, and thus offer a real alternative to rebellion' (Lemarchand, 2009: 141).

The international community (including several bilateral, multilateral, and regional actors) invested huge amounts of resources in the immediate post-war years in order to create a peace-dividend that would make peace pay and prevent a return to violent conflict. The UN, the USA, Belgium, France, the UK, and the EU were all involved in Burundi following the signing of the Arusha Agreement. Burundi was one of six countries placed on the agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, and remains a recipient of funding from the UN Peacebuilding Fund, receiving a total of \$61.75 million between 2007 and 2016.<sup>6</sup> Regional actors also played a significant role, including regional heads of state, members of South Africa's government, and the African Union. All these actors had different understandings of the nature of the conflict and different strategies and agendas for resolving it. This meant that international actors were 'sometimes working at cross-purposes with each other, while presenting the parties to the conflict with ample opportunities for manipulation'

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations Peacebuilding Fund. Statistics available online at <http://www.unpbf.org/countries/burundi/>. Accessed 3 June 2016.

(Lemarchand, 2009: 141). Consequently, peacebuilding encounters between international, regional, and domestic actors became characterised by friction and resistance as Burundian elites renegotiated and reinterpreted the institutions and practices promoted by interveners (Curtis, 2012b; Wodrig and Grauvogel, 2016). Curtis argues that ‘despite talk of liberal peace, local participation, bottom-up peacebuilding, and inclusive governance’, in practice peacebuilding in Burundi was about ‘stability, containment, and control’ (2012b: 75). Consequently, international peacebuilders contributed to the maintenance of ‘an “order” in Burundi where violence, coercion and militarism remain central’ (Curtis, 2012b: 72).

Militarism, patronage, exclusion, and violence persisted throughout the post-war period. The anti-third term protests which erupted in April 2015 only make this clearer. Daley and Popplewell (2016) argue that the widespread protests that commenced following the announcement that the President, Pierre Nkurunziza, would stand for an unconstitutional third term, should be analysed within this context of sustained militarism and persistent political and economic marginalisation. Van Acker argues that although the protests were sparked by the announcement of the President’s candidacy, they were driven by grievances and frustrations among ordinary Burundians about the continued lack of social and economic prospects and rising insecurity. Consequently, the protests should be seen not only as ‘a way to rescue the Arusha Agreement and its clear rulings on presidential term limits, but also as a response to the problems Arusha did not manage to resolve: elite capture of the state, corruption, militarism, patronage, and exclusion’ (Van Acker, 2015: 7-8). The violent repression of these protests is further example of how these norms have been reproduced through the discourse and actions of political elites, and of their desire to gain and hold on to power at all costs.

## Civil society in post-war Burundi

Civil society has sought to challenge the excessive power and violence exercised by political elites and the reproduction of many harmful social norms in recent years, but with limited success. This in part due to their complicated relationship with the prevailing social and political hegemony

within Burundi. Civil society in Burundi has at different times in the course of its history been both part of and contested this hegemony. It has also, at various times, emerged as an alternative site of authority and legitimacy, which has affected its relationship with the state.

### **Emergence of civil society in Burundi (pre-colonial period to 2000)**

Civil society has a long history in Burundi, with roots stretching back as far as the pre-colonial period. Most civil society structures in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods both were part of and contested the dominant social and political hegemony. For example, the *bashingantahe* is a customary authority responsible for conflict resolution and mediation within communities, which emerged in the pre-colonial period. The councils performed important social and judicial functions at the local level and, according to Daley, also worked as ‘an institution to constrain the excesses of masculinity and violence’ within pre-colonial society (2008: 47). Invested members could come from any social background and were chosen because they embodied certain values such as knowledge, virtue, and authority (Ingelaere and Kohlhagen 2012: 43). There is evidence that women with sufficient intellect, wealth, and status could also become members of the *bashingantahe* (Daley, 2008). Although they were part of the governing social order, they were autonomous and so independent of the Chiefs and the Monarchy and were able to hold both to account. Thomas Laely argues that ‘even though the institution of *ubushingantahe* was according to all evidence encouraged by the monarchy, it was a major constitutive element of the civil society, poised against the power of the central state’ (Laely quoted in Lemarchand, 1994: 167).

In its early days, the Catholic Church could be considered as part of the prevailing political and cultural hegemony. It supported the establishment of colonial authority in Burundi and played an important role in the modernisation process. Missionaries sought to suppress traditional belief systems, and advance modern values and European ideas (Daley, 2008). They also contributed to the social construction of ethnicity in the colonial period. Daley argues that ‘colonial policies – political, education and religious – combined to produce rigid ethnic boundaries, and enabled the consolidation of Tutsi power over other groups’ (Daley, 2008: 50). The Catholic Church established

missionary schools, which focused primarily on educating the children of the Tutsi elite, with the intention of creating a new class of administrators to implement the colonial project. Daley argues that the Church also contributed to the introduction to the country of European patriarchal structures and ideology which promoted the subordination and domestication of African women. The church also established a number of associated civil society organisations, which came to be known as Catholic Action Movements, as well as institutions such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides of Burundi in the early 1950s.

However, in the decade following independence, the Church became an important space for Hutu voice and organisation. Daley argues that it ‘provided a mouthpiece, a meeting place and an organisational structure for the Hutus’ (2008: 74). In Rwanda, the Church played a significant role in the Hutu or Social Revolution in Rwanda from 1959 to 1962, a violent insurgency which resulted in a shift of power from the Tutsi elite to the Hutu majority. Along with the colonial authorities, the Church in Rwanda provided Hutu revolutionaries with ‘sustained political, moral, and logistical assistance’ (Lemarchand, 2009: 81). Its affiliated organisations, church-sponsored cooperatives, and Christian trade unions also played an important role in the revolution. Consequently, the establishment of a Hutu-led Christian trade union, known as the *Syndicats Chrétiens*, provoked suspicion and alarm among the Tutsi elite in Burundi. There were numerous provocations and clashes between members of the union and the violent youth wing of the pro-Tutsi UPRONA, which culminated in the Kamenge Riots in 1962 and the murder of the president of the *Syndicats Chrétiens* (Lemarchand, 1994). Trade unions and student groups became increasingly politicised and divided along ethnic lines during the late 1960s and 1970s. Lemarchand notes that the pro-UPRONA trade union, the *Fédération des Travailleurs du Burundi* (FTB) ‘emerged as one of the most strident pro-Tutsi and anti-Western pressure groups in the country’ (1994: 66). What remained of the *Syndicats Chrétiens* continued to promote the interests of Hutu workers. The *Union Nationale des Etudiants du Burundi* (UNEBA) was firmly pro-Tutsi and ‘gained widespread notoriety as one of the most radical student organisations’ (Lemarchand, 1994: 67).

During the Second Republic (1976-87), President Jean-Baptiste Bagaza sought to restructure state-society relations and limit the social and political influence of institutions such as the Catholic Church and the *Bashingantahe*. Severe restrictions were placed on civil society and most notably the Catholic Church, which Bagaza saw as a threat to state power and an obstacle to party influence in rural areas (Lemarchand, 1994 & 1996). According to Lemarchand (1996), Bagaza nationalised schools run by the Church, abolished Catholic parish councils, and banned lay Catholics from preaching, reading the Bible, or giving communion in churches. He also expelled foreign missionaries, arrested Catholic laymen and priests, and closed organisations associated with the church known as Catholic Action Movements. The security services harassed and detained a number of outspoken figures associated with the Catholic Church, including the Archbishop of Gitega, Joachim Ruhuna. Those organisations that continued to operate during this time lacked independence from the state and were expected to support the agenda of the ruling party. Niyonkuru explains that

During the single-party period, the state never created or maintained a space for free expression. All actions and activities affecting the public interest were to be inspired and guided by the party's ideological line and orientation. This situation did not favor the emergence of civil society. The few organizations that could be classified as non-state actors working for the general interest, such as unions, women's organizations, youth movements, or cooperatives, were obligated to follow the guidelines set forth by the regime and the ruling party. (2011: 1).

The restrictions were only lifted following the overthrow of Bagaza in 1987. His successor, Pierre Buyoya, oversaw a period of liberalisation and created a legal framework in 1992 providing for the establishment of non-governmental associations, known in Burundi as *Associations Sans Buts Lucratifs* (ASBL). The number of registered organisations slowly began to increase following the introduction of the legislation and over two hundred associations were registered between 1992 and 1994, including the first rights-based organisations (Ntakarutimana and Ntsimbiyabandi, 2004). Palmans finds that civil society groups established in the early 1990s were often divided along ethnic and political lines and were even used by politicians as 'a springboard to gain power'

(Palmans 2006: 219).<sup>7</sup> Palmans concludes that as a result, ‘civil society became a sphere of interests, and a way to continue the political struggle’ (2006: 219). There were organisations that sought to overcome these ethnic and political divisions, such as Ligue ITEKA, although there were ethnic cleavages even within these more progressive groups (Palmans, 2006). Despite this, Burundian writers such as Ntakarutimana and Ntsimbiyabandi (2004) and Niyonkuru (2011) regard this brief period between the introduction of legislation and the outbreak of war as a time of democratic opening and as the moment when contemporary civil society was born.

The number of associations continued to grow as Burundians sought to respond to emerging socio-economic challenges generated by the conflict such as the rise in orphans, street children, and child soldiers (Palmans, 2006). They also established a large number of organisations concerned with conflict resolution and the promotion of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. However, civil society voices were prevented from participating in formal peace negotiations because they ‘were not taken seriously by politicians’ (Palmans, 2006: 221). Daley (2008) cites two reasons for this: first, the majority of Burundian negotiators were reluctant to admit civil society groups as independent parties because they wanted to prevent Buyoya dominating the negotiations by bringing in new pro-Tutsi groups; and secondly, the parties to the talks regarded the civil society groups as insufficiently independent or organised to form a structure capable of representing the interests of the Burundian population. The report of the commission charged with investigating issues relating to reconstruction and development, published as part of the Arusha agreement, notes that:

Civil society in Burundi is not yet sufficiently organized to form a structure strong and solid enough to uphold the interests of all groups in the population. The notion of civil society is in fact a new one and is not well understood by the population, just as civil society itself does not understand its own mission (Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, Report of the Committee IV, Reconstruction and Development, Paragraph 2.5.6.1: 125).

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<sup>7</sup> All quotes from Palmans (2006) have been translated from French into English by the author.

The civil society representatives that did participate in the negotiations were partisan organisations that were often closely connected to political parties. Palmans states that the organisations and individuals that participated were ‘chosen by the government and were not independent’ (2006: 222), while Daley notes that they participated ‘as part of the delegation of the political parties they were affiliated to’ (2008: 206). Many genuine civil society actors chose not to participate in order to maintain their independence, and instead decided to organise seminars, workshops, and debates to raise awareness of what was happening at the talks among local communities. According to Palmans, ‘human rights organisations, such as Ligue ITEKA, did not want to participate, and remained as observers to protect their independence. It is these organisations, which carried out awareness-raising activities, that supported the population to become involved in the peace process’ (2006: 222). Daley argues that ‘their exclusion as independent participants reinforced the idea that peace making is solely the prerogative of political parties, rebel movements and men’ and ensured that peacemaking remained ‘non-transformative, denying representation and thus political agency to local civil society groups’ (Daley 2008: 206). Despite their outsider status, women’s organisations also played a critical role in the Arusha Peace negotiations. They worked with the UN to create an informal diplomacy track that ran parallel to the official peace talks, which successfully influenced the course of the peace negotiations (Saiget, 2016; Daley, 2008). Many also sought to create spaces for dialogue and reconciliation at the grassroots.

### **Growth of civil society in the transition period (2000-2005)**

According to Palmans the civil society that emerged during the transition period (from the signature of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2000 to the first post-conflict elections in 2005) in Burundi was hugely complex, ‘not only because of its diversity in terms of structure, objectives, mission and ideologies, but also because of its diversity in terms of the nature, quality and success of organisations' activities and the support they receive from donors’ (2006: 225). The number of civil society organisations increased dramatically in the transition period (Ntakarutimana and Ntsimbiyabandi, 2004). Palmans (2006) states that the number of registered organisations had increased to 2000 by 2006, and estimates that there were an additional 5000 community-based

groups. She finds that these community-based groups were dominated by women's organisations, which played an important role in poverty reduction and supporting citizen participation in local decision-making structures (Palmans, 2006).

**TABLE 2: CATEGORISATION OF BURUNDIAN CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS IN THE TRANSITION PERIOD BY SECTOR (SEBUDANDI AND NDUWAYO 2002)**

| Category                         | Description                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Economic and self-development    | Poverty-reduction and community development organisations, and organisations that support agriculture, animal husbandry, carpentry, etc.                                                  |
| Training and research            | Education institutions including independent schools, colleges, universities, and organisations such as adult literacy groups                                                             |
| Religious and faith-based        | Churches, other religious confessions, and associated faith-based organisations                                                                                                           |
| Mutual aid and solidarity groups | Organisations that support others that come from the same place, face the same challenges, such as alumni associations, networks for people living with HIV/AIDS, expatriate groups, etc. |
| Support to vulnerable groups     | Organisations that provide support to orphans, widows, disabled people etc.                                                                                                               |
| Civic action                     | Movements and associations that actively promote citizen participation, good governance, peace, nonviolence, and social justice, etc.                                                     |
| Humanitarian and philanthropic   | Organisations created to respond to distress and emergency needs resulting from war and conflict through provision of humanitarian aid                                                    |
| Culture, art and sport           | Organisations such as music and theatre groups, football clubs, and other sport associations, etc.                                                                                        |
| Defence of special interest      | Trade unions, professional associations, and workers' cooperatives, etc.                                                                                                                  |
| Human rights                     | Generalist organisations who work for all social political and economic rights and specialist groups that focus on particular areas such as prisoners' rights, children's rights, etc.    |
| Environment                      | Organisations that promote protection of the environment, wildlife conservation, etc.                                                                                                     |
| Youth                            | Organisations that provide support and training to young people, promote youth participation, etc.                                                                                        |

|                                |                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Women                          | Organisations that promote women's rights and participation, provide support to women, etc.          |
| Media and freedom of the press | Organisations that promote freedom of the press and media institutions, such as private radios, etc. |

Analysts made a number of attempts to group and classify Burundian civil society in the immediate post-war years. Sebudandi and Nduwayo (2002) classified Burundian civil society into 15 groups, the largest of which was economic and self-development organisations, followed by faith-based associations, research and training institutions, and mutual aid and solidarity groups. Human rights associations and women's organisations were far less numerous than groups in these other categories (see Table 2). Stijn de Reu (2004), on the other hand, categorised organisations according to their funding and effectiveness (see Table 3). He identified three groups: first, organisations that were prominent, effective, and that received support from the international community; secondly, organisations that were active but struggled to raise external funds (including organisations that had not attracted funding because they lacked visibility, and those that once received funding but did no longer); and finally, those organisations that had 'almost no program, no activities', and were 'little more than just a name' (de Reu, 2004: 3). De Reu argued that only those in the first group and some of those in the second, representing just 5-10% of organisations registered, could be considered 'really active' (2004: 3). The difficulty with this analysis is that it assumes that organisations must be in receipt of donor funds to be active and excludes the possibility that organisations may raise their own funds in order to support their work. For example, Palmans finds that Catholic and Protestant organisations had quite well established local networks of self-financing within parishes, noting that many of 'these organisations have existed for decades and have developed their own funding networks' (2006: 226).

**TABLE 3: CATEGORISATION OF BURUNDIAN CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS IN THE TRANSITION PERIOD BY OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS (DE REU, 2004)**

| Group | Description                                                                                                   | Percentage of organisations |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1     | Reliable organisations with external funding                                                                  | 5%                          |
| 2     | Good organisations with little external funding or organisations where external funding has been discontinued | 10-20%                      |
| 3     | Organisation that are not active with no external funding                                                     | 75-80%                      |

Palmans (2006) discusses the difficulties that faced civil society in the transition period. Many organisations struggled to raise enough funds to support their work, and were dependent on external sources, which can be unstable. The growing urban–rural divide was also an issue, as most organisations were situated in the capital. She found that those based in Bujumbura had a weak link to the grassroots and did not always respond to the needs of communities, while those who were aware of these needs often struggled to raise funds to support their work. This was because those outside the capital city lacked visibility and found it difficult to attract international donors. She also lists several challenges relating to the external environment, including a poor relationship with the government, widespread poverty, and a lack of genuine consultative mechanisms. She found that civil society also lacked internal cohesion and had limited capacity for networking and strategic planning. However, Palmans felt there was potential for change with the establishment of coalitions such as *Forum Pour la Renforcement de la Société Civile* (FORSC), which was established to strengthen the collective voice and capacity of civil society, and *Coalition de la Société Civile pour le Monitoring Electorale* (COSOME), which was created to coordinate civil society work on elections.

### **Evolution of civil society in the post-war decade (2005-2015)**

A lot was written about civil society during the transition period, but very little has been published since. Consequently, much of the information in this section comes from my own research,

including interviews with civil society actors and individuals working for multilateral organisations, as well as a mapping exercise conducted before entering the field which I updated throughout the course of my research. Many of my interviewees told me that the number of registered civil society organisations continued to grow throughout the post-war decade, from the first post-conflict elections in 2005 until the contested elections in 2015. Sources from the United Nations in Burundi interviewed as part of this research explained that there were over 6000 registered associations in 2015, although they suspected that most of these organisations were inactive and existed in name only. One of these respondents estimated that only 10-15% of organisations submit an annual report to the Ministry of the Interior as required by law, which is an important indicator of activity for registered organisations. Interviewees working for civil society organisations explained that they faced profound challenges including severe funding constraints, limited opportunities for participation, and an unstable and divided political environment, as well as internal obstacles such as a lack of human and physical resources and reduced capacities for fundraising, networking, and strategic advocacy and programming. Despite this, many of these groups were very active throughout the post-war decade, and increased (though still very limited) internet and mobile connectivity has benefited the work of several organisations and activists, including those at the national level and within communities.

As previously noted, this research argues that civil society in post-war Burundi constitutes a complex assemblage of different organisations, individuals, and mobilisations, as well as individual and collective agencies and the discourses they both challenge and reproduce. It also adopts an analysis of civil society that is inherently spatial. Conventional analyses argue that there is a significant gap between organisations that operate at the national level and those situated within communities at the grassroots. Although there certainly is a significant urban-rural divide, civil society in Burundi traverses multiple scales from the global to the local. Even organisations that work solely within communities on everyday problems are connected to the global in a number of different ways, whether through funding and organisational networks or in a more abstract way through discourses and power relations. Civil society continues to be both part of the prevailing

social and political hegemony in Burundi and a space where it is contested and reworked. Its relationship to elite politics and political parties in Burundi is ambiguous and unstable. A noticeable trend has been an increase in both the number and influence of pro-government civil society organisations that are either funded by or are supportive of the ruling party. These organisations, as well as members of the government, have criticised other parts of civil society for being too close to or even part of the political opposition. Although the human rights organisations and other groups that are the target of these assertions are neither part of the political opposition nor connected to opposition parties, they have been extremely critical of the government and have stood up for rights of opposition politicians and their supporters to freedom of expression and freedom of association and assembly. For other parts of civil society, their political independence and neutrality is vital to their legitimacy. The government has also criticised many prominent human rights organisations for being too close to the international community, and views them as mouthpieces for foreign interests that are part of the dominant global hegemony. While many of these actors are funded by external donors and are broadly supportive of liberalisation and democratisation within Burundi, they are also very critical of the track record of the international community and the failure of liberal peacebuilding to create a sustainable and everyday peace.

Forms of organising became increasingly diverse over the post-war decade, and informal structures such as movements, protests, and demonstrations became more prominent. A diverse range of associations existed alongside and interacted with these more organic forms. These organisations continued to address a vast array of issues, as they have done in the past. Below is a list of some of the more noticeable groupings of organisations that worked on issues related to peace, nonviolence, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding in Burundi in the post-war decade. It is based on the initial mapping exercise that I began prior to going into the field, and continued to update as I carried out the research.<sup>8</sup> These groupings are relatively loose, with porous boundaries, and they are not

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<sup>8</sup> Sources included existing mapping exercises, such as the one conducted by Insight on Conflict (available online at <https://www.insightonconflict.org/conflicts/burundi/>. Accessed 8 March 2017), reports published by international NGOs and multilateral organisations, lists of partner

exclusive. An organisation may fit in more than one group. It is not only associations categorised as human rights and democracy promotion groups that worked on human rights and democratisation, or women's organisations that worked on issues connected to women and gender, for example. The groupings also traverse many scales and include groups that worked on these issues at local, provincial, national, and regional levels.

- *Human rights, governance and democracy promotion organisations:* These organisations worked on issues such as political rights, corruption, governance, elections, participation, democratisation, and the constitution. They performed a variety of functions including monitoring, advocacy, socialisation, and sometimes service delivery (such as the provision of legal services to victims of human rights abuses). They include large networks, such as FORSC, a coalition of 142 organisations, as well as prominent specialist groups, such as *Association pour la Protection des Droits Humains et des Personnes Détenues* (APRODH), which works on prisoner rights, and Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT-Burundi), a Christian organisation that campaigned against the use of torture. Predominantly situated within Bujumbura, they tended to be closely associated with the urban elite and could lack rootedness within communities. However, there were local structures and community-based organisations that worked on these issues at the grassroots, such as INAMA, a coalition of community-based associations that monitored electoral violence at the grassroots level. Some national organisations, such as Ligue ITEKA, which was Burundi's oldest human rights organisation, also had a strong presence throughout the country.
- *Faith-based organisations, the Catholic Church and other religious confessions:* These organisations worked on a variety of issues related to peacemaking and peacebuilding

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organisations on international NGO websites, lists of national coalition members (e.g. members of FORSC, COSOME, CAFOB), as well as material gathered through interviews.

including mediation and conflict resolution within communities, socialisation on human rights, and non-violence, and they also conduct advocacy on issues such as corruption, human rights, elections, and the constitution. Organisations such as *le Ministère paix et Réconciliation Sous la Croix* (Mi-PAREC), a Quaker organisation that worked with peace committees around the country, and the Justice and Peace Commissions, Catholic organisations that supported Local Participatory Governance Committees and Local Mediation Committees within parishes as well as managing a range of peacebuilding programmes, were among the few organisations that had the structure and capacity to work across multiple scales from the local to the national and even the regional level.

- *Women's associations and the women's movement:* These organisations were concerned with the promotion of the rights, participation, and development of women and girls. They worked across a range of domains related to these issues and performed a variety of functions including advocacy, socialisation, facilitation, and service provision. Most women's organisations worked within communities at the grassroots, and came together at the national level through networks such as *Le Collectif des Associations et ONGs Féminines du Burundi* (CAFOB), which has 62 member organisations throughout the country. Within the peacebuilding sector, Association Dushirehamwe, a national network of local female peacebuilders, provided training and capacity building on nonviolent conflict resolution and runs projects that promote women's leadership and tackle electoral violence.
- *Youth organisations and networks:* These organisations sought to promote the rights and participation of young people. They were predominantly involved in socialisation and social cohesion activities, but some groups also conducted advocacy and monitoring, or were engaged in service provision. Many groups sought to bring together young people from different social backgrounds through cultural and sport activities. Others provided training for young people in areas such as agriculture and carpentry, or supported them through microfinance and other income-generating activities. Most worked at the local

level, but there were networks that provided capacity building support and ran programmes at the national level, such as *Réseau des Organisations des Jeunes en Action pour la Paix, la Réconciliation et le Développement* (REJA), which had 164 member organisations working at different scales in provinces throughout the country.

- *Peace committees and grassroots conflict resolution mechanisms:* This group includes peace committees and clubs, the Bashingantahe councils, and other conflict resolution mechanisms situated within communities such as the Local Mediation Committees associated with the Catholic Church. Peace committees were community-based structures seeking to mitigate violence, resolve conflicts, and facilitate dialogue and reconciliation. Niyonkuru (2012) estimated that there were around 350–400 active peace committees in 14 out of Burundi’s 17 provinces. Many of these committees were supported by national organisations such as Mi-PAREC, which provided administrative and capacity building support for peace committee members. The Boy Scouts and Girl Guides of Burundi also ran peace clubs for young people throughout the country as part of the Amahoro-Amani programme, which connected young people from communities across Burundi, Rwanda, and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.
- *Trade unions and professional associations:* This group includes prominent organisations representing specific groups, such as the Burundi Bar Association, the Association of Burundian Consumers (ABUCO), and the Burundian Journalists Union (UBJ), as well as organisations such as the *Maison de la Presse*, which campaigned for media freedoms. Often based at the national level, these organisations were members of national coalitions. They are primarily involved in advocacy although some are also engaged in socialisation and service provision.
- *Victims’ associations and ex-combatant organisations:* Several victims’ associations and ex-combatant groups emerged following the war to represent the interests of particular social groups, often united by shared experiences during the civil war and earlier periods

of ethnic and political violence. These groups were often extremely local, but some operated at the national scale. While some of these groups were engaged in socialisation and social cohesion activities seeking to bring together people from different ethnicities, others are mono-ethnic or are associated with particular rebel groups. A progressive example was the *Association pour la Mémoire et la Protection de l'Humanité contre les Crimes Internationaux Gira Ubuntu* (AMEPCI), which brought people together from across the ethnic divide to commemorate past conflicts and massacres.

Two other major civil society groupings include educational institutions and student associations, and socio-economic development, microfinance, and social enterprise organisations. Most of these organisations were based at the grassroots, but there were also a number of provincial or national organisations which receive support from the international community.

Protests and demonstrations also became an important feature of the political landscape in Burundi towards the end of the post-war decade, and the most significant of these were the anti-third term protests. These protests were initiated by a group of prominent human rights and democracy promotion organisations which came together to form the *Halte au Troisième Mandate! Coalition* in January 2015. Members and supporters of opposition parties as well as thousands of ordinary Burundians joined the protests, which began in April 2015 and continued for several months. Protestors came from all social backgrounds. Although the government claimed that the demonstrations were concentrated in a few Tutsi neighbourhoods of the capital, Van Acker argues that 'these claims don't do justice to reality. In several of these neighbourhoods, Hutu youth from the hills and plains surrounding the capital... joined the protest.' (2015: 6). The demonstrations were not just an urban phenomenon, as they also took place in several rural areas outside of the capital city. These demonstrations also built on previous protests that had occurred in the preceding months and years, including several strikes against the rising cost of living, and protests against the detention of particular activists and journalists.

Many Burundian civil society actors also have a strong regional presence. Some are part of regional and even global families such as the Girl Guides and Boy Scouts, and catholic associations such as the Justice and Peace Commissions. These organisations often have close relationships with their sister organisations in Rwanda and Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. For example, the Girl Guides and Boy Scouts contribute to a regional peacebuilding programme called Amahoro Amani, which seeks to promote peaceful coexistence and acceptance among communities and between young people across the regions. One Burundian NGO that I spoke to, which had started as a grassroots community group many years ago, explained to me that they have gone on to forge relationships with other organisations from across the Great Lakes and broader east Africa region, and were even helping to support a peacebuilding programme in South Sudan.

Some civil society actors also have close personal connections to other countries across the region, often because of the civil war. I spoke to many who had lived abroad during the conflict, often as refugees in places such as Rwanda, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo, and even Kenya. It is perhaps also worth noting here that Rwanda is often seen as a regional leader when it comes to restrictions on civil society. In recent years, it appears that the Burundian government has sought to emulate its northern neighbour by placing increasingly strict controls on civil society and political opposition. The International Center for Non-profit Law (ICNL) NGO Law Monitor states that the operating context for civil society in Rwanda ‘is one of enforced collaboration with the government’s political and development plans. Those CSOs working within these boundaries can act relatively freely; those that do not face difficulties’<sup>9</sup>. This research shows that Burundi appears to be moving in the same direction.

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<sup>9</sup> ICNL NGO Law Monitor, ‘Civic Freedom Monitor: Rwanda’, available online at <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/rwanda.html>. Accessed 10 June 2017.

## **Political space for civil society and spaces for peace in the post-war decade**

In 2013, Civicus – one of the leading contributors to the policy discourse on political space for civil society – declared that Burundi had ‘the third worst enabling environment’ for civil society in the world (Civicus, 2013a: 14). The donor community was hopeful that the post-war transition would create a favourable environment for civil society, which would monitor the implementation of the Arusha agreement and hold the post-conflict state to account. However, this was not to be. The political environment for civil society began to weaken in advance of the 2010 elections and worsened dramatically in the lead up to and in the aftermath of the 2015 election. This deterioration led several high-profile human rights reports to argue that there has been a ‘crackdown’ on civil society, independent media and political opposition in Burundi (Amnesty International 2014, Human Rights Watch 2010). Following the 2010 elections, the government introduced legislation that restricts basic rights and freedoms, and attempted to change the law governing the registration of civil society organisations. Attacks on outspoken individuals around the 2015 elections contributed to the creation of a climate of fear in Burundi, which has only intensified following the violent and arbitrary suppression of opposition and dissent in the wake of the anti-third term protests.

Since April 2015, the government has imposed a number of restrictions on civil society. There have been reprisals against prominent human rights defenders, including the disbarment of human rights lawyers, and the violent harassment and intimidation of activists. A prominent human rights campaigner and a journalist have disappeared. The country’s leading human rights organisations have been either shut down or suspended. The government has also introduced two new laws, that place oversight measures and controls on national and international NGOs. National NGOs are required to re-register every two years and must receive the approval of the Ministry of the Interior for all their activities or face sanctions, such as the closure of their offices or the suspension of their activities. All foreign funding must be transferred through the Central Bank. The law also places limits on the formation of coalitions, a move that could seriously impede the coordination and the influence of the sector. The activities of international NGOs must be aligned with the priorities of

the government, and they must now sign programme implementation agreements with the relevant ministerial department. The situation facing civil society in Burundi following the 2015 elections is dire, and yet it is important to note that limited political space is not a new thing. The Burundian state has repeatedly crushed opposition and dissent using repression and violence throughout the post-independence period. Contemporary narratives on political space also fail to show how historical events and personal tragedies such as the 1972 genocide and the civil war continue to shape experiences and perceptions of political space in Burundi.

Much of the literature also overlooks the ways in which civil society actors in Burundi have consistently sought to create spaces for peace through bottom-up peacebuilding initiatives even in the midst of violence and repression. Watt (2008) narrates the stories of several civil society groups and individual activists, and their involvement in peacemaking and peacebuilding in Burundi. These stories tell of the establishment of peace groups in communities where mass atrocities took place, church groups that promote nonviolent mediation and reconciliation between returning refugees and those who stayed, youth organisations that have sought to bring together young people separated by various social cleavages, and human rights organisations that attempt to tackle the culture of impunity and pervasive corruption (Watt, 2008). Niyonkuru explores one grassroots peacebuilding intervention, the establishment of local civil society peace committees, which were ‘formed around the country as a mechanism for dialogues, conflict reconciliation and social rehabilitation’ during and after the war (Niyonkuru, 2012: 6). These civil society initiatives are ignored by much of the literature on Burundi and where they are examined, the discussion is focused more on documentation and description than analysis, and as a result is often uncritical and can romanticise the work of local civil society groups. Consequently, the literature fails to engage in a broader analysis of the extent to which civil society groups, individual activists, and human rights defenders are able to create different spaces for peace in the midst of violence and repression and their ability to transform violence, militarism, and exclusion. This research will look at two main spaces for peace – the spaces for participation and dissent created at the national level, and spaces for dialogue and reconciliation created within communities at the grassroots.

## Conclusion

This chapter discusses three key themes which will be picked up throughout the remaining chapters. The first, is the production and reproduction of dominant social norms such as violence, exclusion, and militarism in the post-independence period, and the extent to which peacemaking and peacebuilding have either transformed or reinforced these norms. The post-independence period was dominated by cycles of violence driven by exclusion and marginalisation, and coercion and militarism. Although peacemaking and peacebuilding following the civil war limited the saliency of ethnicity, they privileged stability and control over transformation. As a result, they did little to challenge political and everyday violence, which persisted throughout the transition period and the post-war decade. The violent repression of civil society following the protests is one example of how these norms continue to be reproduced through the language and practice of state authorities and political elites.

The second theme the chapter explores is the evolution of civil society, from the pre-colonial and colonial period, to independence and the single-party state, to political liberalisation in the early 1990s and the civil war that followed, and finally the transitional period and the post-war decade. It fleshes out what civil society actually looked like at particular times throughout this history, that is, the empirical reality as opposed to the theoretical construct, and explores its relationship with the state. It finds that civil society has, over the course of this history, both reproduced and contested the prevailing social and political hegemony in Burundi. Certain of its elements could at various times be considered part of this order, while others emerged as alternative sites of authority and legitimacy. In the post-war decade, civil society sought to challenge the excessive power and violence exercised by political elites and the reproduction of dominant social norms but with limited success.

The final point considered is the importance of historical perspective. There is reflection on the temporal and relational dimensions of political violence in Burundi, that is, the ways in which experiences and memories of past violence and injustice have affected possibilities for peace in the

post-independence period. It also situates current events in a broader historical perspective. In doing so, it finds that the repression of civil society is nothing new. There was arguably much less space for civil society both under single-party rule, and during the civil war. This history shows that the Burundian state has repeatedly crushed opposition and dissent, using violence and repression, throughout the post-independence period. Although the current situation facing Burundi is very different, there is much to be gained from exploring historical continuities. This research is also focused on how perceptions of political space present are mediated through the lens of the past – a theme that will be developed further in subsequent chapters.

## Chapter 3

### *Deconstructing discourse using critical discourse analysis: theoretical and methodological approaches*

This research uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) to deconstruct discourses on civil society, political space and peacebuilding in Burundi. CDA is a form of discourse analysis that combines linguistic and social theory approaches, through locating the linguistic analysis of texts within a broader study of social and power relations. Although its intellectual origins lie within linguistics, it is strongly influenced by the thinking of Michel Foucault (1972, 1977, 1980, & 2003) on the relations between discourse, knowledge and power, as well as geographical thinking on discourse advanced by writers such as David Harvey (1996), who emphasises the dialectical nature of discourse. CDA is concerned with the relations between discourse and power, that is how discourses legitimise and sustain dominant power relations, and how subjects may discursively challenge and transform the prevailing hegemony (Fairclough, 2010).

This chapter is split into two parts. It begins with a theoretical discussion on discourse and discourse analysis, then explores how this has informed the fieldwork upon which this research is based. The first part reviews the existing literature on discourse within social theory, focusing on the writings of Michel Foucault and geographical approaches to discourse, and then looks at CDA in greater depth. It emphasises the relations between these bodies of literature, and the main challenges and debates associated with discourse analysis, including finding a balance between structure and agency, and between language and practice. The second part of this chapter sets out the methodology for this research, outlines the approach to CDA adopted within this study, and the specific data collection methods used. It also discusses the merits and the challenges of working with grey literature, and will reflect on how to search for literature in a transparent and systematic

way, and how to get to grips with the multiple and diverse functions of different types of documents and the many ways in which they contribute to the production and reproduction of discourses.

## Discourse and discourse analysis: theoretical perspectives

It is difficult to pin down a single definition of discourse because several exist, emanating from different theoretical positions and disciplinary traditions. Within linguistics, ‘discourse analysis’ refers to the study of texts, and the interactions they generate between the speaker or writer and the audience, as well as the processes of producing and interpreting texts and the social context within which these takes place (Fairclough, 1992). Texts are usually extended pieces of written or spoken language, such as newspaper articles or interview transcripts. Social theory, on the other hand, typically regards discourses as systems of representation that structure and produce the social world. According to Fairclough, within social theory, ‘discourses do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or “constitute” them; different discourses constitute key entities... in different ways, and position people in different ways as social subjects’ (1992: 3). This section will explore these social theory approaches in more depth. It begins with a look at the work of Michel Foucault, then geographical approaches to discourse, before examining CDA in greater depth.

### **Foucault and discourse**

Foucault conceptualises discourses as bodies of knowledge that govern what can and cannot be talked about, delimit what can and cannot be known, and regulate practice and conduct (1972, 1977). They comprise of groups of statements; pieces of knowledge that are functional rather than descriptive (McHoul and Grace, 1995). According to Dreyfus and Rabinow, statements are a type of linguistic function that is neither a proposition nor an utterance, because ‘the same sentence with the same meaning can be different statements, that is, have different truth conditions, depending on the set of statements within which it appears’, and ‘several different utterances can be repetitions of one identical statement’ (1982: 45). Statements come in many forms. Although they often appear as phrases or sentences, images and maps can also be discursive statements.

The statement is not even a grammatical entity restricted to sentences. Maps can be statements if they are used as representations of a geographical area, and even a picture of the layout of a typewriter keyboard can be a statement if it appears in a manual as a representation of the way the letters of a keyboard are standardly arranged (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 45)

Foucault (1972) is concerned with the rules and practices that govern the production of statements, making it possible for particular statements, but not others, to emerge at specific times and in particular places. These systems, which he refers to as 'discursive formations', control what can and cannot be talked about, demarcate what can and cannot be known, and regulate practice and conduct.

Just as discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write or conduct oneself, so also, by definition it 'rules out', limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic, or constructing knowledge about it (Hall, 2001: 72).

Perhaps Foucault's most significant contribution is his assertion that discourses are productive. In the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault famously argued that 'nothing has any meaning outside of discourse' (1972, 32). Although something may exist outside discourse, Foucault believes that it takes on meaning only when it becomes an object of knowledge within a discourse, which leads him to argue that discourses 'produce the objects about which they speak' (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 61). The primary object of many discourses is human beings, and in his later works (1977 & 1980), Foucault becomes increasingly concerned with how bodies of knowledge interact with disciplinary practices to construct human beings as social subjects. In particular, he explores how discursive and disciplinary practices function within specific institutions at certain historical moments, such as the nineteenth-century prison, in order to regulate the conduct of human beings, divide them into classificatory categories, and even help them to establish a sense of themselves as subjects.

Power is fundamental to Foucault's understanding of discourse, just as discourse is inseparable from his notion of power, which he views as something that is not merely repressive but productive

and disciplinary. Foucault argues that power ‘doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no,’ but it ‘traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be thought of as a productive network that runs through the whole social body’ (Foucault, 1980: 119). Furthermore, power does not operate in a straightforward and linear manner or as Foucault puts it, ‘in the form of a chain’ (1980: 98). Rather, it circulates and ‘is deployed and exercised through a net-like organization’ (Foucault, 1980: 98). It is also embedded within everyday practices at all levels of society; it is rooted ‘in forms of behaviour, bodies and local relations of power which should not at all be seen as a simple projection of the central power’ (Foucault, 1980: 201). Consequently, Foucault encourages us to focus on the ‘microphysics of power’, that is ‘the many, localized circuits, tactics, mechanisms and effects through which power circulates’ (Hall, 2001: 77).

Foucault had an enduring interest in the relationship between discourse, power, and knowledge. He famously argued that ‘there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations’ (Foucault, 1977: 27). It is the application of knowledge that is of most interest to Foucault; he is less concerned about whether the content of knowledge is true or not, than with how it is applied in everyday life. In the real world, knowledge begins to have real effects, and it is in this sense that knowledge becomes true (Hall, 2001). Foucault is concerned with how power functions through the production and application of knowledge. Discourse is integral to Foucault’s understanding of power, which operates ‘from below’ through the application of practices and techniques that are essentially discursive in nature (Foucault, quoted in Fairclough, 1992: 50). Discourse itself becomes highly political as power struggles occur in and over the production of discourse and discursive practices. For Foucault, ‘discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which there is struggle. Discourse is the power which is to be seized’ (quoted in Fairclough, 1992: 51).

While highly celebrated, Foucault’s approach to discourse has also been widely criticised. The biggest concern is that Foucault over emphasises the productive nature of discourse and

underestimates the agency of subjects (Fairclough 1992; Thrift 2007b). For Fairclough, Foucault's emphasis on the productive nature of discourse is both his greatest contribution to discourse analysis and one of the biggest weaknesses in his theory. He argues that Foucault is too structuralist in this regard, and leaves little room for agency. While the subjects of knowledge are shaped by discourses, they do not wholly and passively succumb to them; 'constituted social subjects are not merely passively positioned but are capable of acting as agents, and amongst other things of negotiating their relationship with the multifarious types of discourse that they are drawn into' (Fairclough, 1992: 60-61). This critique is also the one most often echoed in appraisals emanating from disciplines such as anthropology and human geography. For example, Thrift has criticised Foucault for his 'post-structuralist anti-humanism' (2007b: 53), where processes and techniques are conceived without reference to real people. The result is:

[H]is texts often seem to exist in an existential gloom. It is a bit like being in the witch wood that is the central actor of so many fairy tales, but this is a witch wood in which the spell only brings its denizens partially (and sometimes grotesquely) to life. (Thrift, 2007b: 56).

This neglect of agency is partly corrected within his later writing, particularly the publication of his lectures at the College de France. Philo argues that in these lectures, Foucault 'grant[s] the human subject more wiggle room than before, offering the fleeting possibility... of the individual being something other than a mere drone of a pre-existing order' (Philo, 2011: 168). In *Society Must Be Defended* (2003), Foucault introduces the concepts of counter and subjugated knowledges, and explores their potential to resist, challenge, and transform hegemonic discourses and transform power relations. With 'counter knowledges', Foucault is referring to the emergence of 'discontinuous, particular and local critiques' of grand theories that dominated early twentieth-century thought, such as Liberalism and Marxism (2003: 6). This local critique, has been made possible by 'the insurrection of subjugated knowledges' (Foucault, 2003: 7). Foucault refers to two types of subjugated knowledge: historical knowledges, critical of the dominant system of the time, which have been buried, masked, or hidden by that system; and everyday knowledges disqualified

because they are deemed as ‘nonconceptual... insufficiently elaborated... naïve... hierarchically inferior... below the required level of erudition or scientificity’ (2003: 7). It is ‘a particular knowledge, a knowledge that is local, regional or differential, incapable of unanimity and which derives its power solely from the fact that it is different from all the knowledges that surround it’. (Foucault, 2003: 7–8). For Foucault, it is the combination of these two types of subjugated knowledge – the historical and the everyday, or ‘the buried and the disqualified’ (2003: 8) as Foucault calls them – that lend counter knowledges their weight.

Philo argues that it is also Foucault’s most sensitive work with regard to geographical concerns such as space and place, exploring how counter knowledges are ‘anchored in quite particular places’, and arise ‘in specific sorts of spaces’ (2007: 359). Through referring to them as ‘local’ or ‘particular’, Foucault also distinguishes them from global or common knowledges, as well as elite ones (Philo, 2007). In doing so, Foucault also seeks ‘to show how such knowledges, lacking coherence, organization, and structure, depart from – and perhaps embody a critical window or response to – more “total” or even “totalizing” knowledges, theories, worldviews, and the like’ (2007: 359). Consequently, these counter knowledges represent sites of struggle and therefore arguably within themselves contain the potential to challenge dominant or hegemonic discourses, such as that of the liberal peace.

Despite the more nuanced view advanced within his later works and the possibilities offered through his thinking on counter knowledges, Foucault fails to fully embrace concepts such as agency and resistance and their potential to challenge dominant discourses. Foucault argues that counter knowledges emerge in places and moments where the theoretical unity of dominant discourses, such as that of the liberal peace, has been ‘suspended or at least cut up, ripped up, torn to shreds, turned inside out’ (2003: 6). Critical peacebuilding scholars argue that liberal peacebuilding constitutes a governmental discourse that seeks to discipline post-conflict populations, and are particularly interested in exploring sites of resistance where the liberal peace is contested and reworked. It is within these places that local and everyday understandings of peace that are capable of challenging and transforming dominant discourses emerge. The idea of counter

knowledges provides a theoretical device for exploring what local and everyday understandings of peace might look like, and examining their potential for resisting and transforming the dominant liberal peace discourse.

### **Geography and discourse**

Geographers have engaged with the concept of discourse in multiple ways. It is commonly used within critical geopolitics to explore how language contributes to the construction of hegemonic power relations and the associated spatial imaginations that sustain them (Dodds and Sidaway, 1994; Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992). Ó Tuathail (2002) examines how political elites draw upon geopolitical discourse to structure and represent world affairs, and Sharp (1993) discusses how geopolitical discourse relates to strategies of power, arguing that ‘strategies of power always require the use of space and, thus, the use of discourses to create particular spatial images, primarily of territory and boundaries in statecraft, is inseparable from the formation and use of power’ (1993: 492). This leads Dodds and Sidaway (1994) to call on critical geopolitics to deconstruct dominant discourses in order to expose the political strategies and power schemes at work beneath them.

Müller (2008) has criticised the conceptualisation of discourse within critical geopolitics for its conceptual ‘vagueness’ and ‘narrowness’, arguing that the term is ‘relatively under theorized and its theoretical breadth and depth remain largely unexplored’ (Müller, 2008: 323). He contends that critical geopolitics concentrates on elite representations rather than everyday experiences, and as a result it fails to capture and understand how discourses contribute to the construction of geopolitical identities. This is because critical geopolitics focuses on deconstructing texts and images, rather than exploring the role of everyday practices in the reproduction of discourses within particular places. Consequently, Müller seeks to advance a broader and more inclusive definition, which views discourse ‘not only as language, but as language *and* practice’ (2008: 322 – emphasis in original). The integration of practice, he argues, ‘yields the potential to engage with more varied forms of social production beyond texts, while preserving the critical focus on hegemony as a central element of critical geopolitical enquiry’ (Müller, 2008: 334-335).

Müller contends that the preoccupation with texts has had two further and related impacts on critical geopolitics; it has resulted in a focus on narratives rather than discourses, and has encouraged writers to overemphasise the autonomy of subjects. Narratives are not the same as discourses, although the two are often used interchangeably. Müller finds that within critical geopolitics, narratives are ‘associated with the agency of subjects as individuals. Individuals produce narratives. These narratives then become manipulated, usually by elites, as a strategic resource for pursuing certain interests’ (2008: 328). Drawing on the writings of Foucault (1972, 1980, & 1982), Müller argues ‘in favour of a greater awareness of the structural constraints on agency and, concomitantly, for the difference between narrative and discourse’ (2008: 324).

He contends that the view of discourses presented within critical geopolitics overstates the autonomy of the individual; it assumes that ‘individuals shape discourses, draw on them intentionally, and deploy them strategically to pursue certain ends’ (2008: 325). Müller finds that this view of agency sits uneasily with the poststructuralist position adopted by many within critical geopolitics, because poststructuralism is ‘quite clear about denying the possibility of an autonomous subject. It is not the individual that structures and manipulates discourse but vice versa – discourses speak through the individual’ (Müller, 2008: 326). He adopts a Foucauldian perspective, which views individuals as products rather than producers of discourse:

Discourses are carriers of valid knowledge in the sense that nothing can acquire the status of knowledge without being subjected to a system of specific rules and constraints... Individuals can only acquire meaning if they identify themselves with the positions that discourses construct and thereby become subjects... Thus, Foucault sees subjects as products not producers of discourses... What constitutes the subject is an ensemble of structures that the subject can think and describe, but within which the subject is not sovereign, which it cannot alter. The subject is, therefore, an effect of structures and does not exist prior to them (Müller, 2008: 327).

However, his partial and uncritical reading of Foucault means that his critique of the use of discourse within critical geopolitics replicates the structural determinism challenged by geographers such as Thrift (2007b) and Harvey (1996, 2007). Müller calls for critical geopolitics

to engage with everyday practice but not everyday agency, and neglects the possibilities for resistance and struggle on the geopolitical margins.

Harvey (1996) advances a more nuanced position, which contends that subjects are both products and producers of discourse, and emphasises the dialectical relations between discourse and power. For Harvey, discourses are but one moment of the social process, and the relations between these moments are inherently dialectical in the sense that 'each moment is constituted as an internal relation of others within the flow of social and material life. Discourses internalize in some sense everything that occurs at other moments' (Harvey, 1996: 80). This leads him to argue that discourses are manifestations of power, they are 'a mode of social relating, a material practice, a fundamental moment of experience' (Harvey, 1996: 83). Consequently, discourses are embedded within the social process; 'discourses can never be pure, isolated or insulated from other moments in social life, however abstract and seemingly transcendent they become' (Harvey, 1996: 83). He goes on to argue that they cannot be separated from the subjects that both produce and are produced by discourses, adopting a less deterministic and more balanced approach to the structure versus agency debate than that adopted by Müller.

Nor can [discourses] be insulated and separated from those doing the discoursing. Human beings (both individuals and collectively) are the bearers of discourses. On the other hand, discourses, though humanly produced, have the awkward habit of assuming a certain power over how individuals think and behave. In this as in many other facets of the social process, human beings can imprison themselves in systems and things of their own construction. (Harvey, 1996: 83).

This study also emphasises the dialectical nature of discourse, and adopts a more nuanced position which critically examines the relations between civil society activists and the discourses within which they are embedded. I argue that these individuals are the bearers of liberal peacebuilding discourse, but they are also its subjects and that this discourse and its functions and effects have, to quote Harvey, 'the awkward habit of assuming a certain power over how individuals think and behave' (1996: 83). Drawing on the work of Müller, discourse is viewed as both language and practice. How discourses are reproduced through everyday practice is explored, as is the extent to

which they are contested at different scales through the agency and resistance of civil society activists at the geopolitical margins.

### **Critical discourse analysis (CDA)**

CDA is a method that combines linguistic and political approaches to discourse analysis, which views language as a form of social practice (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). CDA is concerned with exploring how discourses shape the social world through situating the linguistic analysis of real texts within a broader analysis of social relations, and focuses on the dialectical relations between discourse and power, particularly how discourses legitimise and sustain dominant power relations and social structures (Fairclough, 2010). It is closely associated with the writings of Norman Fairclough (2010 & 2014), Teun A. van Dijk (1997 & 2011), and Ruth Wodak (2009 & 2013).

Fairclough (2010) argues that CDA has three essential properties that distinguish it from other approaches to discourse analysis; it is relational, dialectical, and transdisciplinary. It is relational, because it is primarily focused on the analysis of social relations, in particular the complex and multi-layered connections between discourse and other ‘objects, elements or moments’ in the social process, such as power or institutions (Fairclough, 2010: 4). These relations are dialectical in the sense that these objects (for example, discourse and power) are different but not discrete; they, ‘are different from one another but... not fully separate in the sense that one excludes the other’ (Fairclough, 2010: 4). The focus of CDA is therefore, the ‘dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements or moments, as well as analysis of the “internal relations” of discourse’ (Fairclough, 2010: 4). Its concern with the relations between discourse and other elements of the social process means that CDA is also inherently transdisciplinary. It covers a broad range of approaches, which have different theoretical foundations, and their own research methods. Consequently, CDA is not a ‘discrete academic discipline’ according to Fairclough et al., but ‘a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement’ that is united through ‘a shared interest in the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political-economic or cultural change in society’ (2011: 357).

### *Influences and origins*

Although its intellectual origins are found within linguistics, CDA also draws upon social theory, particularly the writings of Michel Foucault. Three aspects of his work have been particularly influential. The first is Foucault's emphasis on 'the discursive nature of power' and the 'political nature of discourse', that is, his assertion that the practices and techniques of power 'are to a significant degree discursive', and that power struggles occur 'both in and over discourse' (Fairclough, 1992: 55-56). CDA also focuses on the connections between discourse and power, which it views as dialectical in the sense that discourse is partly a manifestation of power, just as power is also partly discursive, but that neither one can be reduced to the other. Drawing on the work of Harvey (1996), Fairclough argues that 'power is partly discourse, and discourse is partly power – they are different but not discrete, they “flow into” each other; discourse can be “internalised” in power and vice-versa; the complex realities of power relations are “condensed” and simplified in discourse' (2010: 4). CDA is particularly concerned with how discourses legitimise and sustain hegemonic power relations and social structures, and how subjects discursively challenge and transform these power relations (Wodak and Meyer, 2009; Fairclough, 2010).

The second of the three aspects, is Foucault's contention that discourses do not just reflect or represent the social world, they also produce it. However, proponents of CDA argue that Foucault overstates the constitutive nature of discourse and underestimates the agency of subjects. While the subjects of knowledge are shaped by discourses, they do not wholly and passively succumb to them; they are according to Fairclough, 'capable of acting as agents, and amongst other things, of negotiating their relationship with the multifarious types of discourse that they are drawn into' (Fairclough, 1992: 61). CDA adopts a more nuanced and dialectical view of discourse, which recognises that it is both shaped by and shapes social relations. It is socially constitutive in the sense that it contributes to the construction of social subjects, but these subjects are also able to challenge and contest dominant discourses and the social relations within which they are embedded. Fairclough argues that such an approach is important 'if we are to avoid the pitfalls of

overemphasising on the one hand the social determination of discourse, and on the other hand the construction of the social in discourse' (Fairclough, 1992: 65). Rather, the impact of discourse 'depends upon how it interacts with the pre-constituted reality' (Fairclough, 1992: 60). Although CDA shares Foucault's contention that discourses are productive, the form of social constructivism it advances is much more nuanced and restrained than that advocated by Foucault, and leaves more room for individual agency.

The third aspect of Foucault's writing that has had a significant influence on CDA is his emphasis on the interdependency of discursive practices, where 'texts always draw upon and transform other contemporary and historically prior texts... and any given type of discursive practice is generated out of combinations of others, and is defined by its relationship to others' (Fairclough, 1992: 40). This can happen at an intertextual level, that is, between texts within the same discursive formation, or an interdiscursive level, between different discursive formations or different types of discourse. Although Foucault engages in an extensive discussion on the production of discursive statements, Fairclough (1992) has criticised him for failing to conduct a linguistic analysis of real texts. CDA, on the other hand, situates the analysis of texts within a broader, interdiscursive analysis that links language and texts to the production and reproduction of social structures, practices, and processes (Fairclough, 2010). This is because CDA views language as a form of social practice. Describing discourse in this way 'implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them' (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258). Most proponents of CDA therefore argue that you need to study not only the text, but the context within which the text has been produced and its relationship to other texts.

### ***Criticisms and foundations***

Critics have highlighted a number of problems with CDA, including issues with its epistemological framework. Their biggest concern is its political approach to research and subsequent lack of objectivity (Breeze, 2011; Hammersley, 1997). Breeze states:

If a central tenet of critical research is that research should be explicitly designed to fulfil political functions (exposure of inequality, dominance, injustice), rather than what would be the more conventional purpose of research (to observe and interpret phenomena), then there has to be a sound justification for this. If, in the end, the justification is only a matter of individual choice, then there is little incentive for the reader to take this type of research seriously. (2011: 500)

CDA is unashamed of its normative foundations. Fairclough argues that it is called *critical* discourse analysis because it 'is grounded in values, in particular views of the "good society" and human wellbeing and flourishing, on the basis of which it evaluates existing societies and possible ways of changing them' (Fairclough, 2010: 7). A core focus of CDA is the role of discourse in the reproduction of social wrongs and injustices. This means that the approach 'is not just descriptive, it is normative. It addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of mitigating them' (Fairclough, 2010: 11). In good examples of CDA, researchers are clear and forthright about their world view, and ground their normative position in empirical data. Breeze contends that:

[T]he fact that CDA's adherents regularly bow in the direction of transparency and truthfulness by stating their political affiliations does not somehow mean that they are absolved from the need for objectivity in their research... such gambits do not free the author to misrepresent the data, or to interpret the data in any way he or she chooses for some particular political purpose. (2011: 501).

The problem with Breeze's critique is that she mistakes research objectivity for research quality. I would argue that the manipulation of data for political purposes is not normative, it simply produces poor-quality research. Proponents of CDA believe that it is possible to produce high-quality research that is grounded within a particular world view and is value-driven. The critical realism that underpins CDA supports it to produce research that is both normative and empirically-based. Critical realism is a philosophical position that maintains that certain phenomena exist independently of our knowledge of them, but this knowledge is historically and socially produced and there is, in other words, 'a difference between our descriptions of reality and the reality that is described' (Hughes and Sharrock, 1990: 165). Proponents of CDA believe that social phenomena and their meanings are socially constructed, an ontological position that is both incompatible with

and antithetical to objectivism (Bryman, 2016). Critical realists believe that structures such as power relations are socially constructed, but that this social constructivism is ‘of a moderate or contingent form’ (Fairclough, 2010: 5). That is because these structures both ‘pre-exist individual actions’, and they are, ‘at the same time, the products of those actions’ (Hughes and Sharrock, 1990: 165). Critical realism believes that although these social structures are not directly observable, it is possible to identify them ‘through the practical and theoretical work of the social sciences’ (Bhaskar quoted in Bryman, 2016: 25); a view implying that it is possible to gather empirical data on these phenomena which can be used to guide and justify a normative position.

## Deconstructing discourses on civil society, political space and peacebuilding in Burundi: methodological approach

This research uses CDA to deconstruct discourses on civil society, political space, and peacebuilding at different scales in Burundi. CDA was chosen for three principal reasons. First, it views discourse as both language and practice, and locates the linguistic analysis of texts within a broader analysis of social relations. In recent years, a multitude of policy reports have been published on the issue of political space for civil society in places such as Burundi. This research provides an analysis of these texts, the discursive practices that produce them, and the broader social context in which they are situated, both at a global scale and within Burundi. It explores how these texts contribute to the reproduction of broader liberal discourses, which position civil society in opposition to the state. Secondly, CDA adopts a more nuanced and dialectical approach to discourse analysis, which is concerned with how discourses shape rather than produce the social world. This means that it finds a better balance between structure and agency, in the recognition that subjects are both a product of discourses and able to negotiate their relationship with them. Located at the interface of the global and the everyday, civil society activists in Burundi are intermediaries who are both the subjects and the agents of liberal discourses. This research examines the extent to which these activists are able to negotiate liberal discourses, and mediate between them and more vernacular understandings that are rooted in everyday knowledge. Thirdly, CDA is also concerned with exploring how discourses legitimise and sustain hegemonic power relations and social

structures, and how subjects may discursively challenge and transform these power relations. Liberal discourses have at best done little to challenge and at have at worst contributed to the reproduction of dominant power relations and hegemonic norms such violence and militarism in Burundi (Daley, 2008). This research explores the extent to which civil society activists are able to challenge these norms and create spaces for peace within Burundi that are emancipatory and transformative.

The research adopts a multi-scalar approach to discourse analysis which examines how discourses on civil society, political space, and peacebuilding are reproduced and contested at global, national, and local levels. Critical discourse scholars have largely neglected the concept of scale in their analysis. This study explores the connections between texts and broader social relations at different scales, and the relations between global discourses and power relations at a more local level in places like Burundi. In particular it is concerned with how language and practice contribute to the reproduction of dominant discourses at and across different tiers, and how the subjects of these discourses negotiate them. Although CDA is the overall approach used, the research is also influenced by the work of Foucault on the relations between discourse, knowledge, and power (especially his work on counter and subjugated knowledges), as well as his archaeological method, which is concerned with the identification of statements, the rules and practices that govern their production, and their functions and effects.

### **Data collection methods**

The research uses a range of qualitative data collection methods to identify and deconstruct discourses on civil society, political space, and peacebuilding. These methods include: literature and document review, textual analysis of policy reports, organisational documents and social media, and individual and group interviews with key informants. A range of secondary sources was consulted, including academic and historical sources, news articles, and policy documents. Primary sources include interviews with civil society activists, participant observation of activities organised

by civil society groups, and the linguistic analysis of organisational documents, policy documents, and Twitter (see Table 4).

**TABLE 4: DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND SOURCES FOR DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

| <b>Method</b>                                 | <b>Sources</b>                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><i>Literature and document review</i></b>  | Academic sources, news articles, policy documents                                                                                                                                 |
| <b><i>Textual analysis</i></b>                | Policy briefings, research reports, written and oral statements, advocacy letters, UN resolutions and EU agreements, organisational and institutional documents, and social media |
| <b><i>Individual and group interviews</i></b> | Transcripts of interviews with Burundian civil society activists, and individuals working for multilateral institutions and INGOs based in Burundi.                               |

#### ***Literature and document review***

This research is grounded in a review of existing literature on civil society, political space, and peacebuilding in Burundi as well as theoretical literature on these topics (see Chapters 1 & 2). The research is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing on literature, subjects, and methodologies associated with disciplines including political geography, international politics, development studies, linguistics, and social anthropology. This research also consults newspaper articles and policy documents on Burundi, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reports (see for example Amnesty International, 2015), in order to gather secondary data about key events that have occurred since I left the field, including the anti-third term protests that began in April 2015, the attempted coup in May 2015, and the subsequent crackdown on opposition supporters and civil society groups.

#### ***Textual analysis of policy literature, organisational documents, and social media***

Chapter 7 is based on a review and textual analysis of existing policy documents on political space for civil society. The review focused on finding and analysing the content of selected documents using textual analysis in order to deconstruct policy discourses on shrinking space and the enabling

environment for civil society. This means that it is focused on reviewing grey literature on civil society space, rather than the limited number of academic studies that are available (see for example van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014 & Christensen and Weinstein, 2013). The review used an explicit search strategy, which began by identifying organisations working on the issues of civil society space and conducting a search of their websites for relevant documents. I then identified and searched relevant online databases using key search terms and strings, and used a snowballing technique to expand the number of organisations and resources included. This involved looking at co-authors and signatories as well as checking bibliographies and reference lists of relevant resources. Key search terms and strings were also entered into online search engines to see if this produced additional documents.

Documents were then selected for review based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria.<sup>10</sup> 112 documents were included in the review in total, of which 73 discuss the issue of political space for civil society at a global or regional level, and 39 discuss the interconnected issues of political space and political violence in Burundi. Documents took a range of formats, including policy briefings, research reports, written and oral statements, advocacy letters and UN resolutions, and EU agreements. Documents included were from at least 27 organisations.<sup>11</sup> These documents were then

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<sup>10</sup> All documents included in the review explicitly focused on civil society *and* one or more of the following issues: political and operating space, enabling environment and aid effectiveness, space for human rights defenders and their organisations, regulatory and legal frameworks for civil society, restrictions on foreign funding for civil society, restrictions on freedom of speech and expression, restrictions on the right to peaceful protest. All documents included in the review were published by civil society groups, policy institutes and foundations, or multilateral organisations; were publicly available online and have been published between 2005 and 2015; and were focused on civil society space either at global level, on a regional scale within Africa, or at national level within Burundi.

<sup>11</sup> ACT Alliance; Africa CSO Platform on Principled Partnership (ACPPP); Amnesty International; Article 19; Carnegie Endowment; CIDSE; Civicus; The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA); the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM); the EU; EurAc; Frontline Defenders; International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH); Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; International Center for Non Profit Law (ICNL); the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC); International Service for Human Rights (ISHR); Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders; World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT); Task Team of Civil Society, Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment; Transparency International;

subjected to an in-depth textual analysis focused on the identification and analysis of discursive statements. Within discourses on civil society space, these statements include phrases such as ‘shrinking space’, ‘enabling environment’, ‘the clampdown is real’, ‘the pushback is global’; as well as indexes and maps which depict where space is closing. Within each discourse there are rules and practices that govern the production of statements, making it possible for particular statements but not others to emerge at specific times and in particular places (Foucault, 1972). Consequently, the researcher looked also for clues relating to the practices governing the production and reproduction of the statements and the facilitation of their movement within and between organisations at different levels.

A textual analysis of organisational and institutional documents from international nongovernmental organisations, multilateral institutions, and Burundian civil society organisations participating in the study was also conducted as part of this research. These documents included organisational websites, strategic planning documents and frameworks, project plans and proposals, research reports, and evaluation reports. The documents were also subjected to an in-depth textual analysis similar to the one outlined above. I also looked for clues within these documents relating to the processes through which texts and actions are produced and interpreted and through which meaning is created, as well as empirical evidence based upon which conclusions can be drawn about the social context within which these discourses are situated.

I also conducted a textual analysis of social media content, gathered between April 2015 and April 2016. Social media became increasingly important during the anti-third term protests for those participating in the protests, as well as the government which sought to quell them and internationals (including many researchers) who wanted to follow them. The research focused on

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Trocaire; Trust Africa; UN Human Rights Council; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); World Movement for Democracy.

the use of Twitter by Burundian civil society activists, independent journalists, and government officials during the protests. To analyse all the social media activity relating to the protests would have been impossible. Consequently, I chose not to look at other social media sites, such as Facebook. I also chose to focus on the activity of key Twitter accounts, such as those of activists and government spokespeople, and the principal hashtags used by them to talk about the Burundi context. I looked at the accounts of 50 Twitter users in total, including 42 individual accounts and 8 organisational accounts, which mostly use French and English. The organisations that I followed included the official Twitter account of the Burundian government, and those of all the main political parties. With regards to individuals, I followed the accounts of 12 independent journalists, 8 politicians, 11 government spokespeople, 7 civil society activists, and 3 Burundian academics. I was able to identify who the key individuals were in each of these areas from my time in Burundi. I also followed 33 hashtags relevant to the Burundi crisis, such as #sindumuja, #burundicrisis, and #stopnkurunziza.

In analysing these data, I sought to identify statements as well as particular trends and themes. I also looked for clues relating to the functions of social media for government and civil society actors, e.g. maintaining a channel of communication with the outside world at a time of crisis, sharing evidence of violence and atrocities to back up contested claims and to raise awareness of what is happening with the country, spreading rumours and misinformation, and stigmatising and delegitimising opponents. However, it is important to note that social media constitute an elite space, as the vast majority of the population do not have access to the internet.

### ***Individual and group interviews with civil society actors***

The vast majority of this research is based on individual and group interviews with civil society activists in Burundi and the international actors who support them. Interviews were conducted in Burundi between July and October 2014, and February and April 2015. I conducted 83 interviews with 71 people (18 women and 53 men, 63 Burundians and 8 internationals). I conducted repeat interviews with 10 individuals. This was because the same individual either worked for two separate civil society organisations, or we struggled to get through everything that they wanted to talk about

in the first interview so we decided to schedule a second one. Sometimes these repeat interviews were several months apart. Representatives of 23 Burundian civil society groups were interviewed in total, plus representatives of international NGOs and multilateral organisations, and representatives of the Catholic Church in Burundi including members of the Jesuit Order and Dominican Friars (see Table 5). I conducted interviews with multiple individuals from 10 of these Burundian civil society groups, in order to get a more indepth understanding of their work.

These totals do not include many informal conversations held with a number of Burundians and internationals who were happy to meet with me to discuss the overall context for civil society in Burundi, but were not willing to take part in an interview (these included a number of journalists, representatives of the UN and other multilateral organisations, and individuals working for international NGOs). It also excludes the ongoing informal conversations that took place with many informants following the end of fieldwork in order to keep up to date with what has been happening in Burundi since the anti-third term protests began in April 2015. Group interviews were conducted on five occasions, at the request of interviewees. In each case, interviewees always worked or volunteered for the same organisation, and explained that it would either be easier or more convenient for them to be interviewed together.

**TABLE 5: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS INTERVIEWED**

| <b>Organisation</b>                                             | <b>Acronym</b> | <b>Scale</b>  | <b>Domain</b>                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Action by Christians for Abolition of Torture in Burundi</i> | ACAT           | National      | Human rights                  |
| <i>Action for Peace and Development</i>                         | APD            | National      | Peacebuilding<br>Youth        |
| <i>American Friends Service Committee</i>                       | AFSC           | International | Peacebuilding                 |
| <i>Association Dushirehamwe</i>                                 |                | National      | Peacebuilding<br>Women        |
| <i>Association pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme</i>        | APDH           | National      | Peacebuilding<br>Human rights |
| <i>Association de Protection des Femmes Burundaise</i>          | APFB           | National      | Women<br>Violence             |

|                                                                     |             |               |                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Association des Guides du Burundi</i>                            | AGB         | National      | Women<br>Peacebuilding        |
| <i>Association des Scouts du Burundi</i>                            | ASB         | National      | Peacebuilding<br>Youth        |
| <i>Bashingantahe</i>                                                |             | National      | Peacebuilding                 |
| <i>Collectif des Associations et ONGs Féminines du Burundi</i>      | CAFOB       | National      | Women<br>Peacebuilding        |
| <i>Care Burundi</i>                                                 |             | International | Peacebuilding<br>Women        |
| <i>Commission Diocésaine Justice et Paix Bujumbura</i>              | CDJP        | National      | Peacebuilding                 |
| <i>Commission Episcopale Justice et Paix Burundi</i>                | CEJP        | National      | Peacebuilding                 |
| <i>Conflict Alert and Prevention Centre</i>                         | CENAP       | National      | Peacebuilding                 |
| <i>Centre Jeunes Kamenge</i>                                        |             | National      | Peacebuilding<br>Youth        |
| <i>Cordaid</i>                                                      |             | International | Peacebuilding                 |
| <i>Coalition de la Société Civile pour le Monitoring Electorale</i> | COSOME      | National      | Democracy-<br>promotion       |
| <i>Centre Ubuntu</i>                                                |             | National      | Peacebuilding                 |
| <i>Forum pour la Conscience et le Développement</i>                 | FOCODE      | International | Human rights<br>Peacebuilding |
| <i>Forum Pour la Renforcement de la Société Civile</i>              | FORSC       | National      | Human rights<br>Peacebuilding |
| <i>Impunity Watch</i>                                               |             | International | Human rights<br>Peacebuilding |
| <i>INAMA</i>                                                        |             | National      | Peacebuilding                 |
| <i>Ligue Burundaise des Droits de l'Homme</i>                       | Ligue ITEKA | National      | Human rights                  |
| <i>Ministère de Paix et Réconciliation sous la Croix</i>            | Mi-PAREC    | National      | Peacebuilding                 |
| <i>Nduwamahoro</i>                                                  |             | National      | Peacebuilding                 |
| <i>Organisation d'Action Gouvernementale</i>                        | OAG         | National      | Democracy-<br>promotion       |

|                                                                                                          |      |               |                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|---------------|------------------------------------------|
| <i>Oxfam Novib</i>                                                                                       |      | International | Development<br>Peacebuilding             |
| <i>Réseau des Organisations des Jeunes en Action pour la Paix, la Réconciliation et le Développement</i> | REJA | National      | Youth<br>Peacebuilding                   |
| <i>Réseau des Femmes et Paix</i>                                                                         | RFP  | National      | Peacebuilding<br>Women                   |
| <i>Search for Common Ground Burundi</i>                                                                  |      | International | Peacebuilding                            |
| <i>United Nations Office in Burundi</i>                                                                  | BNUB | International | Peacebuilding<br>Democracy-<br>promotion |
| <i>ZOA International</i>                                                                                 |      | International | Development<br>Peacebuilding             |

Potential interviewees were identified using a mapping exercise of organisations working in the fields of peacebuilding and political space for civil society. I first consulted existing databases on civil society organisations and then identified key individuals within the civil society network in Burundi and asked them to identify potential interviewees, using a snowballing technique. These key individuals also proved invaluable in gaining access to respondents within the civil society network, who I could not otherwise have met. During my first fieldwork trip (July–October 2014) I interviewed activists from a large number of different organisations as well as individuals from the United Nations, due to withdraw from Burundi in December 2014. During my second trip (February–April 2015) I chose to focus on conducting individual and group interviews with representatives from a smaller number of grassroots organisations, who are involved in creating and maintaining spaces for dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation (such as peace clubs and committees, local mediation and conflict resolution committees, and local governance committees). I also focused on interviewing high-profile civil society activists involved in organising campaigns and protests such as the *Halte au troisième mandat!* (Stop the Third Term!) campaign and the anti-third term protests. All interviews were semi-structured, and conducted either in French or English without translation, and were recorded using a digital recording device and later transcribed. Notes

were also taken during the interviews. Despite my efforts, I was not able to get an interview with a representative of the Burundian government. Consequently, this research reflects the perspectives of civil society activists and their international supporters.

## Data analysis

Based on data gathered using these methods, this research critically examines the texts and actions that contribute to the production and reproduction of various discourses on civil society, political space, and peacebuilding, the discursive practices surrounding the production and interpretation of these texts and actions, and the social context within which these discourses are situated (see Table 6). This study also analyses the ways that these texts, actions, practices, and the social context within which they are situated shape the creation and maintenance of spaces for peace in Burundi.

**TABLE 6: FOCUS AND METHODS FOR DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

| <b>Focus</b>                | <b>Definition</b>                                                                                                 | <b>Method</b>                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Texts</i>                | Passages of written or spoken text, including images and other symbolic forms such as maps.                       | Textual analysis of policy documents, organisational documents, social media, and interview transcripts.                                         |
| <i>Actions</i>              | Individual and collective practices, actions, and activities.                                                     | Interviews with civil society activists and individuals working for multilateral institutions and INGOs based in Burundi.                        |
| <i>Discursive practices</i> | The processes through which texts and actions are produced and interpreted, and through which meaning is created. | Interviews with civil society activists and individuals working for multilateral institutions and INGOs based in Burundi.                        |
| <i>Social context</i>       | The social context within which discursive practices are situated and produced.                                   | Interviews with civil society activists and individuals working for multilateral institutions and INGOs based in Burundi, and literature review. |

In doing so, it modifies an approach advanced by Fairclough (1992) known as the three-dimensional concept of discourse analysis. Within this approach, discourse is seen as comprising three elements:

it simultaneously constitutes a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice. Where ‘discursive practice’ refers to the nature of the processes that contribute to the production and interpretation of a text, ‘social practice’ relates to issues concerning the social circumstances within which the discourse has emerged, how these circumstances shape the nature of discursive practice, and the constitutive effects of the discourse. Fairclough argues that analysis should take place at all three of these levels, and explores the relations between them.

### **Problems and limitations**

I encountered a number of problems throughout this research, most of which will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter. Here I will mainly discuss the problems associated with using grey literature. The first relates to finding grey literature in a systematic and replicable manner. There are very few comprehensive and up-to-date databases of policy literature, meaning that reviews rely on the use of pre-existing knowledge and manual search strategies, such as the use of online search engines and bibliographical references, to find documents and resources. In addition, grey literature comprises many different types of publications, which come in a wide range of formats, from press releases to extended policy reports. These documents have diverse and multiple functions, which can be difficult to identify. Discourse analysis is particularly useful in this regard as it encourages the reader to critically engage with the language used and focus on the functions and effects of particular discursive statements situated within the document. More often than not, the functions of these documents relate to influencing, whether that is through targeted advocacy, awareness raising, or organisational learning. However, documents such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reports also contain a lot of detailed empirical information. Consequently, I would often find myself using these documents in multiple ways; I subjected them to textual analysis, but I also used the empirical data contained within these reports to support particular arguments.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored existing theory on discourse and discourse analysis, and discussed its application within this study. The first half of the chapter emphasised the relations between different thinkers, and some of the main challenges and debates within this literature, around structure and agency, and language and practice. One of the most significant thinkers on discourse is Foucault; his focus on the relationship between discourse and power, and the productive qualities of discourse, has proved particularly influential. However, one of the major criticisms of Foucault's work is that he overstates the constitutive nature of discourse and underestimates the agency of subjects. Despite the subtler view advanced within his later works, Foucault fails to fully embrace concepts such as agency and resistance, and their potential to challenge dominant discourses. Writers who engage in a partial and uncritical reading of Foucault, such as Müller, often reproduce his structural determinism. For example, in his critique of the use of discourse within critical geopolitics, Müller calls for it to engage with everyday practices but not everyday agency, and neglects the possibilities for resistance and struggle on the geopolitical margins.

This research prefers the more balanced position advanced by geographers such as Harvey, contending that subjects are both products and producers of discourse, and emphasising the dialectical relations between discourse and power. This research also emphasises the dialectical nature of discourse, and adopts a more nuanced position which critically examines the relations between civil society activists – who are the primary subjects of this research – and the discourses within which they are embedded. Subsequent chapters will explore how these individuals are both constitutive of and constituted by international discourses, such as liberal peacebuilding, and how they at various times reproduce, contest, and subvert these discourses. The dialectical perspective advanced by CDA is one of the reasons why it was chosen as an approach for this study. Another is its normative tendency. CDA is interested in ways discourses legitimise and sustain dominant power relations and social structures, and looks at how subjects may discursively challenge and transform power relations.

The final reason why I chose CDA as an approach, is its focus on language and practice, particularly the way it situates the linguistic analysis of real texts, and the discursive and social practices that produce them, within a broader analysis of social relations. This research seeks to explore how discourses are reproduced through texts and practices, but also the extent to which they are contested at different scales through the agency and resistance of civil society activists at the geopolitical margins. It gathers data using three methods, a literature and document review, interviews with civil society activists, and the textual analysis of policy documents, organisational materials and social media. I had hoped to undertake more participant observation, which would have enabled me to observe discursive and social practices to a greater degree. However, this was not possible owing to the difficulties that I encountered in the field, which will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4

### *Researching politically sensitive topics in violent and divided contexts: lessons and reflections<sup>12</sup>*

Political space for civil society is a contentious and highly sensitive issue in Burundi. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that this research, which concerns civil society, political space, and peacebuilding in post-war Burundi, encountered a number of challenges. The fieldwork upon which it is based was bookended by two significant events: a few months before I entered the field for the first time, the Burundian government arrested one of the country's leading human rights defenders, and mass protests erupted on the streets of Bujumbura just days after I left Burundi. These events had a significant impact on the focus of the research, as well as its approach and duration. The issue of political space for civil society was elevated from a background to principal concern. Uncertainty and volatility made participant observation almost impossible, as I was unable to travel to locations where projects were based, and planned community-based activities were cancelled because of security concerns. Intensification of advocacy placed further time pressures on activists, and interviews, which became the primary form of data collection, had to be scheduled around radio interviews and coalition meetings.

Sustained violence following mass protests meant that I was unable to return to the field once I left in April 2015. The deterioration in the security situation also had profound implications for research ethics, and even publication and dissemination. I encountered many other challenges throughout the research process, which I will explore throughout the course of this chapter. For example,

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<sup>12</sup> An early draft of this chapter was presented at a PhD Seminar at the Centre for Development Studies, University of Bath in September 2015. I intend to submit a version of this chapter to the journal *Development in Practice*.

gaining access took much longer than I anticipated, leaving less time to conduct data collection than planned. I was underprepared for the emotional stress attached to researching issues such as political space, a problem that was compounded by an adverse reaction to anti-malarial medicine. I also succumbed to the pressure to engage in debates online through blogs and social media about the unfolding crisis in Burundi, which exposed my initial naivety about how even moderate and nuanced criticisms could be deliberately misinterpreted.

When writing my letters of introduction and visa applications, contacts in Burundi advised me not to use the words ‘civil society’ to describe the groups that I would be working with, but to call them ‘nongovernmental organisations’ or ‘non-profit associations’, as these terms were less political and my application would be more likely to be approved. Researching civil society in Burundi is sensitive for many reasons. Although power-sharing arrangements instituted by the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Accords successfully reduced ethnic tensions, they did little to mitigate political divisions which have sharpened in recent years. Within this context, the government has come to view prominent civil society activists and organisations as part of the political opposition, and as a threat to its political authority and legitimacy. It has introduced legislation to restrict public gatherings and limit freedom of expression, and has harassed and intimidated activists. Following mass protests, the government banned a number of leading organisations and suspended others. The context in the run-up to the 2015 elections became increasingly antagonistic and was extremely unstable, and became noticeably more so over the course of this research, both while I was in the field and afterwards. Although the situation in Burundi could not be described as an active conflict zone prior to the 2015 elections, it shared many similarities with such zones, including high levels of political violence and human rights abuse, political divisions, limited rule of law, difficulty in accessing information, and high levels of volatility and uncertainty.

Consequently, this chapter situates reflections on my own experience of carrying out fieldwork in Burundi within the existing literature on research in conflict zones (Cramer et al., 2011; Mazurana et al., 2013; Wood, 2006), or violent and dangerous situations (Sriram et al., 2009; Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000). These authors identify common or particular challenges associated with

conducting fieldwork within these settings, including: carrying out research in an ethical and socially responsible manner; securing access and maintaining relationships; establishing veracity and reliability; security for both researchers and participants; and issues related to identity, positionality and representation (Sriram et al., 2009). Mazurana *et al* identify three issues that are important to consider when conducting research in conflict zones: 'the responsibility attached to representing oneself and others in violent environments, the careful choosing of research methods in conflict settings, and the skills of accessing, creating, and ultimately understanding the fluidity of safe spaces to carry out research' (2013: 7). All stress the unforeseen challenges that researchers are likely to encounter and the dynamic nature of field work in these contexts. Sriram et al. argue that 'field research is never static' because the context in which it takes place 'is subject to many forces that continually transform it, presenting new challenges and opportunities. At the same time, all of the characters are continually developing and changing, including the researcher' (2000: 7). King (2009) emphasises the adjustments to research strategies and methodological tactics frequently required in response to conditions on the ground, as well as the 'breakdowns' that occur during the research process, that is, the unintended errors that can so easily occur in conflict zones. Many of these authors place a particular emphasis on ethics, risks, and decision-making in these environments. Cramer et al. argue that researchers must ask hard questions about every activity, 'from selecting a topic, a location and a time, to deciding who to ask for funding and how to obtain access and consent, right down to deciding what and where to publish and how to handle post-publication responsibilities' (2011: 2—3).

This chapter explores each of these areas in relation to my own experiences in Burundi. It adopts a reflexive approach, which entails consideration of a range of factors from personal biography, social situation, and political values, to personal relationship with research respondents and relations of authority within the research process (Gregory et al., 2009: 627). The chapter is split into six sections: planning and preparations, access and acceptance, flexibility and resilience, safety and security, positionality and perspective, and finally criticism and interpretation. It also discusses

some of the particular issues that can arise when working with civil society activists and organisations in violent and divided contexts.

## Planning and preparations

There are a number of important areas to consider when planning to go into the field, from ethical considerations to more practical and administrative preparations. Research ethics go beyond gaining clearance from an institutional ethics committee, although this is part of the process. For example, this research was approved by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) at the University of Oxford. CUREC states that it is ‘committed to ensuring that its research activities involving human participants are conducted in a way which respects the dignity, rights, and welfare of participants, and which minimises risk to participants, researchers, third parties, and to the University itself’.<sup>13</sup> Securing informed consent from research participants is at the heart of this process, but this can be difficult in violent and difficult contexts given the dynamic and often unpredictable character of these situations. Informed consent implies that participants understand the research and are aware of the risks associated with participation. Cramer et al. point out that in conflict zones, it is impossible for researchers to ‘predict the full array of likely consequences for those who participate in the fieldwork encounter’ (2011: 8). Honesty and transparency must be the grounds for obtaining consent, which should be discussed throughout the research process rather than as a one-off event at the beginning. They contend that ‘given the dynamic nature of the research process, the implication is that obtaining consent may require re-negotiations over time’ (Cramer et al., 2011: 3). Informants must be aware of and accept risks associated with participating in a study, including those that are as yet unknown. This leads Cramer et al. to advocate for ‘a localized ethic grounded in extensive dialogue’ which depends on the ‘agency, emotions and judgements of informants’ (2011: 8). That said,

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<sup>13</sup> CUREC website, available online at <https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/>. Accessed 30 December 2016.

Paramount among the ethical considerations, however, are the need to protect research participants and honour their trust, and the need for foresight regarding the consequences of research, anticipated and non-anticipated. Obtaining consent does not absolve the researcher from the obligation to protect informants against potentially harmful repercussions (Cramer et al., 2011: 3).

In the case of this research, all participants completed a consent form before engaging in the research and these were stored securely both during fieldwork and when I left the field, as were recordings of interviews and field notes. Participants were made aware of all potential risks associated with participating in the research, and these conversations continued as the research progressed. However, the dramatic deterioration of the security situation after I left the field presents particular challenges. For example, although I managed to maintain contact and was able to continue re-negotiating consent with a handful of research participants, this was not possible with the vast majority of those I interviewed. Given the increase in political tensions and the restrictions and violence inflicted on activists, I made the decision to anonymise all interviewees in order to continue protect research participants from any future repercussions.

Just as ethical considerations go beyond the ethics committee, thinking about risks must also surpass what is required for an institutional risk assessment. This includes thinking through potential risks to research participants and the researcher. Mertus argues that these are connected:

Care of the self is integrally related to care for others... a researcher who overlooks the potential risks of their work and who disregards their own vulnerability may endanger not only their own security but also the security of their interview subjects (2009: 166).

Undertaking a comprehensive security assessment prior to entering the field is vital. Both Mertus (2009) and Mazurana and Gale (2013) advise participants to review manuals and guidelines produced by organisations, such as the UN and humanitarian NGOs on basic and advanced security training prior to commencing a security assessment and entering the field. Mertus also advocates for a broader and more inclusive approach to risk assessments, which involves ‘scrutiny of both the external factors and internal threats that may affect the security environment’ (2009: 170). This

might include a consideration of: the history of the conflict and violence, identification of elites and external players, legal institutions and the rule of law, trends in protection of human rights, military developments, economy and resources, crime, and the nature of the current context. She also encourages researchers to undertake a vulnerability assessment, which explores why some researchers might be more vulnerable to certain threats than others and involves the identification of individual and particular risks relating to the origin, affiliation, age and gender of the researcher. She argues that these assessments should be structured around six questions: Why would an attack happen? Who poses a threat? What are the likely targets? How could an attack happen? Where might an attack happen (spaces, locations)? When could an attack happen? I would argue that these documents should be living ones that are continually reappraised throughout the research process. They should not be completed prior to entering the field and then filed away and never looked at again. Researchers may also consider writing action plans detailing how the researcher will respond to particular risks should they arise, including exit strategies, before entering the field.

A comprehensive risk assessment and action plans were completed prior to entering the field as part of this research. At the University of Oxford, risk assessments must refer to the travel advice provided by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) for specific countries. Where there are travel warnings in place, the FCO advises travellers to either 'see our travel advice before travelling', avoid 'all but essential travel' or avoid 'all travel'. When I was writing the risk assessment in April 2014 the UK government recommended that travellers check advice before travelling to Burundi, and advised against all but essential travel to some rural areas and specific neighbourhoods within the capital. The presence of this travel warning meant that I was not permitted by the University to travel to certain areas where projects were based, and the change in travel warnings following pre-election violence precluded the extension of fieldwork and ruled out returning to the country following the elections. Ensuring that you have the requisite permissions in place prior to travelling, including permission from your university, as well as having any visas and research permits in place prior to travelling to the field is essential. However, researchers should

be aware that these permissions can be revoked and should consider the implications this may have both on fieldwork and the viability of the study, as was the case with this research.

## Access and acceptance

Gaining access to the field is a challenge for to all researchers, but can be more difficult for those working in violent and divided contexts. Access has to be negotiated at multiple levels, from obtaining a visa or research permit from the national or regional government, to gaining consent from individual participants. Writing about her own experience of conducting research in post-genocide Rwanda, Thomson (2009) identifies three points of entry where access can be complicated: the government, social spaces and sites where access to participants and participant observation is possible, and individuals who may be unwilling or unable to participate. In the course of her fieldwork, Thompson has had to continually negotiate access at each of these scales. Gaining permission from the government is often essential when conducting fieldwork, although this was not necessary at the time in Burundi. In many cases, negotiating access with research participants is much more complex than obtaining permission from the state. Sriram et al. (2009) discuss the importance of trust, while Mazurana et al. (2013) focus on finding and creating spaces where participants feel safe. Nearly all the existing books and articles on this topic view establishing trust and relationship building as essential to establishing access.

There are particular challenges involved with gaining access to local civil society activists and organisations. Researchers should consider the implications of how they establish access, that is whether they pursue a vertical or horizontal approach. Taking a vertical or top-down approach, which involves going through donors or other international partners, might be easier for some researchers, but is potentially problematic. The risk is that researchers may become associated with the donor and respondents may be less open, particularly when it comes to issues that touch on funding, performance, or the relationship with the donor. Conversely, gaining horizontal access by contacting them directly, or indirectly through peers, can be more difficult, especially for outsiders, but may result in a more open and productive relationship in the long run. Other things to consider

when working with civil society groups is their organisational legitimacy and credibility, as well as their accountability. Organisations may be reluctant to open themselves up to researchers as they are wary of criticism, and are concerned that it may damage one or more of these attributes and upset their reputation and relationships with donors, authorities, or the communities they work with. It is important to understand these sensitivities. Furthermore, they are likely to differ between organisations and from one context to another.

My position as an outsider meant I had several problems gaining access to civil society activists and organisations. Being a native English speaker and someone who speaks good but not fluent French and does not speak Kirundi limited my ability to gain access to some organisations, especially those that work at the community level and to observe their activities. It also took me time to build up a network of contacts and establish relations based on trust with civil society actors. My previous work as a researcher and campaigner with two INGOs (SCIAF and INTRAC), one of which supported a handful of local organisations in Burundi, meant that I had some existing contacts. I began by contacting several INGOs with a presence in Burundi, and used this connection to gain access to some organisations, bearing in mind some of the issues associated with vertical access. I also conducted a mapping exercise of civil society organisations working on issues related to peacebuilding, which was the original focus of the research, before I entered the field.

Upon arrival in Burundi I pursued a parallel access strategy employing two methods, one of which involved a snowballing technique where I asked my initial contacts to introduce me to new organisations, and the other, contacting organisations to which I did not have an existing connection, directly through email. I also identified a number of key informants with whom I established strong working relationships, who helped me to negotiate access to multiple organisations. Although this last method proved extremely successful in the end, it took much longer than I anticipated, meaning that I had much less time for data collection. I also spoke to a number of individuals working for INGOs in Burundi, and representatives of the United Nations Office in Burundi (BNUB). In most cases these interviews were off the record. I had much less success gaining access to the Burundian government and the Ministry of the Interior, who refused

to meet with me. This meant that the study focuses solely on the perspectives of civil society organisations, and members of the international community. It also meant that I was unable to access the register of civil society organisations and gather quantitative data relating to civil society in Burundi.

## Flexibility and resilience

Conducting research in violent and difficult situations is dependent on the creation of flexible and resilient research methodologies. Mazurana et al. point out that ‘the research methods used in conflict zones are not qualitatively different, yet require heightened sensitivity to an ever-changing, high-stakes context’ (2013: 12). More often than not, researchers will need to adapt their approach once they enter the field: ‘once they arrive in the field, many researchers realise that the questions they so carefully honed required substantial reformulation or that their intended study subject or methods will not work’ (Mazurana et al., 2013: 12). Cramer et al. also stress the necessity and reality of continual innovation and adaptation in war zones:

Researching in conflict situations requires the social scientist to think on his or her feet, changing research plans, survey or interview designs and developing ad hoc solutions to minimize the risk and damage on a day by day, sometimes moment by moment, basis (2011: 12).

I encountered a number of challenges over the course of this research, which required me to alter my methodology. Upon arrival in Burundi I realised that my initial approach, which involved large amounts of participant observation and the use of participatory research methods, was unworkable. The time constraints of my informants were a significant issue in this regard. Many research participants had full-time jobs, and their civil society activities were undertaken in their spare time. Those that were full-time employees of civil society groups were also very busy, as the organisations they worked for were often understaffed and underfunded and so they had a very heavy workload. Activists would often consent to doing interviews, but didn’t have the time to engage with more participatory or group activities. The ad hoc and unstructured nature of activities

also made it difficult to undertake participant observation in any systematic way, although I did observe a handful of activities, including non-violent communication workshops, training for electoral observers, and peace committee meetings. I found that a growing number of activities were cancelled as the political climate became increasingly tense and the security situation more uncertain in the run-up to the elections. I would often be in a taxi on my way to observe an activity when I would receive a phone call explaining that the workshop or meeting had been cancelled for security reasons. My risk assessment also prohibited me from travelling to certain areas of the country or specific neighbourhoods within the capital as well as from working at night, which meant that I was unable to observe activities that took place within these locations or after sunset. This meant that the bulk of my data came from interviews. I decided to conduct multiple interviews with key informants, which allowed me to build up a strong relationship with them over time and improved the quality of the information gathered. I then used triangulation to ensure the veracity of data, comparing material obtained from different informants as well as information from news reports and other secondary sources.

I conducted two fieldwork trips, one from July to October 2014, and the second from February to April 2015. Although I had initially planned to do most of my interviews with international organisations during the second trip it became clear that I had to prioritise these interviews, particularly those with representatives of BNUB. It became increasingly clear that the fractious relationship between the Burundian government and the United Nations operation meant that the mandate of BNUB was unlikely to be extended beyond the end of 2014, so I had to schedule these interviews much earlier than planned. I also had to move the second trip forward by a few months to ensure I would have adequate time for data collection. Through following news reports, it became clear by January 2015 that there was a strong chance that the president would seek a third term, and that he would need to announce his candidacy in April 2015. From speaking with activists and other informants it seemed likely that this decision would be contested and protests would follow any announcement. I realised that in order to ensure I had enough material, I would need to complete my data collection in Burundi by April 2015. I had hoped that I would either be able to extend my

stay in the country or return following the elections. However, the rapid deterioration in the security situation made this impossible. I made the decision first not to extend my stay and then not to go back, not only for my own safety, but because I was concerned about the safety of my interviewees, and realised that the likelihood of gathering useful and reliable information in such a situation would be very slim and not worth the risks involved. The decision not to return to Burundi meant that I had to find new sources and alternative methods of gathering data. I attempted to stay in touch with my key informants remotely using email and Skype. However, many of my informants were too afraid to speak openly about the situation in Burundi because they were concerned that their communications were being monitored.

Social media took on increased importance during and after the protests. Sites such as Twitter and Facebook became important spaces for sharing information within and outside Burundi, and for communicating with the outside world. However, the veracity of information shared on these sites was questionable, and it became clear that they were increasingly used to spread rumours, propaganda, and misinformation. Government spokesmen, such as Willy Nyamitwe, took to Twitter to denounce protesters and civil society activists as ‘terrorists’ and ‘insurgents’, and discredit evidence of mass killings and gross human rights violations published by human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and other international observers. Protesters and opposition supporters began to circulate images of dead bodies lying in the street as evidence of atrocities. Although the poor reliability of information shared on social media meant that it could not be used for conventional data collection, it was interesting to see the perspectives of different groups and individuals, and how they represented themselves on sites such as Twitter and used it as a tool for furthering their political objectives. The use of discourse analysis to deconstruct how language and practice contributed to the production and reproduction of violence and dominant power relations proved particularly interesting and effective.

## Safety and security

Security is a particular concern for researchers working in violent and difficult situations. Relying on states for security is problematic in situations where state institutions are weak, and the police and security services are implicated in violence and human rights abuses (Mertus, 2009). This includes the safety of the researcher and their participants, both during the research and after the researcher has left the field. The qualitative researcher faces numerous risks. Lee-Treweek and Linkogle argue that ‘all qualitative research is to some extent potentially dangerous... The nature of qualitative enquiry means that researchers encounter the unexpected and the threatening as part of their attempt to understand the world of participants’ (2000: 10). They identify four conspicuous and hidden forms of danger facing qualitative researchers: physical, emotional, ethical, and professional. Physical harm can occur in both extreme and more mundane circumstances. It can include violence, but there are other forms of physical danger such as illness and disease, or a poor reaction to anti-malarial medicine, for example. Lee-Treweek and Linkogle define emotional danger as ‘the experience of severe threat due to negative “feeling states” induced by the research process’ (2000: 13). An example of emotional danger faced by researchers working in violent places is secondary trauma, the emotional stress that results when an individual hears about the first-hand trauma experienced by someone else. A number of my informants shared experiences of trauma in the interviews, including how they witnessed individual and mass atrocities committed during the civil war, and experienced harassment and intimidation in the run-up to the elections. I found listening to these experiences extremely difficult and was underprepared for the emotional stress they caused. After I left the field, I was exposed to images of extreme violence on social media, which compounded this secondary trauma. I also found transcribing interviews emotionally distressing, particularly with the knowledge that some of my informants had been caught up in the government crackdown following the protests and had been forced to leave the country for their own safety. Being able to leave the field when your research participants cannot, can also lead to feelings of guilt and helplessness, which may contribute to the emotional stress experienced by researchers, as it did in my case.

Research participants may also face risks, particularly where the research is regarded as politically sensitive. Researchers can and should take steps to limit the dangers faced by participants when in the field and once the researcher has left. Mazurana et al. stress the importance of finding safe spaces, arguing that ‘it is important that the researcher understand the implications of meeting space, and that in a conflict-affected community there could be multiple views of why people are meeting’ (2013: 15). In some cases, these might be private spaces, such as the informant's home, and at other times public spaces may be the safer option for the researcher and their participant. Where possible, I chose to meet civil society activists in their offices, for a number of reasons. Most civil society organisations in Burundi either receive or are seeking external funding, so the visit of a European woman would be relatively commonplace and unlikely to attract undue attention. It also enabled me to fit in interviews around their extremely busy schedules, and it was a place where respondents felt comfortable and could talk in a free and open manner. The obligation of the researcher is to mitigate risks faced by participants when they leave the field and publish their findings. Given the security situation in Burundi, this means being extremely careful when it comes to disseminating the research and ensuring that all references to informants that will appear in the public domain are anonymised.

Much of the literature on conducting research in conflict zones stresses the connection between looking after oneself and ensuring the safety of others involved in the research (Mertus, 2009; Mazurana and Gale, 2013). Mazurana and Gale argue that ‘researchers who lack the knowledge, ability, and/or discipline to make good decisions to stay physically and emotionally healthy and safe are a risk to themselves, the other people on their team, and the people they are interviewing’ (Mazurana and Gale, 2013: 277). Cramer et al. (2011) argue that conducting research in conflict zones involves taking calculated risks, weighing up the potential to gather useful and reliable evidence against the risks involved in collecting it.

Concretely, and because researching “dangerous fields” carries multiple risks, researchers should consider calculated strategies whereby the gain of (relatively) credible information outweighs the risk of personal harm to the researcher and her informants. But what is

calculated risk? To answer is to confront some difficult-to-pin-down emotions and awkward-to-acknowledge feelings (Cramer et al., 2011: 5).

When in the field, mitigating risks often relies on gathering accurate and up-to-date information (Mertus, 2009). This can be extremely difficult in politicised and volatile contexts, where rumours and misinformation are rife. Kaiser finds that ‘the flow of information – who controls it, who possesses it, and who seeks to share and disseminate it, is highly charged, contextually specific and always political’ in conflict zones (Kaiser quoted in Mazurana et al. 2013: 12). Mazurana et al. argue that ‘research in conflict settings requires careful triangulation of information so as to sort out rumour from knowledge’ (2013: 14). Whilst in Burundi, I made sure to listen to local radio bulletins every morning in order to find out what had happened during the night. I also found that the taxi driver I used to take me to my interviews was particularly well informed and was able to provide me with additional information. However, it is not only poor information that can impede decision-making in violent settings. Cramer et al. (2011) find that extended immersion in a particular place can affect a researcher’s ability to perceive risks, as can emotions such as anger and fear and physiological reactions to danger such as adrenaline. Wood (2006) argues that the failure to acknowledge emotions can lead to errors of judgement that can have damaging consequences. I mitigated against this by ensuring I left the field for a short break during both trips, once travelling to Nairobi and the other time to Kigali. I also kept a reflective diary, which helped me to process my emotions while in the field.

## Positionality and perspective

Perspective and positionality are important concerns for researchers working in violent and divided contexts, as they are for those working in other environments. Positionality concerns our relations with the field and our participants, and how these relations are affected by our own subject positions. These positions impact every part of the research process, from the approach we select and the way we frame our research, to our access to data and institutions, our analysis of the data we collect, and our ability to disseminate this analysis. Gregory et al. define positionality as:

The fact that a researcher's social, cultural and subject positions (and other psychological processes) affect: the questions they ask; how they frame them; the theories that they are drawn to; how they read...; their relations with those they research in the field or through interviews; interpretations they place on empirical evidence; access to data, institutions and outlets for research dissemination; and the likelihood that they will be listened to and heard (2009: 556).

My background and positionality had a considerable effect on my research, which manifested itself in a number of different ways. My experience as a campaigner and researcher working for international development NGOs made it much easier for me to understand and empathise with some of the more common and mundane challenges faced by civil society activists, and sympathise with some of the more extreme ones presented by the context in Burundi. It also meant that I approached the research with a particular position. Like many researchers, I find it extremely difficult to be neutral when it comes to violence and injustice. I recognise and understand the position advanced by Scheper-Hughes, who believes that in such circumstances, we should 'pause and reconsider the traditional role of the anthropologist as neutral, dispassionate, cool and rational, objective observer' (1995: 10). This leads her to argue in favour of a more politically and morally engaged approach to conducting research on violence and injustice, where researchers are 'witnesses' rather than 'spectators' (Scheper-Hughes, 1995).

My own views are more similar to the more nuanced position articulated by Cramer et al. (2011) which argues that although impartiality is impossible, this does not mean that the researcher should take sides. This is because it can be extremely difficult to distinguish between rights and wrongs or the good and the bad in conflict zones. The reality is often much murkier or more complex. This prompts them to ask: 'How does one reconcile the roles of the researcher as a balanced, if not neutral, observer with that of witness and/or activist, particularly in the face of suffering, and desperation?' (Cramer et al., 2011: 13). For me, the key words here are 'balanced, if not neutral'. Consequently, the way that this research has sought to navigate this ethical dilemma is through adopting a concerned and committed but critical approach, which strives to be balanced if not neutral and is rooted in broader analysis of social and power relations. Mazurana et al. argue that

an understanding of the power relations that structure conflict zones must be at the heart of any attempt ‘to advocate, to gain information, to assist, to represent unheard voices, or to reveal marginalized or suppressed experiences or perspectives’ (2013: 7—8). This research is extremely critical of the sustained violence and militarism in Burundi, and the widespread suffering and injustice it generates, as well as the use of targeted violence against opposition supporters and civil society activists. Although I am deeply concerned about my informants and the pressures they have faced, I am not uncritical of them.

The literature conducting research in conflict zones is particularly concerned with how our positionality influences our relationship with the field. Brun argues that ‘we are part of the field both when we conduct fieldwork and when we are away from the locations we define as our field’ and that ‘this has implications for how we understand our position as researchers’ (2013: 134). Mazurana et al. argue that researchers should

consider carefully how they will represent themselves in and out of “the field,” and how they will represent their research communities and the violence permeating their lives. This includes, for example, how researchers introduce themselves and their projects and their dress, manner, and behaviour in the field. (2013: 8)

My own positionality affected my relations with the field and my research participants in a number of ways, some of which were positive while others were less so. As a white British woman, I was very much seen as an outsider in Burundi. Such a position can have its advantages and its disadvantages. Many of my informants told me that it would be extremely difficult for a Burundian to conduct research on such a politically sensitive issue, and that as an outsider, I was considered to be more neutral and objective. However, my unfamiliarity with the context meant that it took me much longer to gain access than someone with more local knowledge would, although my professional background and the connections that I had established within the international development sector helped me to overcome this challenge to a certain extent. More significantly, my background working for civil society groups enabled me to understand and to empathise with my informants. Talking about the challenges associated with attracting funding, the burden attached

to reporting requirements, and the difficulties of getting a government minister to reply to your letter, helped to break the ice and enabled me to establish a good rapport with my informants. I believe that this ultimately enabled me to establish a relationship based on trust, which encouraged activists to be more open with me than they might otherwise have been. My youth and gender meant that I was less likely to be considered a threat, which also contributed to this greater degree of honesty. However, this was also a hindrance at times, especially when it came to discussing violence. I never pushed my informants to talk about their experiences of violence and trauma, but the issues did come up on occasions because of the nature of the research. I felt that there were times when a natural and entirely understandable reluctance to speak about traumatic experiences was strengthened by a desire to protect me from the details of these events. On the street, I was generally considered to be one of the many international aid and development workers that are based in Bujumbura. I deliberately reinforced this perception in some ways, for example through my appearance and the way that I dressed. But I also contradicted it in other ways, for example, I chose to travel around the city using taxis, or walking, rather than driving around in a four-wheel drive car like most internationals.

I think that it is also useful to consider the position of respondents, that is, how they relate to the field and to you as a researcher. Reflecting on the social and political position of your informants is particularly important when working on politically sensitive topics in divided contexts. One concern is around the reliability of the information provided. Sriram et al. (2009) discuss some of the challenges associated with establishing veracity in violent and difficult situations and the possible utility of rumours and misinformation:

Researchers confront all sorts of barriers to authentic information, including: multiple subject perspectives and intentionally misleading statements... Sorting data into two tidy groups – “truths” and “untruths” – is both impossible and undesirable in some settings. That a research subject provides information that is exaggerated or untrue does not negate the importance of the data gathered from that subject. Misleading statements from informants are data within and of themselves (Sriram et al., 2009: 4—5).

Rumours are extremely common in Burundi, and although they were discussed by my informants within interviews, they did not make deliberately misleading statements. However, it was clear that each interviewee had a particular subject position which informed how they answered my questions. Although some do come from modest backgrounds, most civil society activists are comparatively well educated. Some are highly mobile individuals who have been educated or travelled abroad, and worked with or for international organisations. They are often more liberal in their outlook, and many are extremely critical of the current Burundian regime. One way of reflecting on the subject positions of your informants might be to consider why they have chosen to participate in your research. I believe that my respondents had multiple motivations for engaging with my study; most simply wanted to help me with my research, which they saw as being of value to them and their organisations, but there were times when I felt that some of those driven by advocacy and awareness-raising also saw me and my research as a way of communicating their experiences of violence and injustice, and sometimes their perspectives on the current regime, to the wider world. Others hoped that my connections to the international NGO sector might be able to help them in some way, whether that might be through access to funding and capacity building support, or through raising the profile of their organisation. While some were open about the presence of these more political or instrumental motivations, others were more circumspect.

## Criticism and interpretation

As academics, we are expected to be critical. But being critical can be difficult, for a number of reasons. For example, it is extremely tough to criticise individuals who have taken the time to participate in your study, often at great inconvenience and even risk to themselves. It may also upset the expectations of participants who assume that you are on their side. However, it is important to remain ‘balanced, if not neutral’, to quote Cramer et al. (2011), and it is possible to be compassionate and constructive at the same time as being critical. There is a risk that being critical could also put participants at risk. Researchers working in violent and divided contexts must be very careful about what they say in and out of the field, and consider the ways in which their

research might be used by different actors. Bourgois (1990) argues that in a context where abuses and injustice are commonplace, the researcher has to decide whether to censor or silence their own voice in order to prevent further injustices and abuses being inflicted on research participants. In such cases, researchers might choose to remain silent in order to protect their informants. Cramer et al. acknowledge that the security situation may lead some researchers to self-censor in order to protect their informants. In these cases, researchers must ask themselves ‘at what point does an ethic of silence become an ethic of complicity?’ (Cramer et al., 2011: 10). In some cases, there is a risk that ‘our words can be used against either us or our informants’ and,

if they can, there may be justification for self-censorship, either in choosing to frame the research project in such a way that sensitive or uncomfortable truths are avoided, or else (perhaps more commonly) censoring ourselves in the presentation of what we have found.’ (Cramer et al., 2011: 17)

Political space for civil society is an extremely contentious issue in Burundi. Activists have been subject to harassment and intimidation. Leading human rights defenders have been forced to flee the country, and the government has banned and suspended a number of prominent organisations. It is very difficult to be critical of civil society in such a context, and there is a risk that any nuances could be easily lost, whether lost in translation or deliberately misinterpreted. There is also a risk that my research could be used in ways that I am uncomfortable with, something that I have already had experience of. During the protests I felt a lot of pressure to blog and tweet about the situation, given that I had just returned from the field and was able to provide certain insights that few others could. I was engaged in a discussion on Twitter with a journalist about civil society in Burundi, in which I said that the government *considered* civil society to be part of the opposition and this is one reason why they were targeting activists. However, this tweet was deliberately misinterpreted by some people associated with the regime, who used it to argue that civil society *was* the opposition. The journalist and I immediately clarified what we had said, but the damage was already done. Since then, I have been extremely careful about the ways in which I disseminate my research findings to non-academic audiences, such as through blogs and social media. However, I am very

reluctant to self-censor, because this is one of the principal ways in which the Burundian government has sought to limit political space. By remaining silent, there is a risk that I will become complicit in this strategy.

Consequently, the challenge that I and other researchers face is whether and how to share our findings in an ethical manner that does not put our informants at increased risk. There are ways of mitigating these risks. Thinking through the possible ways in which your research might be interpreted or used in a systematic manner is a helpful first step. Writing in a clear and unambiguous way can reduce the opportunity for others to deliberately misinterpret your words. Carefully choosing where, how, and when you publish your research, and ensuring your informants remain anonymous can also help to protect them. I took the decision to anonymise all individuals involved in the research, even where permission had previously been given, because of the rapid deterioration in the political context following my fieldwork, and concerns that naming individuals could place them at increased risk. I have only published the names of the organisations that participated more in the methodology section of my thesis, and not in the chapters that are to be published as journal articles. I have also been extremely careful about how I disseminate my research to non-academic audiences via the internet and social media.

## Conclusion

Cramer et al. conclude that often when working in conflict zones ‘it’s about trying to discern the “least worst option”, the path least treacherous rather than that which is right, true or just’ (Cramer et al., 2011: 10). This path can be difficult to identify in practice. Below are some lessons and reflections from my experience. I found it very hard to be impartial when faced with violence and injustice. Taking a reflexive approach encourages you to recognise this position, and develop a perspective that is balanced, if not neutral. I also found that renegotiation is a constant feature of the research process in violent and volatile settings. As the context changes you will need to reconsider your ethics and risk assessments, and may need to renegotiate your access to the field, participant consent, and confidentiality. Adopting a research methodology that is flexible and

resilient is also critical. Much of this is about being able to recognise that something is not working, giving yourself time and space to adapt, and finding creative but rigorous solutions. I found keeping a research diary extremely helpful because it encouraged me to record the decisions that I made throughout the research process. It also helped me to process some of the emotional stress associated with conducting research in conflict zones. My final lesson relates to the emotional toll of conducting research in violent and volatile contexts, particularly the effects of secondary trauma. It is important to be as prepared for this as you can be before you go into the field, and take breaks from the field if you can. Returning from the field can often be the hardest part of fieldwork. The most important advice that I could give to others is to be open about your experiences and how you are feeling, and not to hesitate to seek help if you need it.

## Chapter 5

### *Civil society and hybrid peacebuilding: reconceptualising civil society in post-conflict contexts<sup>14</sup>*

The crisis engulfing liberal peacebuilding has sparked a renewed interest in hybridity among critical peacebuilding scholars. Post-colonial critiques, which have contributed to the current ‘local turn’ in peacebuilding studies (Hughes et al, 2015), view the liberal peace as a hegemonic and governmental discourse that restricts emancipatory and transformative thinking about peace (Richmond, 2011a; Mac Ginty, 2011). They seek to challenge liberal peacebuilding through focusing on sites of resistance where the liberal peace is contested and reworked (Richmond and Mitchell, 2012; Mac Ginty, 2010 & 2011). In doing so, they emphasise the everyday agency exercised by local actors in peacebuilding encounters and the composite forms of thinking and practice that emerge as a result of interactions between the international and the local. The promotion of a vibrant and active civil society is integral to the liberal peace, a particular model of social, political, and economic organisation which seeks to restructure post-conflict societies through processes of securitisation, institutionalisation, liberalisation, and marketisation, on the assumption that this will create the optimum conditions for peace and prevent a return to violent conflict. The primary function of civil society within this model is to support the establishment of a social contract between post-conflict populations and liberal institutions, and to hold the state to account through the promotion of good governance, human rights, and participation. Critics argue that in practice, liberal peacebuilding has resulted in the creation of an artificial civil society that is dependent on international interveners and disconnected from local communities (Pouliny, 2005;

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<sup>14</sup> Submitted as a journal article to *Third World Quarterly*.

Richmond, 2011a & 2011b; Mac Ginty, 2011; Cubitt, 2013). Post-colonial critiques contrast this 'liberal veneer' with the more authentic forms of organising that exist at the level of the everyday or what Richmond (2011a & 2011b) calls the 'local-local'. Where 'externally-supported' civil society marginalises authentic voices and is unable to promote radical social change, civil society that is based more locally has more legitimacy and is capable of producing an emancipatory form of peace (Richmond, 2011b).

This paper argues that the division of post-conflict civil society into the externally supported and the locally based is problematic for a number of reasons. It is overly simplistic and fails to capture the complexity and diversity that characterise post-conflict civil society. This paper compares the conceptualisation of civil society articulated within post-colonial critiques to what political geographers have called 'actually existing' civil society in Burundi, a country with a long history of violent conflict. (Mohan, 2002; McIlwaine, 2007). Exploring 'the civil society that exists rather than what is presumed to exist' reveals a much more interesting landscape similar to that outlined within Gramscian perspectives, in which civil society is seen as a terrain of negotiation and resistance where hegemony is both challenged and constructed (McIlwaine, 2007: 1254). Dividing post-conflict civil society into the 'externally-supported' and the 'locally-based' also constructs and reproduces a problematic global–local binary.

Civil society in Burundi traverses multiple scales from the global to the local. Even organisations that work solely within communities on everyday problems are connected to the global in a number of different ways, whether through funding and organisational networks or in a more abstract way through discourses and power relations. Civil society groups are sites where hegemonic peacebuilding discourses, such as the liberal peace, are produced, contested, and reworked. This paper argues that it is precisely their position at the interface of the global and the local that makes these groups and the activists that work with or for them so interesting. However, it also makes them increasingly vulnerable to government restrictions and political violence, which should itself be viewed as part of a broader pattern of resistance to the implementation of the liberal peace in Burundi. The paper argues that concepts such as authenticity, legitimacy, and resistance are poorly

defined within post-colonial critiques. It builds on and develops the critique advanced by Paffenholz in a recent edition of *Third World Quarterly*, which argues that ‘the local turn is hampered by a binary and essentialist understanding of the local and the international, which are presented as the only relevant locations of power or resistance’, and that this has led to an overstatement of local resistance and a failure to analyse resistance beyond the international–local boundary (2015: 857).

It finds that Burundian civil society resembles a complex assemblage populated with hybrid entities, rather than the international–local binary advanced within post-colonial critiques. In geography, an assemblage denotes a process where ‘heterogeneous elements come together in a non-homogenous grouping’ (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011: 125). It captures the difference and agency that characterise civil society, as well as its ever-changing nature and the processes of coming together, establishing coherence, and then dispersing that define it. The paper focuses on three hybrid forms of civil society in Burundi: peace committees, the Catholic Church and faith-based organisations, and the *bashingantahe*. It is based on five months’ qualitative fieldwork with civil society groups in Burundi, conducted in two phases between June 2014 and April 2015. It draws on material from over 80 in-depth interviews with Burundian civil society activists and representatives from international nongovernmental organisations and multilateral institutions working in Burundi. The paper adopts a critical geographical perspective, and will draw on existing literature on space and scale within this discipline in order to deconstruct the local/international binary within critical peacebuilding studies (Herod, 2011; Herod and Wright, 2002; Massey, 1994 and 2004). The paper begins by critically exploring the understanding of post-conflict civil society within post-colonial critiques and some of the issues with it in greater depth. The paper then looks at ‘actually existing’ civil society in post-war Burundi and discusses some of the hybrids that populate this diverse and complex assemblage before ending with a broader discussion about authenticity, legitimacy, and resistance in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts.

## Civil society, peacebuilding, and hybridity

Despite widespread use of the term, there is no agreed definition of ‘peacebuilding’. Originally conceptualised by Johan Galtung, it can be broadly defined as the means by which positive peace is constructed, through building the capacity of societies to address the underlying causes of conflict and prevent further violence (Galtung, 1975; Boutros-Ghali, 1992). Liberal peacebuilding, which has dominated policy and practice since the 1990s, promotes a particular model of social, political, and economic organisation known as ‘the liberal peace’. Civil society is a core element of liberal peacebuilding and international interveners have invested massive amounts of resources in capacity building in post-conflict contexts. Richmond argues that the civil peace, which he defines as the construction of a vibrant and active civil society, represents a central part of the liberal peace agenda ‘because it supports the liberal peace’s overall emancipatory claims... and offers grounded legitimacy, being derived from local agency as well as international liberal norms’ (Richmond, 2011a: 5). Its core functions are to support the establishment of a social contract between post-conflict populations and liberal institutions, and in doing so, strengthen the accountability and legitimacy of these structures, or in other words, hold the post-conflict state to account, through the promotion of good governance, human rights, and participation. It also serves to facilitate the expansion of the liberal peace and its core processes of securitisation, institutionalisation, liberalisation, and marketisation to the local scale. Peacebuilding has become increasingly dominated by neoliberalism in recent years. Laliberté argues that this has involved ‘the downscaling of responsibility to the site of the individual’ and has resulted in the peacebuilding interventions which ‘are based on the assumption that the behaviour of the conflict affected population is the problem’ (2016: 28). Many of these programmes have been conceived and implemented by civil society, seeking to change community attitudes and individual behaviours of post-conflict populations. In doing so, civil society also supports the expansion of neoliberal governmentality to the grassroots.

Post-colonial critiques of liberal peacebuilding regard it as a hegemonic global discourse that seeks to discipline local populations in conflict-affected and post-conflict environments. They are

interested in exploring the ways in which local actors subvert and resist the liberal peace, and the extent to which these interactions between the global and the local produce hybrid forms of peace and governance (Mac Ginty, 2010 & 2011; Richmond and Mitchell, 2012; Richmond, 2011a, 2011b; Belloni, 2012; Millar et al., 2013). Hybridity here is understood as a social process, or to quote Mac Ginty, ‘a constantly moving piece of variable geometry’ (2011: 77). It denotes the composite forms of thinking and practice that emerge as the result of social interactions between different groups. This process is often a gradual one, where norms and practices evolve and adapt over time (Mac Ginty, 2011). These critiques of the liberal peace draw on the work of the post-colonial thinker, Homi Bhabha (1994), who views hybridity as the process by which different cultures intersect with each other to produce a third, which ‘displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives’ (Bhabha quoted in interview with Rutherford in Rutherford, 1990: 211). This composite is not reducible to its constitutive elements, rather it is imbued with certain characteristics such as creativity, assertiveness, and agency (Nadarajah and Rampton, 2015).

Critics of liberal peacebuilding argue that international interveners have focused on constructing a new civil society rather engaging with pre-existing grassroots associations and local forms of organising, which they assumed were either entirely absent or lacked the characteristics necessary to support democratisation and liberalisation (Mac Ginty, 2011; Cubitt, 2013). Civil society is defined within these critiques as a group of associations, as opposed to a space between the state and the individual or a set of values – the two other definitions identified by Edwards (2004). They argue that where suitable organisations did not appear to exist, liberal peacebuilders would create them, often in their own image (Pouliny, 2005). Richmond (2011a & 2011b) argues that this has resulted in the construction of an artificial and externalised civil society, made up of professional, urban-based NGOs that lack local legitimacy and authenticity. He contrasts this externally-supported civil society with more local forms, which are variously referred to within the literature as ‘indigenous civil society’ (Cubitt, 2013; Mac Ginty, 2011); ‘post-colonial civil society’ (Richmond, 2011b); and the ‘local-local’ (Richmond, 2011a). Richmond defines this more locally-

based civil society as ‘that which lies beneath the often artificial and externalised “civil society”,’ (Richmond, 2011a: 13). Where externally-supported civil society marginalises everyday voices, this locally-based civil society is considered to be more representative, authentic, and local legitimate (Richmond, 2011b). Authors such as Richmond and Mitchell (2012) and Mac Ginty (2011) are particularly interested in the ways in which these more local forms of civil society exercise agency and engage in resistance against liberal peacebuilding in order to produce a more emancipatory and transformative form of peace.

The conceptualisation of post-conflict civil society advanced by proponents of the hybrid peace is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it fails to capture the complex and diverse nature of civil society in conflict-affected societies. There are almost always divisions and cleavages within post-conflict civil society, but they are rarely so clean-cut. It is extremely difficult to divide associations into those which are externally supported and locally based civil society in practice. The distinctions between these groups have also become less clear-cut over time as international donors seek to fund associations that are considered to be more rooted, and more local groups seek to become (or at the very least to appear to become) more liberal in order to attract much-needed funding. Consequently, most post-conflict civil societies are actually complex assemblages of hybrid entities. The vast majority of organisations within such an assemblage are composites to varying degrees and in different ways. These groups and the activists that work with them traverse multiple scales from the global to the local, and their perspectives on peacebuilding blend liberal values with traditional norms and embody vernacular understandings on peace as well as international ones.

Furthermore, this hybridity is not necessarily a new thing; it is often the result of several decades of prior hybridisation and social interactions between the local and the international during the colonial and post-colonial periods. The concept of the hybrid peace has been widely criticised for overlooking historical relations of power and resistance in post-conflict contexts (Nadarajah and Rampton, 2015; Paffenholz, 2015). Nadarajah and Rampton, argue that its proponents have a ‘selective engagement with hybridity’, which means that they neglect ‘the multilectical character of hybridisation and the *longue durée* timeframe’ over which hybridity is constructed (2015: 51).

Nadarajah and Rampton do not deny the empirical existence of hybridity within peacebuilding encounters, but argue that the current focus on hybrid peace overlooks historical relations of power across multiple scales that contribute to the production of hybridity over time in particular places. Most advocates of the hybrid peace do recognise the existence of prior hybridization. For example, Mac Ginty, argues that ‘it is important that we move away from notions of hybridisation that conceive of two pure entities being melded together to produce a third, hybrid identity’, because ‘in most contexts, even those we may believe to be geographically or culturally isolated, long-standing processes of cultural mixing mean that hybridisation is well entrenched’ (2011: 72). In a later article, Mac Ginty and Richmond state that hybridity ‘is a long-term process involving social negotiation, co-option, resistance, domination, assimilation, and co-existence’ (2016: 221). The problem is that although they acknowledge the presence of prior hybridisation, it is not fully explored within the existing literature on the hybrid peace or applied to empirical examples, which neglects the historical power relations that underpin processes of hybridisation.

Geographers have sought to capture the diversity and complexity of post-conflict civil society and historical relations of power that have shaped it through exploring ‘actually existing civil society’, that is the civil society that is present, rather than what is presumed to be present in particular places (McIlwaine, 2007; Mohan, 2002). They draw on Gramscian perspectives, which outline a much more complex vision of civil society where it is characterised by negotiation, conflict, and resistance, and ‘is simultaneously the terrain of hegemony and opposition to hegemony’ (Buttigieg, 2005: 38). McIlwaine conceptualises civil society as ‘a domain of contention in which hegemony is negotiated, struggled over or conceded to’ and as ‘a site of resistance, counter-hegemony and revolutionary praxis depending on the context’ (2007: 1255 – 57). These perspectives appeal to geographers because they emphasise the differentiated, fragmented, and even contested nature of civil society, problematise the relationship between civil society and the state, and highlight the importance of historical social and power relations – all of which are significant features of civil societies in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts.

Critics of the hybrid peace also argue that its proponents continue to construct and reproduce a problematic binary between the international and the local (Nadarajah and Rampton, 2015; Paffenholz, 2015). Nadarajah and Rampton contend that supporters of the hybrid peace position the local as ‘the antithesis of the international’, which obscures ‘the role of hybridity, the local and the everyday in the reproduction of oppression, contestation, and violence’ (2015: 51). Of particular concern to this paper is the ways in which proponents of the hybrid peace talk about civil society in conflict-affected contexts in binary terms. Richmond (2011a) argues that post-conflict civil society is divided into the externally supported and the locally based, where the former refers to ‘what international actors normally perceive as a range of actors and terrains spanning their non-Western and “non-liberal” partners for liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding at the elite level’ and the latter to the communities and individuals that exist ‘beyond this often liberally projected artifice of elites and civil society’ (2011a: 14). Although Richmond argues that he does not want ‘to exaggerate a local-international binary’, this is precisely what he does (2011a: 14). He positions externally-supported civil society, which is seen as an extension of the international or the global, in opposition to locally-based forms of organising, which he argues represent the genuine and authentic local. One problem with this analysis is that it views more local forms as authentic and legitimate than internationally-supported ones, yet much of the analysis within existing post-colonial critiques concentrates on the international, while the ‘local-local’ remains vague, opaque, and Other. As a result, these critiques come perilously close to reproducing the same binary (where locally based = authentic = legitimate and the externally supported = artificial = illegitimate) that the concept of hybridity seeks to disrupt.

Geographers have long sought to deconstruct these binaries, which situate the global and the local in opposition to each other, and attach certain attributes to them. They are also concerned with exploring the relations between these different scales, and the ways in which they are mutually constituted (Herod, 2011; Herod and Wright, 2002; Massey, 1994 & 2004). Herod argues that the local is often undertheorized and tends to be seen as an exotic or authentic Other: ‘although the local and the global have often been paired as two sides of a dualism, unlike the global, the local

generally has not been theorized in particularly spatial terms, except to be seen as Other to the global' (2011: 228). He finds that, where the global is seen as powerful and is associated with space, the local is characterised as weak and is connected to place. The conceptualisation of the local within existing post-colonial critiques relates to a particular view of place, which the geographer Doreen Massey once described as, 'a view of place as bounded, as in various ways a site of an authenticity, as singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity' (1994: 5). In her famous essay, *A global sense of place*, Massey makes 'a plea for a new conceptualisation of place as open and hybrid – a product of interconnecting flows – of routes rather than roots', a view that, 'calls into question the whole history of place as a center of meaning connected to a rooted and authentic sense of identity' (Cresswell, 2015: 88). Massey understands places as something that are inherently relational; they are shaped by social and spatial relations within them as well as those that stretch far beyond them. She views the global and the local as interconnected and interdependent. For Massey, the global is 'part of what constitutes the local' and the local is part of what constitutes global (1994: 5). Viewing the global and the local in this way emphasises connections between the two, and recognises that this relationship will vary. As Dirlik states, 'most phenomena are both global and local, but they are *not all global and local in the same way*' (Dirlik quoted in Gibson-Graham, 2002: 33). Consequently, others prefer to conceptualise the global and the local as processes; 'they are not fixed entities but are contingently produced, always in the process of being reproduced and never completed' (Gibson-Graham, 2002: 32–3).

## Civil society and peacebuilding in Burundi

Burundi has experienced several cycles of ethnic conflict and genocidal violence since its independence from Belgium in 1962 (Daley, 2008; Lemarchand, 1996 & 2009; Uvin, 1999 & 2009; Watt, 2008). The assassination of the country's first democratically elected Hutu leader in 1993 sparked a civil war that gripped the country for over a decade, caused the deaths of at least 300,000 people, and resulted in widespread displacement (Daley, 2008; Uvin, 2009). A negotiated transition provided for the establishment of a power-sharing government, and the first post-conflict elections

were held in 2005. However, the post-war decade was also characterised by sustained violence and militarism, continued economic marginalisation and political exclusion, and increasing government restrictions and political divisions. While peace negotiations and subsequent peacebuilding interventions have successfully limited the saliency of ethnicity over the past decade, political divisions remain and many promised and much-needed reforms have not materialised. Curtis (2012b) and Wodrig and Grauvogel (2016) find that peacebuilding encounters have been characterised by friction and resistance, and have privileged stability and control over reform and transformation. Daley (2008) argues that peacebuilding has, at best, done little to challenge the persistence of dominant norms such as marginalisation, coercion, and militarism, and contributed to them at worst.

Support for civil society has been an important feature of international peacebuilding in Burundi. Part of this support has focused on building the capacity of the sector to assist with the implementation of the peace agreement, and strengthening its ability to hold the government to account. Other international actors have sought to work with civil society groups to create spaces for dialogue and reconciliation at the grassroots. The vast majority of Burundian civil society organisations are relatively young. Most were established either during the early 1990s in the brief period of political liberalisation that took place prior to the outbreak of the civil war, or during the civil war itself, or as aid flowed into the country following the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2000 (Palmans, 2006). A representative of the United Nations that I spoke to in Burundi estimated that over 6,000 organisations were registered with the Ministry of the Interior in 2014, but explained that very few of these groups are active (Interview, 14 September 2014). When Burundians talk about civil society, they are mostly referring to a small tier of professional and externally-funded NGOs that are based in the capital and have relatively few links to the grassroots. These organisations are funded by international NGOs, and have received funding from other international actors, such as the United Nations and bilateral donors. They also tend to work on issues that are associated with liberal peacebuilding, such as democratisation, good governance, and human rights.

Although the presence of this group of professional and externally-funded organisations appears to support the binary conceptualisation of post-conflict civil society advanced by proponents of the hybrid peace, this tells only part of the story. On closer inspection a much more complex and interesting picture emerges. Civil society is a site where the liberal peace is constructed and reproduced within Burundi, but also one where it is contested and reworked, and alternatives can be discussed and developed. It is a space of difference and disagreement as well as one of consensus and compromise. Although they promote liberal values such as tolerance and seek to advance issues such as human rights and democratisation, activists have also challenged hegemonic peacebuilding discourses. They value the support of international interveners, but are highly critical of their failure to secure a lasting peace in Burundi. Their understanding of peace is sometimes quite different from that advanced by the liberal peace. They fuse local norms with liberal values, as well as religious teachings from global faiths such as Christianity and Hinduism, to create hybrid forms of peace that differ from and are sometimes incompatible with those advanced by liberal interveners.

Nearly all contemporary forms of civil society in Burundi are local–liberal composites to some extent. As a result, it is perhaps more helpful to think about hybridity as a spectrum or continuum, where some forms are more liberal and some more local than others. They are not all local and liberal in the same way. At one end there is a small group of externally-supported human rights organisations based in Bujumbura, and at the other more locally-based groups such as victims' associations and customary structures like the *bashingantahe*. In between you have a vast array of different organisations, many of which are both externally funded and possess a high degree of local legitimacy, where hegemonic peacebuilding discourses are both questioned and reproduced. Three of the most interesting examples of these local–liberal hybrids are local peace committees, the Catholic Church and faith-based organisations, and the *bashingantahe*, which could in its contemporary form also be considered a hybrid. Hybridity is also nothing new within the Burundian context. The history of civil society in Burundi reaches back into its post-colonial, colonial, and even precolonial past. Decades of hybridisation took place over the colonial and post-colonial period as local actors subverted and adapted colonial structures and international practices and

norms. The result is a much more diverse and dynamic picture than that advanced by post-colonial critiques of the liberal peace.

### **Peace committees**

Peace committees are community-based structures that seek to mitigate violence, resolve conflicts, and facilitate dialogue and reconciliation (Van Tongeren, 2013). In Burundi, peace committees are grassroots organisations that are rooted in communities and possess a high degree of local legitimacy. They are staffed by local volunteers that are either elected or appointed by the communities they serve. Niyonkuru (2012) estimates that there were over 350–400 committees active in Burundi in 2012. The first local peace committee was founded in 1994 in a community in the central region of Burundi, which was the site of a notorious massacre in the early days of the civil war. The committee was established with the help of an American volunteer from an international Quaker organisation, who brought together representatives from both sides of the community and supported them to establish a structure that would help them find a collective solution and manage conflict within the village. Several of the founders of the original peace committee went on to establish a national NGO, which has supported the expansion of the peace committee model across the country and continues to build the capacity of committees and their members. It has become a highly professional organisation supported by a number of international donors and works with similar organisations across the region in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, yet remains connected to the grassroots through the peace committees that it helped to establish and continues to support.

Peace committees draw on traditional or customary approaches to conflict resolution developed by the *bashingantahe*. They have even adopted symbolic practices associated with this customary structure, such as sharing a drink following a mediation. However, they are increasingly framing their work in language more closely associated with the liberal peace discourse, such as the matters of human rights and good governance. They are also implicated in programmes that seek to change community attitudes and reform the behaviour of individuals within the post-conflict population.

Although they are staffed by local volunteers and are relatively self-sufficient, the peace committees are also supported by national and international NGOs who work with them to build their institutional capacity and encourage them to address issues such as gender and good governance. As this narrative demonstrates, peace committees could be described as hybrid entities because they are both global and local: they are grassroots structures that have retained a high degree of local legitimacy although they are supported by international funders; and they blend traditional approaches to peacebuilding with those more closely associated with liberal (and neoliberal) discourses which seek to change the attitudes and behaviours of the post-conflict population.

### **The Catholic Church and faith-based organisations**

Faith-based organisations are a prominent feature of civil society in Burundi. Catholic missionaries arrived in Burundi in the mid nineteenth century, prior to its incorporation into German East Africa in 1899. The Catholic Church flourished under German and later Belgian colonial rule. In the 1950s the Church established a collective of civil society organisations, which became known as the Catholic Action Movement and included groups such as the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides of Burundi. These organisations were suspended in the 1980s as the President of the Second Republic sought to limit the influence of the Catholic Church, which he saw as a threat to his political authority and legitimacy. With an extremely devout and religious population, of which around two thirds are Roman Catholic, the Church continues to hold great power and influence within Burundi and it plays an extremely significant role within local communities throughout the country. Consequently, the Catholic Church and faith-based organisations (including those associated with other Christian denominations, such as the Quakers and the Anglican and Evangelical Churches, as well as Muslim associations) have a great deal of local legitimacy.

Faith-based organisations associated with the Church are involved in running grassroots committees at the parish and the diocesan level that are involved in nonviolent conflict resolution and community mediation, as well as issues such as anti-corruption, good governance, and human rights. Many of these committees are implicated in the extension of the liberal peacebuilding to the

grassroots and are involved in peacebuilding programmes that seek to change community attitudes and reform the behaviour of individuals within these groups. At the national level, the Church has sought to hold the ruling regime to account for human rights violations and played an important role in organising and monitoring post-conflict elections in 2005 and 2010. Members of the Catholic Church were appointed to the National Independent Electoral Committee (CENI) as well as electoral committees at a provincial and local level, which organised and monitored these elections.

However, in 2015 the Catholic Church instructed its members to resign from the committees in protest at the President's decision to run for an unconstitutional third term. The legitimacy of the Catholic Church has been challenged by the Burundian government following the 2015 elections. In April 2016, the President of the National Assembly accused the Church of playing a 'purely political, not spiritual role', and labelled them 'sponsors of terrorism'.<sup>15</sup> He also attacked the colonial origins of the Church, stating that 'the Catholic Church has been implicated in almost all our country's crises since the first missionaries arrived as precursors of European colonisers'.<sup>16</sup> Faith-based organisations and the religious confessions that support them fulfil important functions associated with liberal peacebuilding, such as holding the post-conflict state to account, and supporting the expansion of liberal peacebuilding to the grassroots. Their advocacy and peacebuilding programmes also draw on religious doctrines such as Catholic Social Teaching, and traditional norms and practices, as well as liberal values. The Church and its associated organisations could also be described as hybrid entities because they are both global and local, and

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<sup>15</sup> Pascal Nyabenda, President of the National Assembly of Burundi, quoted by Jonathan Luxmoore, 'Burundi official accuses Church of "sponsoring terrorism" as crisis engulfs the country', *Catholic Herald*, 7 April 2016. Available online at: <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/04/07/burundi-official-accuses-church-of-sponsoring-terrorism-as-crisis-engulfs-the-country/> Accessed 13 November 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

continue to possess a high degree of legitimacy among local communities despite their colonial origins.

### **The *bashingantahe***

The *bashingantahe* is a traditional council of elders that emerged in the precolonial period but today is considered to be part of civil society. Like many institutions, the *bashingantahe* has been profoundly affected by social and political changes and has been forced to evolve in order to maintain its relevance and legitimacy. But as Ingelaere and Kohlhagen note, ‘the underlying principles of the institution have not been much affected’ by these evolutions (2012: 42). For many, it has come to epitomise traditional Burundian values of social cohesion, tolerance, and neighbourliness. The *bashingantahe* was a critical pillar of the sociopolitical system that governed pre-colonial Burundi (Ingelaere and Kohlhagen, 2012; Deslaurier, 2003). Invested members of the *bashingantahe* served as councillors and justices of the peace, and were responsible for promoting social cohesion and conflict resolution among communities in the *collines*. Members were chosen based on values such as their maturity, dignity, and wisdom, and ‘they embodied justice, knowledge, virtue and authority’ (Ingelaere and Kohlhagen, 2012: 43). The *bashingantahe* continued to operate throughout the colonial period. However, under Belgian rule they were incorporated into the apparatus of the colonial state as customary authorities and lost much of their autonomy. They became further detached from their traditional roots following independence and were fully incorporated into the state apparatus after the introduction of one-party rule in 1966. The influence of the customary councils weakened during this period, but they continued to meet and operate informally. The institution was formally re-established by presidential decree in 1997 and it was recognised as a traditional mechanism of conflict resolution in the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Accords signed in 2000. They received funds from international NGOs and bilateral government agencies, who sought to modernise the institution, and rehabilitated it as a civil society organisation. However, the post-conflict government sidelined the *bashingantahe* and established elected local councils which would perform a similar function. Despite this it has continued to

operate informally throughout the countryside, often working with or alongside the elected councils.

The transition to civil society has not been without its problems, and the *bashingantahe* has become increasingly politicised in the post-war period, and continues to be seen by some as Tutsi-dominated (Deslaurier, 2003). A number of the activists that I spoke to regard it as exclusionary and politicised. A male civil society activist that I interviewed in Burundi felt that ‘it is very exclusionary. Women and young people are excluded from the *bashingantahe*. It was also involved in the divisions that have marked the country so it can no longer be considered neutral’ (Interview, 30 March 2015). Younger activists saw it as irrelevant and out of date. As one young male activist that I spoke to in Burundi said, ‘It used to be an honour to be a *bashingantahe*, and now it’s used as an insult – it means someone who is out of date and attached to the past’ (Interview, 05 September 2015). Despite this, many within civil society use traditional conflict resolution and mediation mechanisms developed by the *bashingantahe* and seek to promote values associated with it. This supports the conclusions of Ingelaere and Kohlhagen (2012) who find that it is the values associated with the *bashingantahe* that constitute the foundation of its continued legitimacy and influence, rather than the institution and its formal representatives. The *bashingantahe* in its modern form is also a hybrid. Although it is a customary structure that dates back to the precolonial period and is associated with traditional values, it was resurrected and continues to be supported by the international community. Politicisation and its association with the former one-party state has damaged its legitimacy among some local communities.

## Resistance, authenticity, and legitimacy

This exploration of actually-existing civil society in Burundi not only challenges the division of post-conflict civil society into the ‘externally-supported’ and the ‘locally-based’ within existing post-colonial critiques, it also raises important questions relating to their use of concepts such as authenticity, legitimacy, and resistance.

## Authenticity

Post-colonial critiques argue that peacebuilding ‘has produced an artificial form of civil society, disconnected from local, political, social, culture, customary, and economic processes and expectations’ (Richmond, 2011a: 26). Forms of organising that are more locally-based are rooted within communities and are perceived as authentic. Authenticity is derived from the Greek *authentikos*, which roughly translates as ‘genuine’, but has also come to be associated with custom and tradition. It is clear from the examples illustrated above that establishing the authenticity of particular forms of civil society is extremely difficult in contexts such as Burundi. Huge social and political upheavals over the colonial and post-colonial period have resulted in decades of prior hybridisation, meaning that very few structures or organisations could be considered authentic. Take the example of the *bashingantahe*. Established during the pre-colonial era, this once autonomous traditional structure was incorporated first into the colonial state and then into the authoritarian one-party state and could be considered part of the prevailing social and political hegemony within Burundi. It was rehabilitated by liberal interveners following the end of the civil war, but became increasingly politicised in the post-war period.

Other newer forms of civil society have appropriated practices, symbols, and values associated with the *bashingantahe*, which they use to bolster their own authenticity and legitimacy. A clear example of this is provided by the local peace committees established during the civil war. These organisations, which began as informal initiatives designed to create spaces for dialogue and reconciliation within local communities during the civil war, have been replicated throughout the country. Many of these committees have even taken the place of the traditional *bashingantahe* within some communities. As they have grown, they have become more professionalised and have attracted more support from national NGOs and from international donors. As the context changes, peace committees have begun to frame their work using terms more closely associated with liberal peacebuilding such as human rights, good governance, and democratisation. Despite this, they continue to be seen as authentic because of their use of customary structures and conflict resolution

practices, their espousal of traditional values, and their appropriation of symbols associated with the *bashingantahe*, as well as their rootedness within local communities.

## **Legitimacy**

The use of legitimacy within post-colonial critiques is also problematic. Legitimacy is not something that you either have or you do not, as these critiques imply. It relates to perceptions, meaning that an organisation or group may be considered to have more legitimacy in the eyes of one stakeholder, such as the local community they serve, and less in those of another, such as the national government. Lister argues that it is important to consider the power relations implicit in the legitimisation process by asking ‘legitimacy for whom?’ (2003: 184). This is because ‘an organization’s legitimacy with one stakeholder might not be compatible with its legitimacy with another’ (2003: 184). While the *bashingantahe* have a high degree of legitimacy among international peacebuilders, and continue to possess some legitimacy among parts of the population, the current Burundian government sees them as much less legitimate and views them as a Tutsi-dominated organisation that is too close to the former one-party regime.

Perceptions about legitimacy are closely related to prevailing societal norms, yet these are liable to change as the social and political landscape shifts during and after violent conflict. Byrne and Klem argue that ‘post-war transitions represent particularly fluid and precarious moments where new rules of the game are negotiated. This involves important shifts in the kinds of politics that are considered legitimate and those that are rendered out of bounds’ (2015: 225). Legitimacy is a process and is liable to fluctuate in response to changes in the social and political context within which organisations are situated. Walton (2013) contends that processes of legitimisation are often connected to broader struggles for political legitimacy in post-conflict contexts. He finds that where the political legitimacy of the regime is contested, post-conflict governments may view civil society groups and other social institutions as alternative sources of legitimacy, and consequently, as a threat to their power and authority. For example, the Catholic Church and its associated organisations have a high degree of legitimacy among the Burundian population, yet it increasingly

lacks legitimacy in the eyes of the Burundian government. The Church challenged the political legitimacy of the regime in the run-up to the controversial 2015 elections, when they spoke out against the president's decision to run for a third term, and instructed their members to stand down from the independent election commission. The Church represents a strong alternative source of legitimacy in Burundi and the Burundian government has increasingly seen it as a rival and as a threat to its power and authority.

## **Resistance**

The conceptualisation of resistance deployed in these critiques is also an issue. Paffenholz has criticised proponents of the hybrid peace for 'overstating' local resistance and failing to analyse 'power, emancipation and resistance beyond the local/international binary' (Paffenholz, 2015: 858). She argues that post-colonial critiques are focused on exploring local resistance to hegemonic and governmental liberal peacebuilding discourses, and as a result, they have 'a tendency to adopt a binary interpretation of resistance' (Paffenholz, 2015: 865). She finds that local responses to liberal peacebuilding tend to be dominated by apathy and compliance rather than resistance. If resistance does occur, it is more likely to be targeted at local and national actors, rather than international interveners. Paffenholz argues that what is missing from post-colonial critiques is an analysis of resistance among local and national elites directed towards the international and the local. In particular she highlights government resistance against local civil society actors, especially those supported by external funders. She notes that 'the fact that resistance by elites against local change actors supported by internationals takes place in all forms all the time... is massively understudied in critical peacebuilding research' (Paffenholz, 2015: 866).

Resistance to civil society and its international supporters has been a significant feature of the post-war landscape in Burundi. The Burundian government placed a number of restrictions on civil society, including the introduction of laws that prevent groups from organising public protests and limit media freedoms in the run-up to the 2015 elections. They also systematically harassed and intimidated activists, and jailed high-profile human rights defenders and journalists. The

government banned five leading civil society groups and suspended others following mass protests against the president's decision to run for a third term in 2015. The security forces responded to the protests with 'excessive and disproportionate force, including lethal force, against protesters, at times shooting unarmed protesters running away from them' (Amnesty International, 2015b: 1). While the protests were initially about democratisation and defence of the post-war Burundian constitution, civil society and opposition leaders were joined by thousands of ordinary Burundians protesting against political exclusion and economic marginalisation, as well as issues such as militarism, elite capture of the state, patronage, and everyday corruption – issues that liberal peacebuilding has failed to address (Daley and Popplewell, 2016; Van Acker, 2015). Up until the protests, government repression and political violence was largely targeted at high-profile and externally-supported human rights organisations that government elites suspected of being foreign agents and part of the political opposition, but following the protests it became much more widespread. Their position at the fluid and porous boundary between the international and the local makes civil society groups and activists that work for them increasingly vulnerable to government restrictions and political violence. This repression should be viewed as part of a broader pattern of resistance to the implementation of the liberal peace among government elites in Burundi, who are increasingly targeting local actors associated with liberal peacebuilding which they consider to be a threat to their political authority and legitimacy.

## Conclusion

At first glance, civil society in post-war Burundi appears to resemble the binary conceptualisation advanced by post-colonial critiques of liberal peacebuilding. On closer inspection, a much more complex picture is revealed. Although there is a tier of professional and externally-funded organisations based in Bujumbura, the vast majority of civil society groups are hybrids, some of which are more local and some more liberal than others. These organisations are often supported by international NGOs and other liberal interveners, but they remain rooted within grassroots communities and possess a relatively high degree of local legitimacy. Yet many of them are

considered to be less legitimate in the eyes of the government, which views organisations such as the Catholic Church and the *bashingantahe* as threats to its political power and authority. While a lot was written about civil society in Burundi during the transition period (2000 – 2005), very little has been published since. This paper contributes to this literature through developing our understanding of the composition of civil society in Burundi in the post-war decade.

It finds that ‘actually existing’ civil society in Burundi is very different to the conceptualisation presented in post-colonial critiques. It has identified other problems with this literature too. Post-colonial critiques argue that ‘locally-based’ forms of civil society are more authentic than ‘externally-supported’ ones, but establishing the authenticity of particular forms of civil society is extremely difficult in contexts such as Burundi. Huge social and political upheavals over the colonial and post-colonial period have resulted in decades of prior hybridisation, meaning that very few organisations could be considered authentic. Even customary structures such as the *bashingantahe*, which was rehabilitated with the support of the international community following the civil war, are hybrids. Newer organisations such as the local peace committees have adopted customary practices and appropriated traditional symbols in order to appear more authentic and boost their cognitive legitimacy. Many of these groups also fuse local norms together with liberal values and religious teachings to create hybrid forms of peace.

Although the concept of hybridity offers an important opportunity to disrupt the local- international binary, the conceptualisation of civil society advanced by post-colonial critiques ends up reproducing it. Geographers have sought to emphasise the differentiated, fragmented, and even contested nature of civil society, and problematise its relationship with the state and the power relations that underpin it. Such an approach is well suited to conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts because it helps to deconstruct the international–local binary that persists within post-colonial critiques. It also helps to analyse resistance beyond the international–local binary, such as government pressures and restrictions on civil society which have become increasingly salient in post-conflict contexts such as Burundi. This paper contributes to the literature on civil society in post-conflict contexts through reconceptualising it as an assemblage. Using this term encourages

us to move beyond viewing post-conflict civil society as a group of associations. Rather, the term encompasses the different organisations, mobilisations, and individuals that make up civil society, as well as the offices they inhabit and the activities and programmes they run, their individual and collective agencies and the values that drive them, and the various discourses they challenge and reproduce. It also captures the difference and agency that characterise civil society in Burundi, but also emphasises its fragility, tentative and contested emergence over many decades, and ultimately its vulnerability in the face of government restrictions and dominant social and political norms.

## Chapter 6

### *Civil society, legitimacy and political space: understanding processes of legitimisation and delegitimisation in violent and divided contexts*<sup>17</sup>

Eighteen months after widespread protests erupted following the announcement that the President would run for an unconstitutional third term, the Burundian government banned five of the country's leading human rights organisations. The statement issued by the Ministry of the Interior said that the groups, many of which were involved in organising the protests, had 'tarnished the image of the country' and 'sowed hatred and division in the heart of the population'.<sup>18</sup> Pressure on political and operating space for civil society in Burundi was nothing new; the government had introduced a number of restrictions in the years preceding the controversial and contested elections in 2015.

However, not all organisations experienced these restrictions and pressures in the same way. Much of the existing policy literature on political and operating space for civil society argues that groups and individuals that work on issues considered to be political or sensitive, such as human rights or democracy promotion, are more vulnerable to restrictions and pressures (ACT Alliance, 2011; ACT Alliance and CIDSE, 2014; Civicus, 2013b; Trocaire, 2012; Carothers and Brechenmacher, 2014). Although government restrictions in Burundi were largely targeted at prominent human rights and democracy promotion organisations and their outspoken leaders, other groups were able to continue

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<sup>17</sup> Submitted as a journal article to *Voluntas*.

<sup>18</sup> Interior Minister Pascal Barandagiye, quoted by Carina Tertsakian on 26 October 2016 in 'Fearing Dissent, Burundi's Government Clamps Down: Activists banned, Media punished', Human Rights Watch Dispatches, available online at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/26/fearing-dissent-burundis-government-clamps-down>. Accessed 1 December 2016.

working on these issues at the same time without experiencing the same degree of constraints.

This paper asks why some organisations working on human rights and democracy promotion in Burundi were more vulnerable to restrictions than others, and considers whether civil society legitimacy can help to explain some of these differences. It draws on qualitative evidence from Burundi, gathered from 83 semi-structured interviews with representatives from 25 domestic civil society groups as well as international nongovernmental organisations and multilateral institutions, which were conducted over five months between June 2014 and April 2015. The paper focuses on the experiences of thirteen domestic civil society organisations that work on human rights and democracy promotion issues in Burundi. It draws on material from 40 interviews with 35 activists. Respondents and their organisations will not be named owing to the heightened political tension in Burundi at the time of writing.

Activists working for five of these organisations explained that either they or their colleagues had experienced harassment and intimidation or other pressures in the run-up to the 2015 elections, while those working for the eight other organisations did not have direct experience of restrictions. The paper examines a number of different explanations for this, including organisational function (e.g. monitoring, advocacy, socialisation), scale of operation (e.g. national, provincial, local), and approach to engaging with authorities (e.g. confrontational, cooperative). It argues that these factors are extremely important, but do not on their own explain why some organisations faced much more severe pressures than others. The experiences of these organisations also relate to their legitimacy, and the extent to which they and the individual activists associated with them are perceived to challenge the political legitimacy and authority of government elites.

The experiences of these civil society groups illustrate just some of the many connections between legitimacy and political space for civil society in contexts marked by violence and political division, such as Burundi. Remarkably, these relations are relatively unexplored within the existing literature on political space for civil society and civil society legitimacy. This paper seeks to build a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the relationship between legitimacy and political space for civil

society in violent and divided societies. It views both legitimacy and political space as situated processes that are negotiated and contested. Consequently, they are both often ‘a matter of degree’ rather than something absolute, which you either have or you do not (Walton, 2013: 21). Furthermore, both concepts are also relational and concern perceptions. Whereas legitimacy relates to the perceptions of external constituencies (such as national governments, international organisations, or grassroots communities), political space relates to the perceptions of civil society actors themselves. The paper begins by exploring definitions of civil society legitimacy and political space within the literature in greater depth, as well as the existing research on legitimacy in violent and divided contexts. It will then look at the issues of political space for civil society in Burundi and some of the factors that may explain why some organisations were able to work on issues considered to be political or sensitive without experiencing direct restrictions and others were not. It then considers this same question through the lens of legitimacy and concludes by exploring relations between civil society legitimacy and political space for civil society.

## Civil society legitimacy and political space for civil society

The connections between legitimacy and political space for civil society are relatively unexplored within the relevant literature. One possible explanation for this is that much of the existing research on civil society legitimacy is focused on organisations rather than the social and political landscape within which they are situated. The literature on political space, on the other hand, concentrates on external environment, namely the restrictions placed on civil society groups, rather than how organisations themselves might influence this space. Where the characteristics and behaviours of organisations are considered, possible connections to civil society legitimacy are not addressed (van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014; Dupuy et al, 2015). However, there are some authors who highlight the connections between broader struggles for political legitimacy and either organisational legitimacy (Walton, 2008 & 2013), or political space for civil society (Wood, 2016; van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014).

## Legitimacy

Generally speaking, political legitimacy relates to the acceptance of an authority as just and proper. For Weber (1964), a political authority is considered as legitimate when its subjects have faith in it and consequently, are willing to obey it. Weber is interested in understanding how legitimacy is produced. Consequently, his definition of legitimacy is strictly descriptive, but the concept also has strong normative dimensions. Here, an authority is considered to be legitimate when it meets certain standards or embodies particular norms. However, purely normative definitions can neglect the processes through which legitimacy is constructed and reproduced, as well as the ways in which it is eroded and undermined. Within the Weberian tradition, legitimacy is associated with the state, which is considered to be the primary source of political legitimacy. However, legitimacy is also produced in structures and spaces outside of the state. Jeffrey, McConnell, and Wilson discuss these alternative sites of legitimacy in order to ‘shine a light on the wider arena of political actors, forms of agency and sites of contestation through which legitimacy is produced’ (2015: 177). Through focusing on sites such as defacto states, governments-in-exile, and liberation movements they seek to ‘unsettle an image of political legitimacy that has often foregrounded the sovereign state as the sole arbiter and provider of legitimacy’ (Jeffrey et al, 2015: 177).

One of these alternatives sites is civil society. Organisations and individuals within civil society have the potential to reinforce or challenge the legitimacy of the state (which can be problematic, especially in places torn by violence and political divisions where authority is contested). However, they may also have political legitimacy in their own right. The existing literature on civil society legitimacy is focused primarily on the legitimacy of organisations; either nongovernmental organisations (Atack, 1998; Edwards, 1999; Brown, 2001; Lister, 2003; Brown and Jagadananda, 2007; Walton, 2008 & 2013) or international nongovernmental organisations and transnational civil society networks (Collingwood and Logister, 2005; Brown, 2008; Ossewaarde et al, 2008; Walton et al, 2016). Several definitions of organisational legitimacy exist within the literature, the most prominent of which is that of Suchman, who defines it as ‘a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed

system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions' (1995: 574). Most definitions contain a strong normative dimension. Organisations that are considered to be legitimate are those that 'are seen to be appropriate and accepted actors whose activities can be justified in terms of the values, norms, laws and expectations of their social contexts' (Brown, 2008: 2) and 'enjoy the support of an identifiable community' (Edwards, 1999: 258). For these writers, organisational legitimacy is closely connected to accountability and transparency, and can be generated through improving their technical performance, building stronger relationships with their constituencies, and increased transparency. Walton et al. (2016) argue that these definitions can be rather technical and tend to 'view legitimacy challenges in terms of technical deficiencies'. The focus on organisational accountability, performance, and representativeness within technical and practitioner perspectives often obscures much deeper and more political questions about legitimacy (Lister, 2003; Walton, 2013). As with other normative approaches to legitimacy, they may also neglect the ways in which legitimacy is constructed and reproduced.

Legitimacy is a political rather than a technical issue. It is a situated process that is embedded within and shaped by social and power relations. Writers such as Lister (2003) and Walton (2008 & 2013) adopt an approach to civil society legitimacy, which views it as something that is socially constructed. They contend that legitimacy relates to the perceptions of different stakeholders about whether an organisation or its behaviour conforms to their values and expectations about civil society. These expectations are rooted within specific normative frameworks. Consequently, different constituencies (such as the national government, international donors, and local communities) often have different expectations about civil society, and what constitutes a legitimate actor or behaviour. This means that organisations may be considered legitimate by some groups and not others. Legitimacy may even be directly contradictory. Being seen to possess legitimacy in one constituency may actually undermine an organisation's legitimacy in the eyes of another. For example, being seen to possess a high degree of legitimacy with the international community may result in an organisation being seen as less legitimate by domestic stakeholders such as the national government. Furthermore, each group will privilege certain kinds of legitimacy over others (see

Table 7). Broadly speaking, there are four kinds of legitimacy: regulatory, pragmatic, normative, and cognitive (Brown and Jagadananda, 2007; Lister, 2003). Lister argues that different kinds of legitimacy may come into conflict with each other and she urges us to consider the power relations implicit in legitimisation processes by asking ‘which legitimacy matters’ and ‘for whom?’ (2003: 184).

**TABLE 7: KINDS OF LEGITIMACY**

|                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Regulatory legitimacy</i> | Where an organisation is seen to be compliant with legal frameworks and regulatory requirements concerning civil society, as well as all other laws governing a particular jurisdiction                                        |
| <i>Pragmatic legitimacy</i>  | Where an organisation is perceived to meet or represent the interests and demands of a specific constituency                                                                                                                   |
| <i>Normative legitimacy</i>  | Where an organisation is seen to meet social norms, values, and standards about what civil society organisations can and should be doing by different constituencies                                                           |
| <i>Cognitive legitimacy</i>  | Where organisations are seen as making sense within larger societal narratives and structures, and are recognised, accepted, and even taken for granted as being part of the way things are within a particular social context |

Sources: Brown and Jagadananda, 2007 and Lister, 2003

## **Political space and processes of legitimisation and delegitimisation**

Within the burgeoning policy literature on political space for civil society, civil society space is defined as ‘the environment within which civil society operates’ (UNHRC, 2014: 1). These environments are characterised as either enabling or disabling. Calling an environment ‘enabling’ denotes the presence of supportive conditions that allow civil society to grow and to flourish, whereas calling it ‘disabling’ indicates the presence of ‘restrictive conditions...[which] make it harder for civil society groups to exist, function, grow and offer their best contribution to society’ (Civicus, 2013: 10). Transnational civil society networks and INGOs argue that space for civil society is shrinking around the world as governments within semi-authoritarian states and partial democracies impose restrictions on civil society through legal and regulatory frameworks that constrain the creation and operation of civil society groups, or through arbitrarily arresting and detaining civil society activists and human rights defenders (ACT Alliance and CIDSE, 2014;

Carothers and Brechenmacher, 2014; Civicus, 2013b; Trocaire, 2012; World Movement for Democracy and INCL, 2012).

Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2014) define political space for civil society as ‘the very opportunities and threats that organisations or individuals experience in a political context, as well as the ways they use those opportunities’ (van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014: 36). Consequently, the political and operating space of particular organisations is ‘not simply taken up... [but] is also made by these organisations and can be claimed or reshaped by NGOs themselves’ (van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014: 37). Their study focuses on three factors that shape this space: the political context within which it is situated, the policies and actions of state and non-state actors that place restrictions on NGOs, and the particular characteristics of NGOs that can make them more vulnerable to these restrictions (such as organisational resources or behaviour). Van der Borgh and Terwindt identify a number of pressures on civil society, which are often interlinked and ‘occur in a certain order or cycle of escalation’ (van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014: 42). They find that political space for civil society is ‘not systematically repressed’ and that some organisations are more vulnerable to pressures than others. This paper argues that political space also relates to the individual and collective perceptions of civil society actors themselves (Beswick, 2010), which are shaped by historical and contemporary experiences of government restrictions or of harassment and intimidation, as well as emotions and subjectivities, such as a fear of reprisals. These perceptions may influence the behaviour of activists and organisations, and the extent to which they are able to claim or reshape their political and operating space. Furthermore, these perceptions are not static, but are liable to fluctuate in relation to changes within the social and political landscape within which activists and organisations are situated.

Perceptions of political space among activists are also affected by processes of legitimisation and delegitimisation, which are situated within particular social and political landscapes and are highly context-specific. In violent and divided settings such as conflict zones, or those places where political space for civil society is under threat, these processes are often highly politicised and the context within which they are situated can be extremely dynamic and unstable (Walton, 2013).

Civil society organisations located within these places face particular legitimacy issues. The first set of challenges relates to legal and regulatory frameworks and foreign funding for civil society in violent and divided contexts. While good legislation and a supportive regulatory environment can improve civil society legitimacy, a poor or restrictive legislative framework can undermine it (Hayman et al., 2013 & 2014).

However, legislative frameworks in violent and divided contexts are often either weak, or place burdensome and sometimes arbitrary restrictions on civil society (ACT Alliance and CIDSE, 2014; Civicus, 2013; Trocaire, 2012). An increasing number of governments have also introduced legislation that either prohibits or restricts foreign funding for civil society in recent years (Christensen and Weinstein, 2013). Such legislation may be introduced for various reasons. Some national governments see organisations that receive foreign funding as more accountable to international donors than to domestic constituencies, and use these concerns about local legitimacy to justify restrictions on civil society (See Wood, 2016 on Kenya; Dupuy et al, 2015 on Ethiopia; Chahim & Prakash, 2014 on Nicaragua). Organisations that receive foreign funding in violent and divided contexts often come to be associated with externally imposed agendas, and may be subject to ‘powerful anti-NGO discourses’ that ‘are usually based on fears that NGOs are providing a surreptitious means for foreign governments to influence domestic politics’ (Walton, 2013: 28). Consequently, governments may also introduce such legislation in the hope of weakening groups that are thought to be capable of mobilising opposition to their regimes (Christensen and Weinstein, 2013).

The second set of challenges relates to the highly politicised and extremely fluid and changeable nature of violent and divided contexts. Perceptions about which behaviours are legitimate are liable to change as the social and political landscape shifts during and after violent conflict. Byrne and Klem argue that ‘post-war transitions represent particularly fluid and precarious moments where new rules of the game are negotiated. This involves important shifts in the kinds of politics that are considered legitimate and those that are rendered out of bounds’ (2015: 225). Shifts in the social and political terrain during and after violence can have a profound effect on the legitimacy of civil

society organisations and their political space. Walton finds that processes of legitimisation and delegitimisation in conflict-affected environments ‘are liable to fluctuation in relation to changes in the political climate and are likely to be instrumentalised by political actors’ (2013: 19). This is because they are often linked to broader struggles for political legitimacy. In some contexts, where the political legitimacy of the ruling regime is contested, civil society organisations may be seen as part of the political opposition, representatives of foreign interests. This may lead governments to view them as a potential alternative source of legitimacy, and even as a threat to state power and sovereignty (Wood, 2016; van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014; Walton, 2013). Governments may also deliberately undermine the legitimacy of organisations that they view as a threat.

## Political space for civil society in Burundi

Burundi has endured several cycles of ethnic conflict and genocidal violence since it gained independence from Belgium in 1962 (Daley, 2008; Lemarchand, 1996 & 2009; Uvin, 1999 & 2009; Watt, 2008). In 1993, the assassination of Burundi’s first democratically elected Hutu president precipitated a civil war that lasted for over a decade, and resulted in the deaths of at least 300,000 people (Daley, 2008; Uvin, 2009). Peace negotiations led to the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Accords in 2000, which provided for the establishment of a power-sharing government and multi-party elections, first held in 2005 and won by Pierre Nkurunziza and the CNDD-FDD. Although the saliency of ethnicity declined in the post-war period, political divisions between the ruling party and opposition supporters have increased, as have levels of political and everyday violence, especially around elections.

Prior to the 2015 elections, Burundi had a vibrant and active civil society with a diverse range of organisations working on a variety of issues. However, over the post-war decade (2005–2015), the government systematically targeted organisations and activists that it perceived to be a threat to its own political authority and legitimacy. Increasing pressures on civil society and opposition parties led international human rights organisations to claim that political space is shrinking in Burundi (Amnesty International, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2012; Human Rights Watch, 2010). Within

the policy literature, shrinking space for civil society tends to be seen as a relatively recent phenomenon in Burundi, yet previous regimes have also placed restrictions on civil society and opposition parties, and dissent has often been met with violence and repression in the past (Lemarchand, 1996; Daley, 2008). Relations between civil society and the Nkurunziza regime became increasingly confrontational around the 2010 elections, and deteriorated further around the 2015 elections. The government used a variety of strategies to limit political space for civil society groups in the run-up to the 2015 elections, including the introduction of restrictive legislation and the harassment and intimidation of activists. They also sought to impede the day-to-day operation of certain groups by disrupting meetings, refusing to meet with representatives, and limiting access to information that should be publicly available (Amnesty International, 2014). They also sought to undermine the operation of more prominent civil society organisations through the establishment of pro-government groups or GONGOs (government owned nongovernmental organisations).

### **Political space for groups working on human rights and democracy**

Not all civil society organisations in Burundi have experienced these restrictions in the same way or to the same extent. The existing policy literature on political and operating space for civil society argues that organisations that work on issues considered to be political or sensitive within a society, such as human rights and democracy promotion, tend to experience greater restrictions (ACT Alliance, 2011; ACT Alliance and CIDSE, 2014; Civicus, 2013b; Trocaire, 2012). In the lead up to the 2015 elections the Burundian government targeted organisations that work on democracy and human rights. However, when asked how they would describe their relationship with the government, individuals who worked or volunteered for organisations working on human rights and democracy promotion gave a mixed response. In total, thirteen of the organisations that participated in this study explained that they work on issues related to democratisation and human rights (see Table 8). Some of the topics that they worked on included electoral violence, torture, and other human rights abuses, corruption and participatory governance, democratic institutions, and public freedoms. Of these thirteen organisations, five said that they had experienced direct restrictions, while the other eight had not. Here ‘direct restrictions’ refers either to the harassment

and intimidation of activists by the security services or militias associated with political parties such as the *Imbonerakure*, or government interference in the internal functioning of organisations. The latter includes banning or disrupting meetings, prohibiting decision-makers from meeting with representatives of certain organisations, blocking access to information, and using pro-government groups to undermine organisations.

**TABLE 8: GROUPS WORKING ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY PROMOTION**

| <b>Group</b> | <b>Structure</b> | <b>Primary domain</b>                  | <b>Primary scale of operation</b> | <b>Functions</b>                                                        | <b>Experience of direct restrictions</b> |
|--------------|------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <b>1</b>     | Association      | Human rights                           | National                          | Monitoring<br>Advocacy<br>Service delivery                              | Yes                                      |
| <b>2</b>     | Association      | Peacebuilding<br>Human Rights          | Local and<br>National             | Socialisation<br>Advocacy<br>Research                                   | No                                       |
| <b>3</b>     | Association      | Peacebuilding<br>Human Rights          | Local                             | Mediation<br>Advocacy<br>Socialisation<br>Social cohesion<br>Monitoring | No                                       |
| <b>4</b>     | Association      | Peacebuilding<br>Human Rights          | National and<br>Local             | Advocacy<br>Socialisation<br>Service delivery                           | No                                       |
| <b>5</b>     | Association      | Peacebuilding                          | National                          | Advocacy<br>Research<br>Mediation                                       | No                                       |
| <b>6</b>     | Network          | Democracy<br>promotion                 | National                          | Advocacy<br>Monitoring<br>Socialisation                                 | Yes                                      |
| <b>7</b>     | Association      | Human rights<br>Democracy<br>promotion | National                          | Advocacy<br>Socialisation                                               | Yes                                      |
| <b>8</b>     | Network          | Human rights<br>Democracy<br>promotion | National                          | Advocacy<br>Socialisation                                               | Yes                                      |
| <b>9</b>     | Network          | Democracy<br>promotion                 | Local                             | Monitoring<br>Mediation<br>Advocacy                                     | No                                       |
| <b>10</b>    | Association      | Human rights                           | National                          | Advocacy<br>Socialisation<br>Monitoring<br>Service delivery             | Yes                                      |
| <b>11</b>    | Network          | Peacebuilding                          | Local and<br>National             | Mediation<br>Socialisation<br>Advocacy<br>Social cohesion<br>Monitoring | No                                       |

|    |             |                        |          |                                                     |    |
|----|-------------|------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------------------------|----|
| 12 | Association | Peacebuilding          | Local    | Mediation<br>Socialisation<br>Social cohesion       | No |
| 13 | Association | Democracy<br>promotion | National | Monitoring<br>Research<br>Advocacy<br>Socialisation | No |

The five organisations that had experienced direct restrictions tended to be prominent organisations that conducted advocacy on democracy and human rights at the national level. These organisations were often located in Bujumbura, had limited connections to grassroots communities, and were heavily dependent on international and multilateral funding, although some associations did receive a modest income from membership subscriptions. Many of these groups also had prominent and vocal leaders. Speaking about their relations with the authorities, a male activist from one of these organisations explained that ‘there is a good collaboration but sometimes it is not easy... sometimes there is a bad relation, but it depends on the issue we are working on’ (Interview with activist from Group 1, 31 March 2015). A female activist working with another of these organisations described their relationship with the authorities as ‘one of strained collaboration’ because they are considered to be ‘part of a group of organisations that are not really tolerated by the government’ (Interview with activist from Group 10, 30 September 2014). Most interviewees from this group felt this was because the government perceived them to be too close to or even part of the political opposition in Burundi. A male activist described his organisation’s relationship with the authorities as ‘not that close, or that good...because we are counted as part of the opposition by them’ (Interview with activist from Group 8, 23 March 2015), while a male respondent from another organisation explained that, ‘[the authorities] refuse to collaborate. Ministers are forbidden to meet with members of [our organisation]. They accuse us of working with the opposition’ (Interview with activist from Group 7, 27 March 2015). Many of those interviewed also reported receiving threatening phone calls or experiencing other forms of harassment and intimidation.

The organisations that had not experienced direct restrictions were far more diverse. Notably, they included a number of faith-based organisations. These organisations tend to have much stronger

connections to grassroots communities as well as influential institutions such as the Catholic Church or the Episcopalian and Mennonite churches. Although they also rely on funding from international donors, some have much stronger domestic resource mobilisation capacities than human rights organisations. They work on issues such as human rights, participatory governance, and democratisation, but this is often a secondary focus and their primary work often concerns issues such as reconciliation and non-violent conflict resolution. A male activist from a large faith-based association that does a lot of work on human rights and governance within communities described their relationship with the authorities ‘as one of mutual aid and assistance, that is, one of contact and consultation’ (Interview with activist from Group 4, 30 March 2015). The male leader of another faith-based association stated that their organisation is ‘respected throughout the country’ and explained that ‘when we invite the authorities to our activities, they come. They also invite us to participate in activities organised by the administration’ (Interview with activist from Group 11, 19 March 2015).

Other associations included in this group were a handful of organisations primarily involved in conducting research on human rights and democracy promotion, and a network that monitors these issues at the grassroots level. A male respondent from one of these organisations explained that they are not targeted in the same way as other groups that work on issues such as good governance, democratisation, and human rights, and that they have a more constructive relationship with the authorities: ‘there are no problems. We participate in activities which we are requested to participate in that are organised by the government... When we organise activities, [government] representatives will participate in them. (Interview with activist from Group 13, 25 September 2014).

## Why did some groups face more pressure than others?

The differences in experiences among the human rights and democracy promotion community in Burundi raises a number of important questions, one of which is why some organisations were able to work on these issues without experiencing direct restrictions, while others were not. There are a

number of possible explanations for this, including organisational function (e.g. monitoring, advocacy, socialisation), scale of operation (e.g. national, provincial, local), and approach to engaging with authorities (e.g. confrontational, cooperative). Another possible explanation that will not be considered here is the personal networks and relationships of activists. Bujumbura is a relatively small place, and many of the activists that work for these organisations come from an elite background. Their personal networks and relationships could explain why some individuals and not others have experience restrictions. The reason that it is not included here is that it was not something that came up in interviews. Understanding of how personal networks and relationships influence political space is something that could be developed with further research.

### **Function and scale of operation**

Organisations working on human rights and democracy promotion adopted a range of functions, from monitoring and denouncing human rights violations, corruption, and electoral violence, to engaging in socialisation activities and human rights education. Much of the policy literature on political space for civil society argues that organisations that engage in advocacy or claim-making on issues that are considered to be sensitive or political are more likely to experience pressures than those engaged in activities like service delivery, for example (ACT Alliance and CIDSE, 2014). Nearly all the organisations that work on human rights and democracy promotion issues in this study are involved in advocacy or claim-making activities of some sort, yet not all of them experience pressures. Van Der Borgh and Terwindt (2014) argue that although organisations that engage in claim-making on sensitive issues are more vulnerable to pressures, they rarely experience them evenly. This is because ‘pressures are not simply the result of the fact that NGOs make claims, but depend on the extent to which they are perceived to impinge on the interests of different kinds of elites’ (2014: 168). Organisations that encroach on the interests of national elites are thought to be more vulnerable to pressures.

In Burundi, all the organisations targeted by the government conducted advocacy on human rights and democracy promotion at the national level, whereas most organisations that had not

experienced direct restrictions primarily conducted advocacy at the local level. A male community-based activist working for a faith-based group explained that: ‘when there is a problem in our communities we’ll go to the police. For example, if someone has been unfairly detained we advocate for them to free that person’ (Interview with activist from Group 3, 17 March 2015). He went on to say that: ‘if someone tells us they think that there is corruption going on we take it to the local authorities. We tell them there is a problem with their staff, and ask them to address it’ (Interview with activist from Group 3, 17 March 2015). However, the relationship between function, scale, and restrictions is not always so clear-cut. Among those organisations that had not experienced direct restrictions were three that conduct advocacy at both the local and the national level. A male activist working for one of these organisations described how their advocacy traverses both scales:

We have evolved as a channel that can connect local voices to national dynamics. That is why we are mainly conducting research and advocacy. We go to communities, we talk to them, we collect their views, the challenges they face, the issues they are faced with. And then participate in fora at the national and even international level where we make sure they are valued, taken into account when it is time to work on policies at the national level (Interview with activist from Group 2, 9 April 2015).

A male activist working for a large faith-based organisation that conducts advocacy on human rights at both levels also explained that they had not encountered any problems with the authorities.

We also conduct advocacy at the national level, notably by gathering data on certain situations that are occurring relating to human rights. We search for experts who analyse the situation and present it to the Catholic Bishops’ Conference, and they use it for advocacy. We’ll also work directly with ministers and parliamentarians. We send letters, organise conferences, write reports, produce awareness-raising programmes, and we publish articles on the Web and in the press. (Interview with activist from Group 4, 30 March 2015).

Organisations may also experience pressures at the local level, a fact that complicates the picture further. Some activists alluded to the presence of restrictions for organisations involved in advocacy at the grassroots. A male activist working with a faith-based association that operates at the local

level said organisations can have problems when they come across corruption in the communities that they work in:

If you touch the particular interests of a person within the government who has a dirty record, he will attempt to discredit the organisation you represent... if you touch an issue that is political or sensitive to the government, such as reports of corruption or of crimes by police against the population, there can be a problem. They won't let you work. (Interview with activist from Group 12, 06 March 2015).

Although organisations that conduct advocacy on issues considered to be sensitive or political are more likely to experience restrictions, there are many organisations that are able to do so without constraints. Most of these organisations tend to work primarily at the local level. However, there are organisations that are able to conduct advocacy on human rights and democracy issues at a national level without restrictions, and some organisations have also faced restrictions when working at the local level. Restrictions and pressures at the local level may also go unnoticed and may not be recorded by either organisations or the national media.

### **Approach to advocacy and claim-making**

Van der Borgh and Terwindt (2014) find that claim-making organisations that adopt confrontational strategies are more likely to experience pressures. Organisations that are involved in advocacy and claim-making on human rights and democracy promotion in Burundi adopt a number of different strategies. Organisations that did not experience direct restrictions often adopted a less confrontational approach to advocacy and claim-making. A male activist working for a faith-based organisation was even reluctant to use the word 'advocacy' to describe what they do.

Interviewer: Is there an advocacy component to the project? Respondent: Yes, but we use a different word, not advocacy. This is the word that [our donor] uses. Interviewer: You use a different word? Respondent: It's a Kirundi word, it's similar to advocacy and lobbying but a bit different. It means trying to convince. So we try to convince administrators to do something for the benefit of the population... Interviewer: So it's less strong than advocacy, less confrontational? Respondent: Yes. (Interview with activist from Group 11, 27 March 2015).

Another activist working for the same organisation described their approach to advocacy as '*diplomatie douce*', which roughly translates as 'soft diplomacy'. He explained how this approach differs from that used by other civil society groups:

We have civil society organisations for whom advocacy is central to their work. They publish, they speak on the radio, they write these memorandums attacking the president and decision-makers. At [our organisation] we use what we call '*diplomatie douce*'. We approach decision-makers and we ask to meet them... We ask for a meeting, we approach them, we explain the change we are looking to see, we share our experience with them, and ask them to accept our change. The meetings are often informal. We don't publish in the media. (Interview with activist from Group 11, 18 March 2015).

Grounding advocacy in research was also important for many civil society organisations that sought to adopt a more cooperative approach. A male activist working for a peacebuilding and human rights group that works at the national and the local level explained how research-based advocacy was essential to protecting their political and operating space:

Most of the time the government sees human rights NGOs as people who are there to say whatever they want whenever they want to say it, without bringing evidence. That is why we have invested a lot in research to make sure our advocacy work is also evidence-based. This has even been a strategy for our own security because when you really invest in research, you collect data, you collect accurate information. Once you bring it [to the government] people will not tend to play a defensive game. (Interview with activist from Group 2, 9 April 2015).

Other groups also used research-based advocacy to create spaces for engagement with the government. A female activist working with a peacebuilding organisation explained how they include decision-makers in their research: 'We have a steering committee, and this is made up of decision-makers e.g. presidents of political parties, the minister of the interior. We keep them informed, and seek their advice on issues.' (Interview with activist from Group 5, 7 April 2015).

Most organisations working at the local level also sought to build the capacity of communities to engage with local authorities in a constructive manner. A male activist working with a faith-based

organisation explained that: ‘we support communities to work with the local administration, identify problems, and try to talk to the local administration about them. They try to propose joint solutions and offer their help’ (Interview activist from Group 11, 30 March 2015). A male community-based activist working with a different organisation gave an example of their anti-corruption work within a particular community. Members of the committee recognised that there was a problem with corruption at the local market, which meant that the traders were refusing to pay their taxes and the authority was losing out on much-needed revenue. Their intervention helped to solve a long-running conflict between market traders and government officials, and also improved relations between the faith-based organisation and the local authorities.

We went into the market to encourage traders to begin paying taxes, and we also worked with the authorities to reduce corruption. We engaged in awareness-raising with the authorities and the traders to try to change perceptions, and show that reducing corruption would lead to an increase in taxation, which would benefit both parties... At the start our work wasn’t appreciated [by the local authorities], but our perceptions of each other changed following our work in the market. Our relations improved and now we are really appreciated. (Interview with activist from Group 3, 17 March 2015).

Organisations that faced direct restrictions often pursued a more confrontational approach to claim-making. A male activist working for a peacebuilding and human rights organisation that had not experienced direct restrictions was critical of the confrontational approach pursued by some organisations:

There are some who think that civil society must systematically oppose the government, that a civil society organisation is one that systematically opposes the government. That is not really my point of view. It’s difficult to influence the revision of laws, it’s difficult to influence the revision of policies, it’s difficult to conduct campaigns. The government is not persuaded in this way. It’s very difficult. If the government don’t see any wish for collaboration, they’ll never accept your proposition and they’ll treat you as an opponent. And it’s the population who lose out, because if unpopular laws stay in place, there is anger. (Interview with activist from Group 2, 29 September 2014).

Many groups working on human rights and democracy promotion issues chose to work together through national coalitions, which often pursued an adversarial approach towards advocacy. The clearest example of this is the civil society campaign that sought to prevent the Burundian president from standing for an unconstitutional third term. The campaign was launched in January 2015, and played an important role in organising the first protests that took place in April 2015. A male activist described the *Stop the Third Term!* Campaign as ‘the most important, actually, the most dangerous, the most striking action that we have undertaken as civil society’ (Interview with activist from Group 8, 23 March 2015). The campaign argued that the decision of the president to run for a third term violated the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, upon which the foundations of the post-war Burundian state rest. In doing so, the campaign, which was led by some of the country’s most prominent human rights organisations, directly challenged the authority and legitimacy of the president.

Although the use of confrontational strategies makes organisations more vulnerable to restrictions, many of the human rights activists interviewed felt that they had no choice but to pursue a confrontational approach. A male activist working for a high-profile human rights organisation said:

When we do a study, and we have recommendations, we’ll approach the relevant government officials. But they don’t want to meet us. So we have no choice but to denounce. We write letters, but they don’t respond. They refuse to meet us; they refuse our demands. (Interview with activist from Group 7, 27 March 2015).

Consequently, human rights activists often turn to the media to provoke a response from the government. As a male activist from another organisation explained: ‘when you have made your statement through the media and you are tough... they will respond’ (Interview with activist from Group 8, 23 March 2015). Limited opportunities for more constructive engagement with the authorities meant that those working for these organisations felt that they had to pursue more confrontational strategies in order to change their operating environment and challenge restrictions. Clearly the relationship between an organisation’s approach to advocacy and its experience of

restrictions and pressures is not a straightforward one. Organisations that lacked political space felt they had no option but to use more confrontational approaches, which put them at increased risk of pressure and further reduced their political space. Whereas organisations that had access to public authorities and consequently had a greater degree of political space were able to pursue less adversarial approaches to claim-making.

## Legitimacy and political space in Burundi

Although factors such as organisational function, scale of intervention, and approach to advocacy and claim-making are extremely important, they do not on their own explain why some organisations working on human rights and democracy promotion issues in Burundi faced much more severe pressures than others. This is because the experiences of these organisations also relate to their legitimacy, and the extent to which they and the individual activists associated with them are perceived to challenge the political legitimacy and authority of government elites.

### **Legitimacy of groups working on human rights and democracy**

Organisations working on human rights and democracy promotion in Burundi possess different degrees of legitimacy. As previously discussed, legitimacy relates to perceptions, which can differ widely among various groups of stakeholders, and several kinds of legitimacy exist (Lister, 2003; Brown and Jagadananda, 2007). Stakeholders often have different benchmarks or standards according to which they assess legitimacy, and they may privilege some kinds of legitimacy over others. A high degree of legitimacy with one stakeholder may even reduce their legitimacy in the eyes of another.

#### ***Regulatory and pragmatic legitimacy***

Regulatory legitimacy is produced through compliance with legal frameworks and regulatory requirements concerning civil society, including legislation covering the registration and governance of organisations as well as laws on related issues such as public protest (Lister, 2003; Brown and Jagadananda, 2007). In 1992, the Burundian government introduced a new legal and

regulatory framework for civil society that provided for the creation of non-profit organisations as legal entities.<sup>19</sup> This framework requires all organisations to register with the Interior Ministry, which has the authority to grant or refuse an organisation legal status. The law covers all non-profit organisations, with the exception of political groups, mutual benefit associations, and public interest bodies or foundations. All associations working on democracy promotion and human rights fall within the purview of this law, and those that are registered with the interior ministry and comply with provisions outlined within the legal and regulatory framework may be considered to have regulatory legitimacy.

Pragmatic legitimacy is generated where an organisation is perceived to meet or represent the interests and demands of a specific constituency or community (Lister, 2003; Brown and Jagadananda, 2007). Associations that have a stronger connection to communities in provinces outside the capital, such as those organisations that work closely with grassroots committees, often have a higher degree of pragmatic legitimacy than those that work solely at the national level. For example, grassroots committees are run by community-based volunteers, who provide important mediation and conflict-resolution services and will advocate on the behalf of individual community members, as well as the community as a whole. As a male activist who works for an organisation that supports a number of grassroots committees explained, they ‘are in charge of resolving differences and conflict between people, and they challenge injustices as well, such as corruption’ (Interview with activist from Group 3, 10 March 2015). Some committees also run community-based loans and savings schemes, and support income generating activities. They are also appreciated by the local authorities, with whom they often have a constructive relationship. A male activist working for another organisation explained:

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<sup>19</sup> Republique du Burundi, ‘Décret-loi n°1/11 du 18 avril 1992 portant cadre organique des associations sans but lucratif (ASBL)’. See Niyonkuru (2011) for an analysis of the former legal framework governing civil society in Burundi.

It's a close relationship. [The committees] have to collaborate [with the government]. When they have a meeting, they have to inform the local authorities... Also the authorities have an interest in the peace committees, because they help them to resolve conflict in the community. They make a positive contribution to the community. That's why it's a close relationship. (Interview with activist from Group 11, 20 March 2015).

Consequently, the committees are also perceived to meet the needs of local authorities, as well as those of local communities. The male leader of one organisation thought that this high degree of pragmatic legitimacy is the reason that they have a good relationship with the government, stating that 'we do lots of things in the country, so it's difficult to attack us easily. I think that's the reason. It protects us' (Interview with activist from Group 11, 19 March 2015). A male activist working for a peacebuilding and human rights group explained how their approach to advocacy helped them to strengthen their pragmatic legitimacy in the eyes of both communities and the government:

Our strategy is about education, it's about partnership with public institutions, it's about creating space for interaction between citizens and government institutions and it's about research-based advocacy. And it helps sometimes more than simply always denouncing what is happening. It's a good thing, we even contribute to their work, we provide [public authorities] with information...It took us more than 10 years to build this legitimacy. (Interview with activist from Group 2, 9 April 2015).

However, this was not the case for all organisations. Some groups targeted by the government also provided much-needed services to communities, especially to victims of human rights abuses, as well as campaigning on their behalf. As a male representative of one organisation explained, their main strength is that 'we are close to the population, we are very visible and well known as we provide direct support to victims' (Interview with activist from Group 1, 31 March 2015). While these services and the advocacy work that complements them generated significant benefits for communities and lent these organisations a high degree of pragmatic legitimacy among these groups, they did not generate pragmatic legitimacy in the eyes of the authorities, who were often the target of these advocacy efforts.

### *Normative and cognitive legitimacy*

Whereas normative legitimacy relates to whether an organisation is seen to meet social norms, values, and standards about what civil society organisations can and should be doing, cognitive legitimacy is where organisations are seen as making sense and are accepted as part of the way things are within a particular social context (Lister, 2003; Brown and Jagadananda, 2007). Organisations that did not experience direct restrictions, such as faith-based organisations, tended to possess much higher degrees of normative and cognitive legitimacy within Burundi than the high-profile human rights groups that were the target of government pressure. In interviews, representatives of these high-profile groups regularly expressed the view that the government does not understand what they do. As one male campaigner said: ‘the government needs to better understand the role of civil society, we need to explain it to the government and educate them about its advantages’ (Interview with activist from Group 7, 27 March 2015).

While the government recognises the provision of services as an admissible function of civil society, it does not see advocacy or campaigning, especially on issues that it considered to be sensitive or political such as corruption, as legitimate behaviour. Many of the prominent human rights organisations in Burundi that had experienced direct restrictions described themselves as ‘watchdogs’, whose primary role was to hold the government to account (Interview with male activist from Group 8, 23 March 2015). While this was not seen by the Burundian government more as an appropriate or legitimate function, it was widely recognised and supported by international nongovernmental organisations, as well as by multilateral institutions and bilateral donors, with whom they enjoyed strong normative and cognitive legitimacy. However, the support of the international community undermined the normative and cognitive legitimacy of these groups in the eyes of the Burundian government, who came to regard them as foreign agents. This perception was arguably reinforced through the use of what Keck and Sikkink (1998) have termed the ‘boomerang effect’, where national groups used transnational advocacy networks to appeal to people in other countries to put pressure on their own governments to challenge pressures and restrictions within Burundi.

Organisations that did not experience restrictions, such as faith-based organisations, tended to conform more to expectations among the authorities about what civil society groups should be and do. These organisations derived cognitive legitimacy from their faith-based identity and their relationship with religious institutions such as the Catholic Church, the Quakers, or the Mennonite Church. A one male activist working for a faith-based organisation explained, ‘The role of the Church is very important. It has an important place in our society... [It means that] we have a lot of credibility among the population’ (Interview with activist from Group 3, 10 March 2015). This was because the majority of the Burundian population are Christian, and recognised and accepted the values of faith-based organisations as appropriate. Another important source of normative and cognitive legitimacy for those organisations that did not experience direct pressures was their independence and political neutrality. Many activists I spoke to felt that their relationship with faith-based institutions reinforced perceptions of independence. As a male activist explained, their relationship with the Church ‘is one reason why the authorities appreciate us. We are seen as a neutral actor working for the benefit of the population. Our neutrality is very important here’ (Interview with activist from Group 3, 17 March 2015).

### **Political space and legitimisation and delegitimisation in Burundi**

Legitimacy and political space are both situated processes. The relations between these processes are complex; they are dialectical, and manifest themselves in multiple and interconnected ways. In Burundi, organisations with a higher degree of pragmatic, normative, and cognitive legitimacy were able to work on sensitive issues with fewer restrictions, while those with less legitimacy were more likely to experience pressures when they spoke out against human rights abuses or government corruption. This legitimacy was affected by the strategies that an organisation adopted and the way it behaved. Confrontational strategies and behaviour undermined perceptions of normative legitimacy among some constituencies, and organisations that used them were often more likely to experience restrictions. They reinforced the unfounded view that they were working either with or for the political opposition in Burundi, which further undermined their normative legitimacy and increased the perception that they were challenging the political legitimacy of the regime.

Governments may purposely seek to undermine the legitimacy and political space of organisations they view as a threat. As Walton (2013) notes, processes of legitimisation and delegitimisation are often linked to broader struggles for political legitimacy and in contexts where the political legitimacy of government elites is contested, civil society organisations may be seen as a threat to their power and authority. In the months preceding the 2015 elections, a wide variety of actors were seen to contest the political authority and legitimacy of the Burundian government when they challenged the decision of President Nkurunziza to run for a Third Term, which many of them viewed as unconstitutional. Among these actors were a number of prominent human rights organisations, and the Catholic Church. In the run-up to the contested elections the Burundian government systematically sought to delegitimise the organisations that it saw as a threat to its own political legitimacy and authority.

The government used a variety of strategies, such as stigmatisation and suspension, to undermine the legitimacy of these organisations and limit their political space. For example, they used anti-civil society discourses and shadow organisations to stigmatise organisations and activists and attack their normative and cognitive legitimacy in the run-up to the anti-third term protests. Many of the leading human rights groups explained that they have a parallel pro-government organisation that shadows their work, which often has a similar name or acronym to that of their organisation. A male representative from a leading human rights group explained how these parallel or shadow organisations operated, and how they affected their work:

When we release a declaration, they will release a contradictory declaration. They will say [our organisation] advocated this or [our organisation] said this and it's not true. It's extremely dangerous because its purpose is to discredit civil society actions, sometimes portraying us to be the voice of the opposition, or to be funded by the west in order to destabilise the regime. This is a big issue. (Interview with activist from Group 8, 23 March 2015).

Shadow organisations are part of a broader strategy to stigmatise more prominent organisations by challenging their actions, contradicting their statements, and spreading anti-civil society discourses which portray human rights organisations either as part of the political opposition or as foreign

agents. These anti-civil society discourses escalated in the run-up to the 2015 elections. Those organisations and individuals that participated in or supported the demonstrations were labelled as ‘insurgents’, ‘rebels’, and ‘terrorists’ in an attempt to justify undue restrictions on civil society and even the use of violence against them.

Another aspect of this strategy was the use of suspensions and bans, which were designed to limit the regulatory legitimacy of organisations. In 2009, the interior minister suspended one of the country’s leading human rights organisations. The ban, which was eventually lifted in 2011, was introduced after the organisation’s leader publicly implicated the government in the killing of an anti-corruption campaigner, although the interior minister claimed at the time that it related to technical problems with the organisation’s membership.<sup>20</sup> In October 2016, the government banned five of the most prominent human rights associations in Burundi, all of which were involved in the *Stop the Third Term!* Campaign which organised protests against the regime in 2015. Almost a year earlier, the government suspended the activities of ten civil society groups and a few days before suspensions were issued, demanded that national banks freeze the accounts of the organisations concerned, as well as those of three high-profile activists.<sup>21</sup> In December 2016, the government introduced a new law governing civil society, which makes it easier for the regime to undermine the regulatory legitimacy of organisations. The law requires organisations to renew their registration every two years. Groups also require approval from the relevant government

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<sup>20</sup> Human Rights Watch (February 2011) ‘Burundi: Lifting Ban on Activist Group a Positive Step: Government Should Do More to Promote Freedom of Association’. Available online at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/01/burundi-lifting-ban-activist-group-positive-step>. Accessed 30 August 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Ministerial Ordinance No 530/1547 of 23 November 2015; Statement by EHAHRDP, APRODH, ACAT-Burundi, FOCODE, FORSC, and RCP (23 November 2015) ‘Burundi: Soon there will be no human rights defenders left’. Published by East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP). Available online at: <https://www.defenddefenders.org/2015/11/burundi-soon-there-will-be-no-human-rights-defenders-left-burundi-bientot-il-ny-aura-plus-de-defenseurs-des-droits-de-lhomme/>. Accessed 25 August 2016.

department for all their activities, without which they face sanctions such as the closure of their offices and suspension of their activities.

The unstable and divided political context in Burundi, as well as the widespread violence that followed the anti-third term protests, also created challenges for organisations working on human rights and democratisation who had not previously experienced direct restrictions. For example, many faith-based organisations struggled with rising instrumentalisation and politicisation, which challenged their political neutrality and their cognitive and normative legitimacy. Prior to the 2015 elections the Catholic Church spoke out against the President's decision to run for a third term, and withdrew its support for the elections, stating that it 'cannot support an election riddled with shortcomings'.<sup>22</sup> The government responded by taking an increasingly critical and even antagonistic approach towards the Church in the months following the elections. In March 2016 the President of the National Assembly criticised the Church for playing 'a purely political, not spiritual role', and said that the government would not engage with 'sponsors of terrorism' and 'insurgent individuals who participated in the destabilisation of democratically elected institutions'.<sup>23</sup>

Speaking in March 2015, one activist who worked with a Catholic civil society organisation said that: 'the Catholic Church opposes the third term of the president, so at the moment the relationship between the Church and the government is not good.' (Interview with activist from Group 3, 10 March 2015). However, this was not the first time that the Burundian government had attacked the Church. As the leader of one faith-based organisation said, 'we are attached to the Catholic Church, so the challenges we face are the same as those of the Catholic Church' (Interview with female

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<sup>22</sup> Bishop Gervais Bashimiyubusa, quoted in an article by Al Jazeera (28 May 2015) 'Catholic church drops backing for Burundi election: Church withdraws support to upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections marred by violence against the president.' Available online at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/catholic-church-drops-backing-burundi-election-150528084805057.html>. Accessed 31 August 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Pascal Nyabenda, quoted by Jonathon Luxmoore (7 April 2016) 'Burundi official accuses Church of "sponsoring terrorism" as crisis engulfs the country', published in the Catholic Herald. Available online at <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/04/07/burundi-official-accuses-church-of-sponsoring-terrorism-as-crisis-engulfs-the-country/>. Accessed 31 March 2016.

activist from Group 4, 22 September 2014). In the 1980s, the president of the Second Republic suspended civil society organisations associated with the Church, which he saw as a threat to his political authority and legitimacy. Political neutrality and independence are an important factor for many organisations working on democracy promotion and human rights issues, and there was a concern that relationships may deteriorate at the grassroots, as the political impartiality of the Catholic Church is challenged at the national level.

## Conclusion

The political legitimacy of the Burundian regime has been highly contested. In 2015, an array of national and international actors spoke out against the decision of the president to stand for a third term, and thousands took to the streets of Bujumbura in protest. In contexts such as this, legitimacy and political space for civil society are often closely bound to broader struggles for power and authority. Governments whose own political legitimacy is contested may seek to weaken perceived opposition to their regime through undermining the legitimacy of those civil society groups they see as a threat (Walton, 2013). The Burundian government responded to the protests by challenging the legitimacy of vocal civil society groups, using anti-civil society discourses to stigmatise them, and even suspending organisations it saw as a threat. Restrictions on civil society are nothing new in Burundi, but they increased in the run-up to the 2015 elections, leading many observers to claim that political space in Burundi was shrinking.

However, not all civil society groups experienced these restrictions in the same way, and some were more vulnerable to government pressures than others. The policy literature on civil society space argues that organisations that engage in claim-making on issues considered to be sensitive or political, such as democracy promotion, are more likely to experience restrictions. While the government targeted organisations that worked on democracy and human rights, not all groups that work on these issues faced restrictions. This paper sought to establish why this is the case, and in doing so to build a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the connections between legitimacy and political space for civil society in violent and divided contexts such as Burundi.

## Chapter 7

### *Shrinking space: deconstructing international discourses on political space for civil society*<sup>24</sup>

International nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and global advocacy networks have turned their attention to the issue of political and operating space for civil society in recent years. They argue that civil society space is under threat in many places around the world as governments place restrictions on activists and organisations. Campaigners have successfully pushed the issue up the international agenda and are putting pressure on illiberal regimes to create and maintain an enabling environment for civil society, which is defined within the policy literature as the absence of restrictions and presence of supportive conditions that allows civil society to flourish (Civicus, 2013a). This advocacy is supported by a plethora of policy briefings and research reports that track how one government after another has enacted restrictive civil society legislation, implemented burdensome regulatory regimes, and harassed and intimidated activists.

This paper argues that these reports form the basis of an emerging policy discourse on political and operating space for civil society, or *civil society space* for short. They share a common vocabulary and possess similar understandings of civil society space, which they view as the environment within which civil society exists and operates. These documents tell many stories about the varied experiences of civil society actors around the world and the particular challenges they face, yet when viewed together as a body of literature one narrative dominates: globally, civil society space is shrinking. However, as Foucault (1972) notes, discourses are not just descriptive but productive; that is, they have functions and effects. This paper is concerned with exploring the extent to which

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<sup>24</sup> Submitted as a journal article to *The Journal of Civil Society*

this emerging policy discourse shapes the political and operating space of civil society groups on the ground in places where activists experience pressures and restrictions. It also situates the shrinking space narrative within broader liberal discourses that contribute to the construction and defence of ‘the liberal project’ in Africa (Williams and Young, 2012). The paper uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) to deconstruct discourses on political and operating space for civil society, and explore their intended functions and unintended effects. It will do this through looking at the case of Burundi, a country that is often cited within these documents as an example of closing space. It raises important concerns about the unintended effects liberal discourses have on civil society groups in Burundi and calls on transnational civil society actors to engage in critical reflection on the unintended impacts of the shrinking space narrative.

## Critical discourse analysis

The concept of discourse is widely used but can lack conceptual clarity and precision. It is often equated only with language, but discourse concerns both language and practice (Müller, 2008; Hall, 1997). For Müller, ‘the integration of practice into discourse yields the potential to engage with more varied forms of social production beyond texts, while preserving the critical focus on hegemony’ (2008: 334). CDA is a method that does this through situating the linguistic analysis of real texts within a broader analysis of social practices and power relations. It is influenced by the work of Foucault, who views discourses as systems of representation (Foucault, 1972; Hall, 1997). They are bodies of knowledge that are comprised of groups of statements; individual pieces of knowledge that are functional rather than descriptive (Foucault, 1972). Statements are often phrases or sentences, but can take many forms including images and maps, and are located within written or spoken texts. Specific practices govern the production of statements within each discourse, making it possible for particular statements but not others to emerge at specific times and in particular places. Consequently, power is integral to the production and reproduction of discourse (Foucault, 1980). CDA focuses on the dialectical relations between discourse and power,

particularly how discourses legitimise and sustain dominant power relations and social structures (Fairclough, 2010 & 1992).

The paper explores the dialectical relations between discourses on civil society space and power relations at different scales, and asks whether these discourses transform or reinforce dominant and often violent power relations in countries like Burundi. It is based on a systematic review and textual analysis of over one hundred policy documents produced by civil society groups, policy institutes, and multilateral organisations which discuss civil society space at the international level and in Burundi.<sup>25</sup> The review adopted a clear and replicable search strategy, which began with identifying organisations and institutions working on the issue of civil society space and conducting a search of their websites for relevant documents. The number of resources and organisations included in the review was expanded using a snowballing technique. Documents were selected based on explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria. They were then subjected to an in-depth textual analysis focused on the identification and analysis of discursive statements, as well as clues relating to the practices governing the production and reproduction of statements. Finally, the policy literature was compared to qualitative evidence gathered from 83 semi-structured interviews with civil society actors in Burundi, conducted between July 2014 and April 2015. This paper directly cites material from ten of these interviews. Respondents will not be named because of the heightened political situation in Burundi at the time of writing.

## Political space for civil society and the liberal project

International concern about civil society space is reflected in the emergence of a small but growing academic literature on the issue. Initially this literature was focused on the restrictions placed on civil society, especially organisations engaged in human rights and democracy promotion

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<sup>25</sup> In total 112 documents were included in a range of formats, including policy briefings, research reports, written and oral statements, advocacy letters, UN resolutions, and EU agreements. Documents were included from at least 27 organisations.

(Carothers, 2006; Gershman and Allen, 2006), and the impact of the war on terror and counter-terrorism measures on NGO funding and civil society space (Howell et al., 2008; Sen and Morris, 2008). The focus then shifted to the restrictions and pressures experienced by civil society in partial democracies and hybrid regimes, and in some cases how organisations have sought to respond to them (See Wood, 2016 on Kenya; Dupuy et al., 2015 on Ethiopia; Obuch, 2014 on Nicaragua; van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2012 & 2014 on Guatemala, Honduras, the Philippines, and Indonesia; and Beswick, 2010 on Rwanda). There is also a growing number of studies concerned with restrictions on foreign funding for NGOs and how this affects civil society space (Chahim and Prakash, 2014; Christensen and Weinstein, 2013). Much of this literature fails to critically engage with the dominant narrative established by the burgeoning policy literature on political and operating space for civil society, or the language and practices that produce this discourse. Some academic papers have arguably even contributed to its construction and reproduction.

The civil society space discourse is situated within and contributes to broader liberal discourses and relies on a particular conceptualisation of civil society that is profoundly liberal in character. Within this tradition, civil society is seen as a sphere of freedom and association that is autonomous and keeps the state in check (McIlwaine, 1998; Mohan, 2002). Africanist scholars have challenged the contemporary use of the concept within research, policy, and practice (Obadare, 2011; Lewis, 2002), and regard civil society promotion and the discourses that accompany it as a core part of the broader liberal project in Africa (Allen, 1997; Williams and Young, 2012 & 2014; Death and Gabay, 2014). For Williams and Young, the liberal project is a particularly useful term because it moves beyond understanding liberalism as a body of theory ‘to understanding it as a project of social transformation that is at work in the concrete practices of political agents’ (Williams and Young, 2012: 7). They argue that Western governments seek to construct and defend a civil society that reflects liberal values and is able to hold the state to account in places where it does not already exist, through ‘a kind of two-pronged strategy on the one hand to inculcate good (liberal) practices and on the other to at least gradually eliminate bad (illiberal) practices’ (2012: 17).

This project and the discourses that underpin it are also produced and reproduced by African civil society actors. According to Death and Gabay, international interventions such as civil society promotion ‘are not homogenous or unified (or even coherent) projects’ and they ‘rely upon and foster African agency’ (2014: 2). Local civil society actors are at the heart of discourses on civil society space. The term ‘local’ is used relationally here to refer to all civil society actors that exist at the national or sub-national level, as opposed to transnational groups that are generally headquartered in places such as the United States, Europe, or South Africa. These actors do not passively accept or consume liberal discourses, rather they continually interact and engage with them, adapting them to their local context and the particular norms that characterise it. This paper will argue that it is often these organisations, which sit at the interface of the global and the local, that are the target of government restrictions, which should themselves be seen as part of a broader pattern of resistance to the expansion of the liberal project.

## Deconstructing liberal discourse on civil society space

International NGOs, global advocacy networks, and multilateral institutions have published hundreds of policy reports on civil society space in recent years. They define civil society space as ‘the environment within which civil society operates’ (UNHRC, 2014: 1). These texts are replete with discursive statements, which produce and reproduce a dominant narrative that describes *what* is happening to this environment and map *where* this is taking place.

### **‘The clampdown is real’: describing civil society space**

Phrases such as ‘shrinking space’ and ‘enabling environment’ appear again and again throughout policy reports and documents on civil society space. They are discursive statements that tell a story about what is happening to the political and operating environment for civil society, which is characterised as either enabling or disabling. A disabling environment is one where governments implement restrictions that limit civil society action and is often associated with shrinking political and operating space. For Civicus, it relates to the presence of ‘restrictive conditions...[which] make it harder for civil society groups to exist, function, grow and offer their

best contribution to society’ (Civicus, 2013b: 10). These restrictions range from the introduction of legislative and regulatory frameworks that impede the formation and operation of civil society groups to the arbitrary detention of activists and the use of harassment and intimidation to create a climate of fear.

An enabling environment, on the other hand, implies the absence of these restrictions and the presence of a set of supportive conditions ‘that actively help civil society to function and thrive’ (Civicus, 2013b: 10). These conditions include the presence of a strong and supportive legal and regulatory framework for civil society, a stable and inclusive political environment, high levels of public accountability and transparency, and access to long-term financial support and resources. In its 2013 *State of Civil Society Report*, Civicus makes a deliberate attempt to shift language on civil society space away from discussion of shrinking space, because the authors saw it as disempowering and reductive. They state that: ‘the danger with narratives about shrinking political and legal space for civil society is that, while they are compelling and help to attract headlines about the difficulties of civil society operating in restricted spaces, they could ultimately be disempowering. (2013: 26). Despite this, many policy reports are still overwhelmingly focused on denouncing governments that limit space for civil society and analysing the particular combination of mechanisms they use.

Further, nearly all of the reports included in this study rely heavily on the use of the passive voice to describe what is happening to civil society around the world, which linguistically reinforces the shrinking space narrative. Phrases such as ‘CSOs are hindered’ (ACT Alliance, 2011a: 1); ‘NGOs are impeded’ (World Movement for Democracy and ICNL, 2008: 14); and ‘political space is restricted’ (ACT Alliance, 2011a: 14) appear regularly throughout the documents. Like shrinking space and enabling environment, these phrases are discursive statements, which are more functional than descriptive, and help organisations to attract attention to what they perceive to be a global trend. The use of the passive voice depicts civil society as the recipient of the action within these clauses and the agent is either omitted, or appears at the end of the clause. Organisations might choose to use the passive voice for a number of practical reasons. However, its use also constructs

local civil society groups which are involved in a daily struggle to create and sustain spaces for action, as the recipients or victims of government action, and denies them agency. Omitting the agent also keeps these phrases sufficiently vague and general, so that they can be applied to different places around the world and help to construct a dominant global narrative about what is happening to civil society.

### **‘The pushback is global’: mapping civil society space**

A number of organisations have made attempts to measure civil society space and have produced indexes and league tables that rank and map shrinking space and enabling environments. Several indexes exist, including the *Civicus Enabling Environment Index* (EEI), which assesses the enabling environment for civil society. The EEI is a global composite index based on secondary data, which is comprised of three dimensions – the socio-economic environment, the socio-cultural environment, and the governance environment – that are divided into 17 sub-dimensions and 53 indicators (Civicus, 2013a; Fioramonti and Kononykhina, 2014). It ranks countries according to how they score across all three dimensions, and then maps them based on where they are placed on the index. Another more recent example is the Civicus Monitor, which classes countries as either ‘closed’, ‘repressed’, ‘obstructed’, ‘narrowed’, or ‘open’.<sup>26</sup> Most of the countries that fall into the first two categories are located in Africa, the Middle East, or Asia.

Maps are also a prominent feature of many policy reports on civil society space, and even some academic papers (for example see Christensen and Weinstein, 2013). The *Civicus 2014 State of Civil Society Report* contains a map that highlights all the countries that have introduced restrictive legislation in 2013 and 2014 (Figure 1), the Civicus EEI Report uses maps to illustrate country rankings (Figure 2), and the *Freedom in the World 2016 Index* includes a map (Figure 3) that colour codes countries according to whether they are ‘free’, ‘partly free’, and ‘not free’ (Freedom House,

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<sup>26</sup> Civicus Monitor. Available online at: <https://monitor.civicus.org/>. Accessed 10 March 2017.

2016). These maps and the indexes they are taken from firmly locate the issue of shrinking space within sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, Central and South America, Asia, and Eastern Europe. Civicus singles out two geographical areas of particular concern, sub-Saharan Africa and former members of the Soviet Union, where it argues that ‘a majority of recent adverse legislative developments for civil society [are] taking place’ (Civicus, 2014: 26).



FIGURE 1: MAP OF COUNTRIES THAT INTRODUCED RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION IN 2013 AND 2014 (CIVICUS, 2014: 34)

These maps and the indexes they come from seek to quantify and measure something that is inherently qualitative, and in doing so they reduce the complexity and variety of civil society experiences both at a global level and within particular places around the world to a single narrative. Maps are discursive statements that are highly functional (Crampton and Krygier, 2006; Wood, 2010). The maps produced by global civil society organisations generate knowledge and debate about civil society space and where it is under threat. According to Civicus, the EEI was created with the aim of developing a tool ‘that can tell us about the environment in which civil society operates... [and] generate debate and dialogue about the enabling environment for civil society’

(2013a: 7). They can also be used as an advocacy tool to put pressure on governments that languish at the bottom of these league tables, and the bilateral and multilateral donors that support them.



FIGURE 2: MAP OF CIVICUS ENABLING ENVIRONMENT INDEX SCORES (2013A: 12)

The problem of shrinking space is also seen as one that overwhelmingly affects authoritarian or semi-authoritarian states, partial democracies, and conflict-affected or post-conflict states (Carothers and Brechenmacher, 2014; ACT Alliance, 2011). ACT Alliance argue that civil society space is heavily influenced by regime type and state capacity and find that ‘the more free and strong a state is, the easier the situation is for NGOs and CSOs... [while] the opposite can be observed in more authoritarian states’ (2011: 7). However, the issue is not confined to semi-authoritarian states and partial democracies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (for example see Sidel, 2010 on voluntary sector regulation in the US, UK, Australia, Canada, and the EU). A few of these reports also contain examples of restrictions placed on civil society in established democracies within Europe and North America, such as the arbitrary arrest of Occupy protestors in the United States and attempts made by the previous conservative government in Canada to de-register organisations (Civicus, 2011; Civicus, 2013b). Yet, these references are few and far between, and the overall impression given by these reports is that this is a problem that primarily concerns predominantly

illiberal countries in the Global South and East, rather than liberal countries in the Global North and West.



FIGURE 3: MAP OF FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2016 FINDINGS (FREEDOM HOUSE, 2016)

### **‘Closing doors’: civil society space in Burundi**

Burundi is often cited within policy reports as a paradigmatic example of ‘shrinking’ political space (Amnesty International, 2014). Problems re-establishing the rule of law following the end of a protracted civil war and poor government perceptions of civil society led Civicus to declare that Burundi had ‘the third worst enabling environment’ for civil society in the world, ranking it at 106 out of 109 countries in its 2013 EEI (Civicus, 2013a: 14). A number of high-profile reports on political space in Burundi have been released in recent years, which detail increasing restrictions and pressures on civil society and political opposition within the central African country. These reports argue that there has been a ‘crackdown’ on civil society, independent media, and political opposition (Amnesty International, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2010). Following the 2010 elections, the government introduced legislation that restricts basic rights and freedoms, including the Law on Public Gatherings, which effectively prohibits spontaneous demonstrations and has

been used by the authorities to ban demonstrations and obstruct meetings organised by civil society and opposition groups (Amnesty International, 2014).

These reports argue that the harassment and intimidation of civil society actors has also increased. Human Rights Watch's report, *Closing Doors: The narrowing of democratic space in Burundi*, details how the authorities sought to 'silence critical voices' around the 2010 elections (2010, 42). They arrested and detained civil society and journalists before and during the electoral period. Several civil society activists reported being followed by the police, and receiving anonymous phone calls, while others received death threats (Human Rights Watch, 2010). In May 2014, the authorities arrested Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, the leader of *APRODH* and one of Burundi's highest profile human rights defenders, and in January 2015 they arrested and detained Bob Rugurika, the head of Burundi's largest independent radio station, *Radio Publique Africaine (RPA)*. Relations deteriorated further following the announcement that the president would run for an unconstitutional third term in office and thousands took to the streets of Bujumbura to protest in April 2015. According to Amnesty International, the police used 'excessive and disproportionate force, including lethal force', such as extrajudicial killings and shootings, to dispel the protests (2015: 15). Civil society activists and their families have also been targeted. In August 2015, Pierre Claver Mbonimpa was shot and seriously wounded, and his son and his son-in-law were killed in separate incidents later that year. In November 2015, the government suspended the activities of 10 civil society organisations it accused of leading the protests, and forced several high-profile activists and human rights campaigners to flee the country.<sup>27</sup> The government went on to permanently close five of these organisations in October 2016, and another leading human rights group in December 2016.

Government-civil society relations have certainly deteriorated in recent years, particularly following mass protests in 2015. Prior to this, the government targeted restrictions largely at one

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<sup>27</sup> Ministerial Ordinance No 530/1547 of 23 November 2015.

group of organisations. Burundian civil society is comprised of a range of different actors from small grassroots associations to high-profile organisations based in Bujumbura. However, within Burundi the term is often used only in relation to a small number of groups, those that are financed by international actors, seek to advance liberal values such as democracy promotion, human rights, and good governance, and try to hold the Burundian state to account through advocacy and campaigning. As one male activist working for a civil society organisation in Burundi explained: ‘the organisations that people tend to call civil society are the ones that confront the government and hold the government accountable about the promises it made for the people’ (Interview, 27 August 2014). It is these groups that were also the primary target of government restrictions, before and after the 2015 protests. When asked how they would describe their relations with the government, a female activist who volunteers with one of these groups said that:

They are one of strained collaboration. We are part of a group of organisations that are not really tolerated by the government. We try to work with delicacy to achieve our objectives, but it’s difficult because of the political environment. We receive threats, often of imprisonment or suppression of our organisation, to stop us from working. The environment isn’t favourable but we continue to work (Interview, 30 September 2014).

Activists working for less vocal organisations would describe their relationship with the authorities in more positive terms in interviews conducted prior to the 2015 protests. As one male activist explained: ‘relations are often difficult between civil society organisations and the Ministry of the Interior. But for [our organisation], this difficulty does not appear so much... there are no problems’ (Interview, 25 September 2014). Activists from another organisation stated that they had a ‘good relationship’ (Interview with female activist 22, September 2014) with the government, and explained that ‘we collaborate with them very well... we have no problem’ (Interview with male activist, 27 March 2015). Such responses were typical of nearly all the organisations that I spoke to outside the relatively small group of vocal organisations targeted by the Burundian government. Even organisations which described their relationship with the government as strained or difficult also shared examples of collaboration or cooperation. As one male activist explained:

‘Most of the time, the relationship between human rights organisations and the government, especially in countries where democracy is weak, such as Burundi, is almost always characterised by conflict and tensions... For us, we have had many incidents. I myself have been in prison... We have seen many local government officials coming to disrupt our activities, and some of them have been suspended. But we also see areas of collaboration... [government officials] at the beginning are sometimes reluctant to collaborate, but when they see you are not doing [advocacy and policy influencing] with only the intention of discrediting the government, they will engage with your work and start to collaborate.’ (Interview, 9 April 2015)

High-profile reports on political space in Burundi have focused largely on the negative experiences of a small number of vocal organisations. However, the situation on the ground is much more complicated and the experiences of activists and organisations are much more diverse than these reports make out. Examples that do not fit with narratives concerning civil society space in Burundi (i.e., that it is shrinking) are left out of these reports. It is very unlikely that this is intentional. However, the exclusion of statements that do not support dominant narratives is functional. It facilitates the production of consensus, which is a central feature of discourses.

## Reproducing liberal discourse on civil society space

The civil society space discourse is produced and reproduced through an informal network of civil society and human rights actors. This network is comprised of a global epistemic community and a related transnational advocacy network. These structures construct and also support the production of consensus on civil society space, and facilitate the reproduction of this liberal discourse within and between organisations across multiple scales and in different places.

### **Creating consensus**

Consensus is constructed and maintained through epistemic communities and transnational advocacy networks on civil society space. An epistemic community is defined by Haas as ‘a network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue area’ (Haas, 1992: 3).

For Davis Cross, they are ‘networks of experts who persuade others of their shared causal beliefs and policy goals by virtue of their professional knowledge’ (Davis Cross, 2013: 142). The creation and maintenance of consensus is extremely important for epistemic communities because their influence rests on their professionalism and internal cohesion: ‘when a group of professionals with recognised expertise is able to speak with one voice, that voice is often seen as more legitimate because it is based on a well-reasoned consensus among those in the best position to know’ (Davis Cross, 2013: 147). Epistemic communities seek to influence policies across states as well as within multilateral institutions. Their policy goals are based on their expert knowledge rather than other motivations, which is what differentiates them from other transnational actors, such as advocacy networks, who are primarily driven by shared values and ideals (Davis Cross, 2013). Consensus is also important for transnational advocacy networks, which Keck and Sikkink define as ‘networks of activists’ who are ‘bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information’ (1998: 1–2). Together, they work to ‘bring new ideas, norms and discourses into policy debates, and serve as sources of information and testimony’ (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 3).

The global network within which civil society space discourse is produced and reproduced comprise an epistemic community and a transnational advocacy network, which function to create and maintain consensus on civil society space. While the former is comprised primarily of researchers, academics, and lawyers, the latter is made up of practitioners, campaigners and activists. However, the boundaries between the two groups are often blurred. Members of the two groups share core values and beliefs, and a conceptualisation of civil society which recognises its importance to the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy. They also possess a common understanding of civil society space, and where and how it is under threat, as well as how to create and maintain an enabling environment for civil society. This knowledge is generated through organisational texts and practices, including the production of policy papers and reports that refer to and draw upon other documents produced within the epistemic community. Members of the community co-author reports, produce joint letters and oral statements, participate in events together, and are part of the same networks, coalitions, and consortiums. There are differences and

disagreements within and between organisations, but these are rarely fundamental and do not detract from or undermine the consensus reproduced within this community.

### **Supporting mobility**

Epistemic communities and transnational advocacy networks also support the mobility of discourses, enabling them to travel within and between organisations at the global and the local level. Activists and organisations from countries where space is perceived to be under threat play an important role in the production and reproduction of discourses on civil society space, and the language and practices that constitute them. They contribute to the production of research and policy and campaign for the creation of an enabling environment for civil society. Although policy reports are generally produced by international organisations, they often refer to the experiences of local civil society organisations or include case studies written by local actors. Local organisations are often co-authors of or contributors to these reports and co-signatories to joint letters, statements, and submissions. They provide knowledge and experience of particular contexts, and their inclusion can also increase legitimacy and credibility of reports and advocacy. Local actors also draw on civil society space discourse to support their work at the local level; using it to attract attention to the challenges they face within their local context and to generate support for their work at the international level.

International NGOs have closely monitored the situation in Burundi, and the country has featured as an example in several global reports on civil society space. In many ways, it is considered an archetypal paradigm of shrinking space, and has undoubtedly contributed to the civil society space discourse at a global level. The discourses are also reproduced locally within Burundi by prominent civil society actors who are part of the global epistemic community and transnational advocacy network on civil society space and are supported by these international groups. These activists have contributed to reports written by international organisations and have actively campaigned for an improved political and operating environment for civil society, both directly and indirectly through meetings with government ministers, organising protests and making statements in the media. They

have strongly denounced the introduction of restrictive legislation, and the harassment and intimidation of civil society actors and they have organised high-profile public protests to demand the release of human rights defenders and journalists. The issue of civil society space is of great concern to local civil society activists in Burundi. It was mentioned in every interview conducted as part of this research. When asked what the main issues were facing civil society are in Burundi today, nearly every respondent raised issues relating to civil society space. This was true even among those who had not directly experienced restrictions and who described their organisation's relationship with the government in positive terms. Many of them also used language similar to that featured in reports on civil society space. As one male activist explained, 'We are living within a democracy, so... space for civil society should be respected. But it is not. We do not have this' (Interview, 5 September 2014).

## Functions of liberal discourses on civil society space

Liberal discourses on civil society space have a number of intended and sometimes unintended functions and effects. They are concerned with getting and keeping the issue of civil society space on the international agenda, and garnering political and sometimes financial support for civil society. They also seek to influence the situation on the ground in countries where space is considered to be under threat through transnational advocacy focused on holding illiberal governments to account and encouraging them to create enabling environments for civil society. While they have certainly succeeded in attracting international attention and support, they have had much less success at the national level.

### **Intended functions**

The intended functions of the civil society space discourse include the creation of a global policy framework, and influencing change on the ground in countries where space is considered to be under threat. The authors of one report question where members of the global network on civil society space should target their limited resources:

Should [resources] be concentrated at the multilateral level in the hope of influencing international frameworks, which can in turn be used to set new norms, around which advocacy can be organised to improve conditions at the national level? Or given that the enabling environment concept is one that is not yet won, does it make sense to seek improvement at the national level and then try to influence governments to translate these to the multilateral arena? (Civicus, 2013b: 20).

Although many organisations are actively engaged in transnational advocacy that seeks to influence the policies and behaviour of illiberal regimes at the national level, recent efforts have been mostly focused on the creation of a global policy framework. This has been achieved through the integration of civil society space within broader human rights frameworks at the UN and in the EU. In September 2014, the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution on civil society space that expects states to create and maintain an enabling environment for civil society.<sup>28</sup> Failure to do so is regarded as a violation of international human rights law. The issue has also been integrated into the EU's strategic framework on rights and democracy and The EU Communication on *The Roots of Democracy and Sustainable Development*, which commits the EU to protecting an 'enabling environment' for civil society in partner countries. Language on the enabling environment also features in agreements on development effectiveness, most notably the 2008 *Accra Agenda for Action* and the 2011 *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation*. Both agreements contain commitments to create and maintain an enabling environment for the effective participation of civil society organisations in development processes. At the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, civil society groups successfully campaigned for the inclusion of 'minimum standards' for an enabling environment, such as 'the right to operate free from unwarranted state interference' and 'the right to seek and secure funding' in the agreement (Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment, 2011: 10). Although it may have influenced policy at the global level, the civil society space discourse has had much less success

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<sup>28</sup> Resolution 27/31 on Civil Society Space adopted at the 27<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (A/HRC/27/L.24). Available online at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session27/>. Accessed 28 April 2016.

challenging illiberal practices and behaviours in places where governments either do not understand or are unwilling to create an enabling environment for civil society.

## **Unintended effects**

In some places, it has also produced unintended effects, which may do more harm than good. This study has uncovered evidence from Burundi, which shows that incidences of harassment and intimidation of civil society actors increase during periods of tension, and more specifically following the release of a critical statement or declaration on a topic considered to be sensitive or critical, and the publication of high-profile international reports. A number of activists interviewed as part of this study reported that threats increase in both number and severity when they make statements on issues such as human rights or corruption, and are critical of the government. As a female activist explained:

Respondent: Sometimes we get telephone calls, anonymous telephone calls. Or sometimes you see people hanging around outside your house. But what can we do? ... Interviewer: Does this happen often? Respondent: Maybe once a month. But, we are used to it. It happens more when you make a statement. They would like you to sit and just keep quiet. Don't declare anything... It's especially bad when you touch, when you talk about issues like corruption. When you denounce corruption they are very sensitive about those questions. It's the same for good governance, embezzlement, killings, and assassinations. And when you talk for or in favour of the opposition they really don't like it. Interviewer: So when you talk about these more political, sensitive topics that makes the situation worse? Respondent: When you talk about the environment there is no problem, but when you talk about these more sensitive, political issues, yes. (Interview, 1 March 2015)

Another activist explained how levels of harassment experienced by individuals working for the organisation changed over time. He noted that they would increase following advocacy undertaken by local and international organisations, including the publication of high-profile international reports:

Respondent: It depends on the subject that's in the news at that time. When something happens, for example if there is a human rights violation, we will denounce and denounce,

and then after international organisations will join in the advocacy. For example, after the attacks in Cibitoke, we denounced it and then [an international human rights organisation] deployed an inquiry team and produced a report on the attacks. Afterwards there was a lot of debates, it made the international media. It created a lot of tension, which then subsided a bit... Interviewer: So you find that the threats increase during these times? Respondent: Yes, but it depends on the subject. When the issue threatens the immediate interests of the public authorities then yes. At the moment the biggest issue is the third term. We have received a lot of threats because of this. (Interview, 27 March 2015)

In December 2014, a Brussels-based advocacy network released a public statement condemning the harassment of a high-profile civil society activist and his family, which states that incidences increase following the publication of critical reports on human rights:

These threats addressed to him have been happening for a while and arise and persist at different levels each time there is a declaration about governance or human rights. Thus any critical report produced by a credible international organisation is attributed to him as the author or informer, so that he gets labelled as an enemy of the country in the pay of foreigners and of the opposition. (EurAc, 2014: 1)

In December 2016, the government banned one of the oldest and most prominent human rights organisations in Burundi, following the publication of a high-profile report which accused the regime of crimes against humanity. The report, which was published by *Ligue Burundaise de Défense des Droits de l'Homme* (also known as Ligue ITEKA) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), recorded and analysed human rights violations perpetrated by the Burundian authorities since widespread protests in April 2015. In a statement announcing the ban, the minister of the interior, Pascal Barandagiye, said that the organisation had ‘tarnished the image of the country and sought to divide Burundian society’.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Interior and Patriotic Training, Ministerial Order no 530/2356 of 21/12/2016 quoted by FIDH (6 January 2017) ‘Ban of the ITEKA League: Another blow to Burundian civil society’, on FIDH website, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/burundi/ban-of-the-iteka-league-another-blow-to-burundian-civil-society>. Accessed 6 March 2017.

The incidence of intimidation and harassment fluctuates, and appears to increase following the release of statements and reports that are critical of the Burundian government. This does not mean that the individuals and organisations that produce these statements and reports are either directly or indirectly responsible for the harassment and intimidation of activists or the closure of the organisations that they work for; responsibility for this lies solely with the Burundian government. It does, however, suggest that these statements and reports may have contributed to the deterioration in relations between the government and the civil society groups that international campaigners seek to protect and defend, and in doing so put them at increased risk of harassment and intimidation.

### **Why might the civil society space discourse put activists at risk?**

The answer to this question relates to the reasons why governments target particular organisations and individuals in the first place. As Lewis (2013) notes, most authoritarian governments tolerate some civil society groups, while placing restrictions on others, namely those that seek to challenge the prevailing hegemonic discourse that sustains the regime, and therefore, the regime's political authority and legitimacy. Consequently, repressive mechanisms 'tend to focus on constraining discursive activity rather than on repressing self-organizing associations, which can often be controlled, co-opted or used to legitimize the existing political order' (Lewis, 2013: 326). Here, 'discursive activity' is understood to mean any actions that contribute to the production of a more open public space, where civil society groups are able 'to develop and express alternative views, discourses, idioms, and imaginaries' that might challenge and eventually lead to the downfall of the regime (Lewis, 2013: 333). These conclusions are supported by the work of van der Borgh and Terwindt (2014), who argue that governments whose political authority is challenged may seek to weaken perceived opposition to their regimes through restricting the political and operating space of organisations they see as a threat. Consequently, restrictions are often targeted at groups and individuals that engage in claim-making against the state, work on issues considered to be sensitive or political issues, and use confrontational advocacy strategies (van der Borgh and Terwindt, 2014).

The Burundian government views civil society groups as part of the political opposition, and increasingly, as a threat to the stability and authority of the regime. When asked whether he had experienced any harassment, one activist replied that he had not because his organisation was ‘not on the list of civil society organisations, of “dangerous” ones’ (Interview, 18 March 15). He explained that the authorities are interested in only a small number of organisations that they consider to be close to the formal political opposition in Burundi:

Anyone who challenges the government, anyone who brings in a different point of view is considered as an opponent. It is to do with the maturity of the democracy and our capacity to accept a different, a contradictory view. So whoever is saying something different is viewed as an opponent by the government, which is of course not true. (Interview, 18 March 2015)

This view appeared again and again in interviews with Burundian civil society actors; the authorities target a small number of civil society actors because they perceive them as being close to or part of the formal political opposition. A female activist said, ‘civil society is mistaken for the opposition. Civil society is obliged to say certain things, and then they are attacked for being part of the opposition’ (Interview, 22 September 2014). Interviewees explained that this situation had worsened following the decision made by formal opposition parties to boycott the 2010 elections. The election went ahead without the majority of formal opposition parties, who lost their parliamentary representation and their ability to hold the government to account within the legislature. The formal political opposition was left weak and divided, and it is within this vacuum that the government came to see a small number of vocal civil society groups as the defacto political opposition. Speaking after the 2010 elections, one high-profile civil society activist is quoted by Human Rights Watch as saying:

Before, civil society was considered to be *close* to the political opposition. In the current context, where we barely have a political opposition to speak of, civil society is more exposed. Now, civil society is considered to *be* the opposition. (Pacifique Ninahazwe quoted in HRW, 2010: 42 - italics in original)

Government rhetoric escalated following the widespread protests that began in April 2015, with ministers and spokespeople calling civil society activists and protestors ‘insurgents’, ‘terrorists’, ‘criminals’, and ‘enemies’. A report published by the Burundian Ministry of Justice in August 2015 accused civil society groups of organising and funding an ‘insurrection’ alongside members of the political opposition. This suggests that government also sees civil society as a threat to their power and they are responding by using discourses on insurgency and terrorism to criminalise civil society activists and make violence against them permissible.

Evidence emerging from this study suggests that liberal discourse on civil society space may inadvertently contribute to this problem through positioning civil society groups in opposition to the state. This happens in two ways. First, they frame civil society space as a human rights issue and conceptualise civil society groups as human rights watchdogs whose primary responsibility is to hold the state to account. Many governments that place restrictions on civil society are unsympathetic to the promotion of human rights, and see it as an externally-driven agenda that is an integral part of the liberal project. Opposition between state and civil society is also reproduced in the language used in reports on civil society space, which is often confrontational and sometimes violent. Government restrictions are variously described as a ‘backlash’ against or ‘crackdown’ on civil society and democracy and human rights support, compound words that combine a direction with an action that denotes some kind of repression or violence. Several of the reports also use a battle or conflict metaphor to describe what is happening to civil society space. Civil society is ‘under fire’ or ‘attack’ and is facing an ‘unrelenting onslaught’. It is part of a global ‘battle’ or ‘contest’ and must be ‘defended’.

Transnational advocacy, as well as securing the provision of international funding for local organisations, may also reinforce the unfounded perception held by many regimes that activists are working on behalf of Western governments. In Burundi, organisations that speak out about human rights or civil society space are branded as foreign agents. One male Burundian activist explained that their association with transnational advocacy networks, and international donors also makes them vulnerable to restrictions:

It's easy for the government to cut them down, because they, for example, the argument that the government is using is that they are the puppet of the West. They are funded by the West. So the government says that [promoting human rights] is their job, they are just doing it to gain money, in order to get funds from outside. (Interview, 27 August 2015)

In Burundi, liberal discourses which position civil society in opposition to the state, have arguably reinforced government perceptions that civil society is part of the formal political opposition and represents a threat to state power. These discourses are not the principal reason behind the deterioration of state and civil society relations in Burundi, nor are they or the organisations that reproduce them in any way responsible for the restrictions placed on civil society. However, they do appear to have unintentionally contributed to this situation, and in doing so placed activists at greater risk of harassment and intimidation. That said, many Burundian civil society activists feel that, given the current situation in Burundi, they have no choice but to speak out against the government and they feel safer doing this when they have the support of the international human rights community who stand in solidarity with them.

## Conclusion

Using critical discourse analysis, this paper has sought to deconstruct discourses on civil society space and critically examine the ways in which they reinforce dominant power relations. It finds that these discourses position civil society in opposition to the state, and unintentionally contribute to the discursive construction of civil society activists and their organisations as political opposition, foreign agents, and in some cases, insurgents – labels that are used by governments to justify the implementation of restrictions on civil society and legitimise the use of violence and repression against them. The paper also finds that civil society organisations that are situated at the intersection between global discourses and local norms, are often at the forefront of this broader struggle over the liberal project. Government restrictions should be seen as part of the resistance to the expansion of this project in places like Burundi.

Organisations and individuals that are part of the epistemic community and transnational advocacy network on civil society space must recognise and address these negative effects and explore alternative ways of working. This might include reframing the issue so that it is no longer viewed as part of the human rights agenda, and moving away from the confrontational language and practices associated with it. Organisations engaged in research, policy, and advocacy on civil society space may wish to avoid using language that reproduces the antagonisms, and positions civil society in opposition to the state or conceptualises them as foreign agents or political adversaries. It may also include finding new ways to support individuals and organisations that experience restrictions in navigating and responding to the pressures that they face in a manner that is appropriate for their organisation and the context within which they are situated.

## Chapter 8

### *Spaces for participation: rethinking political space for civil society in post-conflict contexts*<sup>30</sup>

Political space for civil society in Africa has become a major concern for international nongovernmental and multilateral institutions in recent years. The *shrinking space* narrative that these actors promote argues that the environment in which civil society operates is becoming increasingly constrained as illiberal governments seek to limit political space for civil society through the introduction of restrictive legislative and regulatory frameworks, and the violent harassment and intimidation of activists. It locates government repression and political violence in particular places, namely partial democracies and semi-authoritarian regimes in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Emerging research on geographies of violence has sought to challenge such place-bound narratives of violence through critically exploring the relationship between violence and place (Laliberté, 2016; Springer, 2011). The principal aim of these geographies is to explore how violence permeates everyday lives as well as institutions and structures (Springer and Le Billon, 2016). They seek to develop its conceptual clarity through interrogating the connections between violence and space (Springer and Le Billon, 2016), and examining its temporal and relational dimensions as well as its affective qualities (Gregory and Pred, 2007; Thrift, 2007a).

This paper is concerned with exploring the relational qualities of political violence, namely the harassment and intimidation of civil society activists, and the ways in which it impacts their experiences and perceptions of political space. It argues that the *shrinking space* narrative does not reflect the multiple and diverse experiences of activists in places where political space for civil

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<sup>30</sup> Submitted as a journal article to *Political Geography*

society is considered to be under threat. Nor does it engage with the ways in which violence shapes their everyday lives and their ability to challenge the institutions and structures within which it is reproduced. Consequently, it also neglects the more relational aspects of political space for civil society, or civil society space for short, which is defined within the policy literature simply as ‘the environment in which civil society operates’ (UNHCR, 2014). Only through viewing space as something that is relational, can we begin to understand how individual and collective memories of violence, as well as contemporary experiences, shape current and future perceptions of political space for civil society. It also enables us to gain a more nuanced and detailed understanding of how spaces for civil society action can and do emerge in contexts characterised by repression and mass violence. Instead of talking about political space for civil society as a fixed and singular entity, it might be more helpful to look at spaces for participation, an approach towards participation that reconceptualises it to include a more political sense of agency, and understands it as a process that is both temporal and spatial (Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Cornwall, 2002 & 2004; Gaventa, 2004 & 2006).

This paper will focus on the perceptions and experiences of political space for civil society among activists in Burundi, a country with a long history of genocidal violence and ethnic conflict (Lemarchand, 1994 & 1996; Watt, 2008; Daley, 2008; Uvin, 2009). After a period of relative calm following the end of a decade-long civil war, levels of political violence and government repression are once again on the rise (Amnesty International, 2014, 2015a, & 2015b). This has led international human rights organisations to argue that political and operating space for civil society is closing (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Amnesty International, 2014). However, this paper argues that the *Shrinking Space* narrative is incapable of reflecting the multiple and diverse experiences of civil society activists in Burundi, and their constant struggle to create and maintain spaces for participation amid rising political violence and government repression. It raises important questions about the extent to which the perceptions and experiences of activists affect their ability to create spaces for participation that transform dominant power relations and prevailing social norms such as violence, exclusion, and militarism. Although activists initially found ways to navigate

government restrictions, sustained political violence following the anti-third term protests in 2015 created a climate of fear and uncertainty, which profoundly altered perceptions and experiences of political space for civil society among activists. The paper is based on five months' qualitative fieldwork in Burundi, conducted in two phases between June 2014 and April 2015. It draws on material from 83 in-depth interviews with Burundian civil society activists, and representatives from international nongovernmental organisations and multilateral institutions working in Burundi, as well as ongoing conversations with civil society activists about the anti-third term protests, which began at the end of April 2015. It includes citations from 10 of these interviews. Individual informants will not be named because of the heightened political situation in Burundi at the time of writing. The research is also based on a discursive analysis of policy literature, organisational documents, and social media sources, such as Twitter.

## Geographies of violence

Violence is, as Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois note, 'a slippery concept' that 'defies easy categorization' (2004: 1-2). The emerging literature on geographies of violence seeks 'to bring greater conceptual clarity to violence by thinking through its intersections with space' (Springer and Le Billon, 2016: 1). Through drawing attention to the spatiality of violence, and critically exploring its relationship with place, these geographies aim 'to interrogate and demonstrate the ways in which violence is woven through everyday lives, institutions and structures' (Springer and Le Billon, 2016: 2). They also highlight its temporal and relational dimensions as well as its affective qualities (Gregory and Pred, 2007; Thrift, 2007a).

### **Violence, place, and space**

At the heart of the emerging literature on geographies of violence is an examination of the connections between violence, place, and space. Many critical geographers have sought to challenge the reproduction of imaginative geographies, which situate violence within particular places and 'erase the interconnectedness of the places where violence occurs' (Springer, 2011: 90). They contend that these imaginative geographies are profoundly Orientalist in character (Laliberté,

2016; Springer, 2011; Gregory, 1995). Laliberté argues that examining these ‘place-bound narratives of violence’ enables critical geographers ‘to expose constructions of difference that perpetuate inequality and sustain systems of violence’ (2016: 27). Rethinking place as something that is relational challenges the foundations upon which these narratives are based. Springer contends that while the manifestations of violence are perceived and experienced as something localised and embodied, the idea that violence is innate or bound to particular places is challenged when place is viewed as a ‘relational assemblage’ (2011: 91). Thinking about place in this way ‘opens up the supposed fixity, separation, and immutability of place to recognise it instead as always co-constituted by, mediated through, and integrated within the wider experience of space’ (Springer, 2011: 91). Narratives on political space for civil society are place-bound. They tie the repression of activists to particular places, namely states that are characterised as partial democracies or semi-authoritarian regimes within Africa, Asia, and South America. In doing so, they reproduce dominant geopolitical power relations between the illiberal South and East and the liberal North and West, while neglecting the ways in which they contribute to political violence and government repression in these places.

Critical geographers also argue that violence is inherently spatial, and are concerned with exploring how violence shapes space and ‘the constitution of violence through space’ (Springer and Le Billon, 2016: 2). Several of these geographies draw on the work of Massey (1994 & 2005), who understands space ‘as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny’ (2005: 9). She argues that space is fundamentally heterogeneous and characterised by multiplicity, and that viewed in this way it becomes ‘the sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist, as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity’ (Massey, 2005: 9). Space is also a process, which is active, dynamic, and continually evolving: it is ‘always under construction... it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed’ (Massey, 2005: 9). Viewing space in relational terms enables critical geographers to explore the co-constitutive nature of violence and space. It also has profound implications for how we

conceptualise violence, which Springer argues ‘can be more appropriately understood as an unfolding process, arising from the broader geographical phenomena and temporal patterns of the social world’ (Springer, 2011: 91).

### **Affective and temporal qualities of violence**

As the social anthropologists, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois note, ‘violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality – force, assault, or the infliction of pain – alone’ (2004: 1). It is the cultural and social meaning attached to violence, as well as its emotional content, that gives violence its meaning and ultimately, its impact. Writing about the political violence that she observed during wars in Angola, Mozambique, and Sri Lanka, Nordstrom concludes that:

It is the intent, and thus the emotive context of the act, that defines violence and its relationship to political will. Violence isn’t intended to stop with the crippling of physical bodies. Violence is employed to create political acquiescence; it is intended to create terror, and thus political inertia; it is intended to create hierarchies of domination and submission based on the control of force (2004: 61).

According to Thrift, the affective impact of political violence lies in its ability to create despair and hopelessness, and construct ‘a particular appearance of the world in which the future itself becomes a casualty because any sense of anticipation is deadened’ (2007a: 285). As Nordstrom notes,

Violence is set in motion with physical carnage, but it doesn’t stop there. Violence reconfigures its victims and the social milieu that hosts them. It isn’t a passing phenomenon that momentarily challenges a stable system, leaving a scar but no lasting effects. Violence becomes a determining fact in shaping reality as people will know it in the future (2004: 59-60).

Viewed in this way, it becomes clear that violence is also inherently temporal. Harvey (2006) argues that something which exists at a particular point in space – in this case, political violence – cannot be understood only through looking at what exists at that point, it also relates to everything else that goes on around it. This is because ‘a wide variety of disparate influences swirling over space in the past, present, and future concentrate and congeal at a certain point . . . to define the nature of that

point' (Harvey, 2006: 274). Harvey is particularly concerned with how these influences are internalised within political subjects and used to support particular ways of thinking or acting. Political violence is interpreted through the prism of the past, but its power lies in its ability to create fear and terror, which shapes thoughts and behaviours both in the present and in the future. This paper will explore how civil society activists view contemporary political violence and government repression in relation to the past, as well as how the affective qualities of these acts shape their thoughts and actions in the present, and about the future. In doing so, it highlights the relational and temporal dimensions of political space for civil society, which are neglected by the *shrinking space* narrative.

## Civil society and political space

The *shrinking space* narrative relies on an understanding of civil society that is fundamentally liberal in character, and is at odds with the empirical reality in many countries where political space for civil society is considered to be under threat. Furthermore, the understanding of political space within the *shrinking space* narrative is inherently problematic. It fails to get to grips with the multiple and diverse ways in which civil society activists and organisations experience political violence and government repression, as well as how their perceptions of political space fluctuate over time. This is because it relies on a relatively simple characterisation of what constitutes the political, and neglects the relational and temporal dimensions of space. Instead of talking about political space for civil society as a fixed and singular entity, it might actually be more productive to think of spaces for participation.

### Civil society

The concept of civil society has a long theoretical tradition within Western political thought. There are two broad perspectives within this tradition: the liberal approach, which sees civil society as a sphere of freedom and association that is both autonomous and in conflict with the state, and is largely influenced by the work of De Tocqueville; and post-Marxist or Gramscian interpretations of civil society (McIlwaine, 1998 & 2007). Liberal interpretations have implicitly dominated donor

discourses towards civil society, which invariably make a series of assumptions about the role of civil society in the democratisation struggle and its autonomy and independence of the state, which critical scholars have shown are rarely borne out in practice (Mohan, 2002; Mercer, 2002; McIlwaine, 2007). McIlwaine (2007) argues that growing disillusionment with liberal interpretations has resulted in a shift towards Gramscian perspectives, where civil society is conceptualised as 'a domain of contention in which hegemony is 'negotiated, struggled over or conceded to' where different groups 'vie for power and influence and/or to create forms of resistance to hegemonic power structures.' (McIlwaine, 2007: 1255)

Gramscian perspectives appeal to political geographers because they focus on the differentiated, fragmented, and even contested nature of civil society, problematise the relationship between civil society and the state, and emphasise the importance of power relations. Political geographers and critical Africanist scholars have stressed the need to differentiate between civil society as a concept and as an empirical reality in Africa, and concentrate on the diversity and complexity of the civil society that actually exists rather than what is assumed to exist (McIlwaine, 2007; Mohan, 2002; Mamdani, 1995). Political geographers have also emphasised the importance of taking a multi-scalar approach that explores the transnational dimensions of civil society, including the ways in which it is shaped through 'translocal encounters', as well as relationships between transnational and local civil society actors (Walton, 2016; McIlwaine, 2007). Consequently, civil society is seen as something that is both temporal and spatial, and situated within particular social and political contexts. It is shaped and informed by its own specific historical trajectory and experiences, as well as its encounters with the transnational and the global (McIlwaine, 1998 & 2007; Mercer, 2002 & 2003; Mohan, 2002; Walton, 2016). In doing so, geographers view civil society as both a political project and an empirical reality, and explore how the relations (and tensions) between the two materialise in particular places.

## **Political space for civil society**

Global narratives on political space for civil society are based on a liberal approach towards civil society and should be seen as part of the liberal project in Africa. They are concerned with the environment in which civil society exists, which they characterise as ‘disenabling’ in places where the presence of ‘restrictive conditions... make it harder for civil society groups to exist, function, grow and offer their best contribution to society’ (Civicus, 2013b: 10). They argue that space for civil society is shrinking as governments within semi-authoritarian states and partial democracies impose restrictions on civil society, including their ability to participate in policy processes at the global and local level, and their right to organise public assemblies and engage in peaceful protest (ACT Alliance and CIDSE, 2014; Civicus, 2013b; Carothers and Brechenmacher, 2014). The policy reports within which these narratives are reproduced contain a detailed analysis of the various ways in which governments seek to restrict political space for civil society, from the introduction of legislative and regulatory frameworks that limit the creation and operation of civil society groups to the arbitrary arrest and detention of civil society activists, and the use of harassment, intimidation, and targeted violence (ACT Alliance and CIDSE, 2014; Carothers and Brechenmacher, 2014; Civicus, 2013b).

However, their conceptualisation of political space for civil society is problematic. They rely on a relatively simple characterisation of what constitutes the political. Swyngedouw (2011) establishes a clear theoretical and conceptual distinction between politics and the political. Where ‘politics’ refers to government institutions and policy-making processes and associated procedures through which individuals and groups pursue their interests; the political concerns the intrinsic heterogeneity that characterises society, and the continuous debates and disagreements that result from this difference. Here ‘the political’ is conceptualised as a space of dissent, where discussions about possible alternatives can take place. Swyngedouw views it as a radical and egalitarian space, which has the potential to be emancipatory and transformative. It appears that dominant discourses on political space are more concerned with space for civil society in politics, rather than space for the political. For example, the *Civic Charter – A Global Framework for People’s Participation*, a

document produced by a group of some of the largest international NGOs and private foundations that has been signed by hundreds more, which seeks to support ‘local, national, regional and global struggles to defend the space for civic participation’, defines ‘effective participation’ as where ‘people and their organisations can genuinely participate in, and influence, public policy and decision-making at local, national, regional and global levels’.<sup>31</sup> In other words, it seeks to support participation in politics rather than the political.

Many of these policy reports also use the term ‘space’ in an uncritical and absolute manner, where it is reduced to its simplest understanding. Instruments such as the *Civics Enabling Environment Index* seek to capture and measure how much political space for civil society is present within a particular country at a specific moment in time. Beswick (2010) argues that approaches such as these are problematic because they seek to quantify something that cannot be measured. They attempt to calculate space by observing and evaluating the actions of civil society, and ‘aggregating the many individual perceptions of those involved in political debate’ (Beswick, 2010: 228). However, ‘individuals’ perceptions of how much space there is are in a constant state of flux’, and it is therefore ‘impossible to claim there is an absolute political space, neatly fixed in a given location at a particular time, which can be objectively measured and scientifically analysed’ (Beswick, 2010: 228).

It is very difficult to measure political space for civil society, because it is inherently relational. It is shaped by individual perceptions, which are influenced by a person’s subjectivities as well as their experiences, and their emotions (Harvey, 2006). Adopting a relational view of political space for civil society also highlights its temporal aspects, and how space is shaped by historical experiences as well as contemporary ones, just as fears or hopes about the future may also shape views about the present. Perceptions of political space for civil society are also highly subjective

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<sup>31</sup> Civic Charter – The Global Framework for People’s Participation. Available online at: [https://icscentre.org/downloads/Civic\\_Charter.pdf](https://icscentre.org/downloads/Civic_Charter.pdf). Accessed 10 March 2017.

and are likely to fluctuate, and also vary between activists – even those working alongside one another within the same place. Consequently, it might be more helpful to think of political space for civil society as a situated process that evolves over time in relation to perceptions and experiences of activists and organisations.

### **Spaces for participation**

Instead of talking about political space for civil society simply as a fixed and singular entity, it might also be helpful to look at spaces for participation; an approach that reconceptualises participation to include a more political sense of agency and understands participation as a process that is both temporal and spatial (Cornwall, 2002 & 2004; Hickey and Mohan, 2004 ). Viewing participation as something that is temporal helps us to understand how political processes, institutions, and political agencies have evolved over time, and ‘how spaces of participation may overlap [in ways that] sometimes reinforce one another and at other times are antagonistic’ (Hickey and Mohan, 2004: 16). Seeing it as a spatial practice allows us to ‘unpack places’ so that we are able to identify ‘the different forms of political action that occur’ (Hickey and Mohan, 2004: 17—18). Cornwall (2004) and Gaventa (2004 & 2006) both distinguish between ‘closed’, ‘invited’, and ‘popular’ or ‘claimed/created’ spaces, which exist on a continuum. Whereas popular or created/claimed spaces ‘are chosen, fashioned and claimed by those at the margin’, invited spaces are ‘spaces into which those who are considered marginal are invited’ and closed spaces are those where the marginalised are excluded entirely (Cornwall, 2004: 78). Where closed and invited spaces relate to space in politics, those spaces that are claimed or created are more likely to constitute spaces for the political, although there will be some overlap. These spaces are interconnected and continually evolving, and the boundaries between them are permeable and unstable.

Cornwall and Gaventa also highlight the political nature of participation and ask critical questions about its potential for transformation. Gaventa argues that adopting a spatial perspective helps us to gain a better understanding of the relationship between participation and power relations: ‘spaces

for participation are not neutral, but are themselves shaped by power relations that both enter and surround them... power relations help to shape the boundaries of participatory spaces, what is possible within them, and who may enter, with which identities, discourses and interests' (Gaventa, 2004: 34). Cornwall (2004) seeks to assess the transformative and democratic potential of spaces for participation, and raises the possibility that these spaces may also be regulatory and disciplinary. Both invited and created spaces are 'infused with existing relations of power, [and] interactions within them may come to reproduce rather than challenge hierarchies and inequalities' (Cornwall, 2004: 81). Thinking about spaces for participation highlights the situated and political nature of civil society participation in contexts where political violence and government repression is an everyday experience for many activists. It also focuses on the political agency of civil society actors, and encourages us to ask critical questions about the character of the spaces created by civil society, namely whether they are more transformative or disciplinary in nature.

## Political violence and government repression in Burundi

Burundi has a long history of violence. Whereas in the past, this violence often took on an ethnic or genocidal dimension, today it is mostly political in character (Vandeginste, 2015; Van Acker, 2015). Speaking in 2014, one female civil society activist explained that:

[Burundi] is not a peaceful country. There are killings and sporadic violence. It's targeted at individuals, previously at those of different ethnicities, but today it's political, between different political parties (Interview, 2 September 2014).

Political violence is understood here as violence that is politically motivated, and is perpetrated by state and non-state actors. Political violence and government repression have become increasingly widespread within Burundi in recent years. They take many forms, and are experienced by different groups within a society. Government repression is targeted at dissenting voices and those that are associated with opposition actors (either rightly or wrongly). This includes members and supporters of opposition parties, and protestors and civil society activists, but it also includes people who happen to live in opposition areas (Amnesty International, 2014, 2015a, & 2015b). Political

violence, on the other hand, affects groups and individuals situated on both sides of the political divide.

This paper will focus on political violence and government repression targeted at civil society activists and organisations in Burundi. Civil society in Burundi is populated by varied actors (including but not exclusively organisations, associations, networks, movements, and individuals), some of which are more structured, formal, and disciplined than others. Working at and across different scales on a wide variety of issues, these actors have diverse and sometimes contradictory agendas and use a wide variety of tactics to achieve their goals. The relationship between civil society and the Burundian government has become increasingly antagonistic in recent years. Yet the existence of tensions is nothing new and the historical relationship between civil society and the state in Burundi is complex, and characterised by cooperation and contestation.

### **Political space for civil society in historical perspective**

The relationship between civil society and the state in Burundi has changed throughout the post-independence period, and perceptions of political space for civil society among activists have also fluctuated greatly. Since gaining independence from Belgium in 1962, Burundi has experienced numerous cycles of genocidal violence and ethnic conflict (Daley, 2008; Watt, 2008; Uvin, 2009; Lemarchand, 1994 & 1996). From the mid 1960s until the introduction of multi-party democracy in the early 1990s, the country was governed by a series of authoritarian regimes which created a ‘genocidal state’ that was dominated by the security forces and reproduced physical and structural violence against its citizens (Daley, 2008). In 1972 a Hutu insurrection in the south of the country was violently repressed by the Burundian army and associated youth militias, who went on to systematically kill Hutu leaders and intellectuals. Historians have argued that memories of the 1972 genocide, continued to shape perceptions and the actions of people during later violence (Lemarchand, 2009; Chrétien, 2008). Chrétien argues that the ‘founding event’ of the civil war that began in 1993, for many was ‘no doubt represented by the crisis of 1972, it haunts their memories and marks their mentality’ (Chrétien, 2008: 29). Many of the civil society groups that existed at this

time – traditional structures such as the *bashingantahe*, and faith-based institutions such as the Catholic Church and its associated societies, alongside more recognisable forms such as trade unions and youth organisations – did little to challenge and in some cases were complicit in the violence that took place (Lemarchand, 1994). The Catholic Church in particular was widely criticised for not doing enough to stop the massacres and confront the dominant social norms of militarism, violence, and exclusion which characterised Burundian society during the post-independence period.

Relations between the state and civil society became increasingly conflictual during the early 1980s, when President Jean Baptiste Bagaza turned Burundi into a one-party state, and sought to limit the influence of institutions such as the *bashingantahe* and the Catholic Church, which he saw as a rival to the Burundian state (Chrétien, 1993; Lemarchand, 1994 & 1996). From the early 1980s onwards, Bagaza introduced a series of increasingly restrictive measures designed to reduce the power of the Catholic Church, including the closure of organisations associated with the Church known as Catholic Action Movements (Lemarchand, 1996). Among these organisations were the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, which had been founded by Belgian missionaries during the colonial period – a ban which was only lifted following sustained advocacy by a loose coalition of Catholic, Protestant and Muslim members of the Scouts and Guides who sought to demonstrate the secularity of the organisations (Interview with female activist, 4 April 2015). During the 1980s, the security services harassed and detained a number of outspoken figures associated with the Catholic Church, including the Archbishop of Gitega, who was later assassinated during the civil war. Those organisations that continued to operate during this time lacked independence from the state and were expected to support the agenda of the ruling party. Niyonkuru (2011) explains that,

During the single-party period, the state never created or maintained a space for free expression. All actions and activities affecting the public interest were to be inspired and guided by the party's ideological line and orientation. This situation did not favor the emergence of civil society. The few organizations that could be classified as non-state actors working for the general interest, such as unions, women's organizations, youth

movements, or cooperatives, were obligated to follow the guidelines set forth by the regime and the ruling party. (2011: 1).

The early 1990s saw a period of political liberalisation and the introduction of multi-party democracy, which included the creation of a new legal and regulatory framework for civil society that provided for the creation of non-profit organisations as legal entities.<sup>32</sup> Over two hundred associations were registered between 1992 and 1994, including the first rights-based organisations (Ntakarutimana and Ntsimbiyabandi, 2004). Among these associations, were a handful of groups established and supported by the government during the early 1990s to check the emergence of more critical voices. The most well-known example of these pro-government organisations was Ligue Sonera, which was led by the former Minister for Justice and Foreign Affairs and established to counter the creation of Ligue ITEKA, the first independent human rights organisation (Palmans, 2006).

Palmans finds that civil society groups established in the early 1990s were often divided along ethnic and political lines and were even used by politicians as ‘a springboard to gain power’ (2006: 219). Palmans concludes that as a result, ‘civil society became a sphere of interests, and a way to continue the political struggle’ (2006: 219). Despite this, many of the activists that I spoke to in Burundi, regarded this period before the start of the civil war as a time of democratic opening and as the moment when contemporary civil society was born, a view that is shared by Burundian writers such as Ntakarutimana and Ntsimbiyabandi (2004) and Niyonkuru (2011).

The assassination of the first democratically elected Hutu president in 1993 precipitated a decade-long civil war, known among Burundians as *la crise*. Spaces for participation were limited during the civil war, although the number of registered associations continued to grow as Burundians

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<sup>32</sup> Republique du Burundi, ‘Décret-loi n°1/11 du 18 avril 1992 portant cadre organique des associations sans but lucratif (ASBL)’.

sought to respond to emerging socio-economic challenges generated by the conflict, such as the rise in orphans, street children, and child soldiers (Palmans, 2006). They also established a large number of organisations concerned with conflict resolution and the promotion of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. However, the mobility of peace activists was severely restricted during the civil war, especially for Hutus, who were treated with suspicion by the Tutsi-dominated military, and found it difficult to travel throughout the countryside without international accompaniment (Interview with male activist, 1 April 2015). A number of civil society activists were arrested, and many of the individuals that I spoke to explained that they had lost close friends, colleagues and family members in the conflict.

It was during this period that many civil society groups became involved in advocacy and campaigning, speaking out against human rights violations and denouncing the use of violence (Palmans, 2006). However, civil society voices were largely excluded from the negotiations leading up to the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2000 (Palmans, 2006; Daley, 2008). Palmans argues that those organisations that participated in the talks were ‘organisations and individuals chosen by the government and were not independent’ (2006: 222). Many civil society actors chose not to participate in order to maintain their independence, and instead decided to organise numerous seminars, workshops, and debates to raise awareness among local communities of what was happening at the talks (Palmans, 2006). The numbers of civil society organisations grew exponentially following the signing of the Arusha Accords in 2000 (Ntakarutimana and Ntsimbiyabandi, 2004). This number continued to grow and it is estimated that the total number of registered civil society organisations in Burundi in 2014/15 was around 6,000, with new organisations registering almost every day (Interview with representative of multilateral organisation working in Burundi, 27 August 2014). However, de Reu estimated that only 5-10% of organisations registered in 2004 could be considered ‘really active’ (2004: 3), a view that continues to be supported by international actors working in Burundi today (Interview with representative of multilateral organisation working in Burundi, 27 August 2014).

The historical relationship between civil society and the state in Burundi is complex, and has changed throughout the post-independence period. There are times when civil society institutions have lacked independence from the state and constituted part of the prevailing social and political hegemony, and moments when relations between civil society and the state have been characterised by conflict, confrontation, and resistance. Perceptions of political space among civil society activists have also fluctuated greatly during the post-independence period. These perceptions relate more to individual and collective experiences of violence and repression and the memories they generate, than to quantitative measures such as the number of civil society organisations created. While the number of civil society organisations has continued to grow during the post-war period, the decade following the end of the civil war has also been characterised by friction between civil society and the political authorities and the introduction of government controls designed to limit spaces for participation.

### **Rising political violence and repression in the post-war decade**

Relations between civil society and government authorities in the post-war decade (from the completion of the first post-war elections in 2005 until the anti-third term protests and contested elections in 2015) were characterised by constraints and confrontations. The CNDD-FDD, a former rebel group turned political party, swept to victory in the 2005 election, and its leader, Pierre Nkurunziza, was subsequently elected president by the Burundian parliament. Relations between civil society and the post-war government became increasingly confrontational around the 2010 elections, and deteriorated further in the run-up to the 2015 elections. In January 2015, a number of leading civil society groups established a coalition, named *Halte au Troisième Mandat!* (Stop the Third Term!), which campaigned against Nkurunziza's intention to stand for a third presidential term. The day after Nkurunziza announced his intention to seek re-election, anti-third term protests erupted on the streets of Bujumbura, organised by civil society groups and opposition parties. These protests culminated in widespread violence, which precipitated an ongoing political crisis that resulted in the deaths of at least 430 people and forced 230,000 Burundians to seek refuge in

neighbouring countries.<sup>33</sup> In November 2015, the government suspended the activities and froze the assets of 10 civil society groups it accused of leading an ‘insurrection’.<sup>34</sup> The breakdown in the relationship between civil society and the government did not occur overnight, but deteriorated over time, and should be viewed in relation to the broader social and historical context within which it was situated.

The Burundian government introduced a number of restrictions designed to weaken the influence of civil society and limit spaces for participation following the 2010 elections. In 2013 the Burundian parliament passed a law on public gatherings that essentially banned spontaneous protests,<sup>35</sup> and was used by the authorities to obstruct meetings and block demonstrations organised by civil society and the opposition parties. In March 2015, the Mayor of Bujumbura banned all demonstrations except for those organised by the ruling party in the name of ‘peace and social cohesion’ (Amnesty International, 2015b: 13). The authorities went on to prohibit all demonstrations the day before the President announced his intention to stand for re-election in April 2015.

The government also sought to undermine vocal civil society groups in the post-war decade through the establishment of pro-government organisations. As one female civil society activist said, ‘the regime is setting up organisations that are favourable to them, in order to prevent traditional civil society organisations from doing their work’ (Interview, 30 September 2014). During interviews, several civil society organisations explained that they have a parallel or shadow organisation which

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<sup>33</sup> Statement of the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, on opening a Preliminary Examination into the situation in Burundi (25 April 2016). Available online at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=otp-stat-25-04-2016>. Accessed 16 May 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Ministerial Ordinance No 530/1547 of 23 November 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Republic of Burundi, ‘Loi No. 1/28 du 05 Décembre 2013 Portant Règlementation des Manifestations sur la Voie Publique et Réunions Publique’.

will follow their movements and contradict their statements. A male activist explained how these parallel organisations operate:

The government is trying to divide civil society like it has done with political parties, where it has split them, and split them again so that they become weaker and the government becomes stronger. The same thing is now happening with civil society. They are creating parallel organisations... which are favourable to the government and have been set up by the ruling party. They are considered members of civil society but they participate in the activities of the ruling party... There are so many of these organisations that have been created. And when the minister of the interior calls a meeting all these organisations will go as well and when [our organisation] speaks, there is someone opposite saying no, and contradicting everything we say. It's become very confrontational (Interview, 25 September 2014).

These pro-government organisations also demand to be included in the limited invited spaces for participation created by multilateral actors such as the United Nations, and disrupt them through speaking over and contradicting civil society participants. If they are not invited to participate in these spaces, pro-government organisations will release statements that criticise the United Nations for being biased against the government and even for being pro-Tutsi (Interview with male representative of multilateral organisation based in Burundi, 27 August 2014).

The use of harassment, intimidation, and violence has also limited spaces for civil society action in the post-war decade. As one male activist working with a high-profile advocacy group in Burundi explained:

The safety and security of human rights defenders is a big issue in Burundi today. Collectively or individually, all those working in civil society are labelled as human rights defenders. And they are at risk of kidnapping, being killed, or being jailed. (Interview, 8 September 2014)

Several of the civil society activists interviewed as part of this research reported receiving threatening phone calls in the middle of the night, seeing people hanging around outside their homes, or receiving threats to themselves and their families. In December 2014, a European

advocacy network released a statement condemning the harassment of a prominent activist, who had received anonymous phone calls and social media messages threatening him and his family following a high-profile trip to Europe where he denounced the government's human rights record (EurAc 2014). A male activist explained that this extra-legal harassment was an everyday occurrence:

The other night the police came to my house without authorisation. I wouldn't let them in without the right documents. Eventually, they went away and didn't come back. It's part of the intimidation we encounter when working on sensitive issues... We are used to it; we are not afraid. It happens, and then we continue our work (Interview, 31 March 2015).

Legal harassment was also common. The Burundian authorities regularly issued judicial summonses to civil society representatives, and also arrested and detained a number of journalists and activists (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Amnesty International, 2014). In May 2014 the authorities arrested a popular human rights defender, and in January 2015 they arrested the director of one of the leading independent radio stations in Burundi. There were also a number of violent attacks on civil society activists and their families. In 2009, an anti-corruption campaigner was assassinated. In August 2015, another activist was seriously wounded in a failed assassination attempt, and assailants killed his son and son-in-law in separate attacks later that year. However, it is important to note that political violence and government repression are targeted not just at prominent individuals. The vast majority of people affected by it are ordinary Burundians, caught up in the struggles of the elite over political power and position. A male activist explained that:

If you listen carefully to local media, they will report the killings of one, two, five people each day. Why are they killed? ... You never know [who the perpetrators are]. They break into your home at night. They kill ordinary people, who cannot afford soap, who are not able to wash their clothes, who cannot afford health care or food. It is these people who are targeted... They are killed because they are a member of the FNL, or because they spoke out about abuses by local authorities (Interview, 8 September 2014).

## Violence and participation in Burundi

Throughout Burundi's post-independence period, civil society groups and activists have managed to navigate various restrictions to create spaces for participation and the political. In the run-up to the 2015 elections, two important spaces for disagreement and dissent emerged: mass protests and social media. However, in practice they became sites of 'contentious politics', defined by Tilly and Tarrow as sites where 'three familiar features of social life: contention, collective action, and politics' converge with 'potentially dangerous' consequences (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015: 7—10). Following the 2015 protests, the situation in Burundi became increasingly violent as the government sought to suppress all opposition to the third term. In many ways, 2015 marked a step change in Burundi. Before the protests, civil society groups were able to negotiate government restrictions and create spaces for participation. After the protests, widespread political violence and government repression created a pervading climate of fear and uncertainty which placed further limits on participation and dissent.

### **Creating spaces for participation**

Burundi does not have a history of mass protests, yet demonstrations became a central characteristic of the political landscape in Burundi in the months preceding the 2015 elections (Van Acker, 2015). Civil society groups navigated restrictions on public gatherings to create spaces where people could come together to express critical views in ways that demonstrated great creativity and agency. In January 2015, a group of civil society actors and independent media organisations came together to establish the *Mardi Vert* movement, where they encouraged people to wear green every Tuesday to show their support for an imprisoned journalist and the causes he championed, an act which enabled ordinary people to express solidarity with imprisoned activists without breaking restrictive laws on public gatherings. In January 2015, over 100 civil society groups came together to establish a coalition, *Halte au troisième mandat!* to coordinate civil society opposition to the third term. The coalition encouraged motorists in Bujumbura to sound their horns in unison to protest against the third term. Along with the *Mardi Vert* movement, this action succeeded in creating important

spaces for participation at a time when coming together through more conventional forms of peaceful assembly could be extremely difficult and even dangerous.

In April 2015, the *Halte au troisième mandat!* coalition and opposition parties called for people to take to the streets of Bujumbura following the announcement that Nkurunziza would stand for a third presidential term. Although the protests that ensued were planned by formal organisations, Van Acker argues that they ‘were clearly driven by urban youth, and tacitly supported by larger parts of society’ (2015: 7). The authorities were quick to dismiss the protests as a ‘marginal phenomenon’ focused in a small number of pro-opposition and largely Tutsi neighbourhoods, but ‘in several of these neighbourhoods, Hutu youth from the hills and plains surrounding the capital [also] joined the protest’ (Van Acker, 2015: 8). Although the protests erupted in the wake of the president’s announcement that he would run for a third term, it is important to note that they also occurred against a backdrop of sustained militarism and persistent political and economic marginalisation (Daley and Popplewell, 2016). While for civil society leaders the protests were about defending the Burundian constitution and protecting the Arusha Accords from creeping third-termism, for many ordinary Burundians they were also about unemployment, corruption, and political exclusion.

Despite repeated calls from civil society leaders for the protests to remain peaceful, they became increasingly violent. Van Acker argues that ‘in the face of brutal police repression, the nonviolent character of the protests [came] under pressure’ and following an attempted coup in May 2015, some protestors ‘claimed and procured arms to defend themselves’ (Van Acker, 2015: 8). However, the clear majority of the violence was exercised by the police, who ‘used excessive and disproportionate force, including lethal force, against protesters, at times shooting unarmed protesters running away from them’ (Amnesty International, 2015b: 1). Clashes between protesters and the police escalated as the Burundian government sought to crush what it described as ‘an insurrection’. The anti-third term protests and those that preceded them, sought to challenge dominant power relations that have historically sustained militarism, political marginalisation, and economic mismanagement, in a peaceful and non-violent manner. Protesters came from all

backgrounds, and they largely resisted government attempts to reignite ethnic tensions by characterising the protests as Tutsi-dominated (Van Acker, 2015; Frère, 2016). However, the protests and the government response to them have arguably strengthened existing political divisions in Burundi and reinforced the violent and exclusionary power relations that sustain them.

Social media are also an important space for participation in Burundi. This took on increased significance following the interruption of private radio stations in the wake of the anti-third term protests. Independent radio stations gave wide coverage to the protests but within days, the authorities had suspended the largest independent radio station, *Radio Publique Africaine (RPA)*, and cut the signals of two other private broadcasters (Frère, 2016). Following the attempted coup in May 2015, the authorities suspended all independent media. The police and members of the *Imbonerakure* youth militia burned the headquarters of RPA to the ground, and destroyed the equipment of a number of other broadcasters (Frère, 2016).

Social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, and mobile networking applications, such as WhatsApp and Viber, became important spaces for organising and sharing information, expressing solidarity with protesters, and resisting authority. There was a huge response to the protests on Twitter, with dialogue and dissent amassing around hashtags such as *#sindumuja* (which means ‘I am not a slave’ in Kirundi) and *#stopnkurunziza*. Speculation about the president’s whereabouts during the attempted coup was parodied on Twitter and Facebook by activists posting photos of themselves looking inside cupboards and under beds accompanied by the hashtag *#whereisnkurunziza?* Messages and tweets were posted in Kirundi, Swahili, French, and English, suggesting that social media became a critical space for engaging with a variety of audiences at different scales, including Burundians within the diaspora, as well as regional and international actors. However, it is important to note that very few Burundians have access to the internet and social media, so while we often think of social media as providing an inclusive and democratic space, in Burundi it is also a highly exclusive one.

Violence also became a defining characteristic of social media spaces following the anti-third term protests. Social media were used not only by civil society actors, but also by government spokespeople to stigmatise and delegitimise civil society actors through labelling them as rebels, insurgents and terrorists. Labelling protesters in this way delegitimised civil society actors and was used to justify the use of physical violence against them. Government supporters have also used social media to send violent threats to civil society actors (EurAc, 2014). As well as supporting the dissemination of information, Twitter and Facebook have also facilitated the spread of misinformation and rumours, which could strengthen the pervading climate of fear and uncertainty in Burundi. Social media has also become a platform for the production and reproduction of discursive violence in Burundi. Almost every day during the protests and post-election violence, graphic photographs of dead bodies were circulated on Twitter and Facebook. While this was often done to provide proof of killings of civilians and opposition supporters, it also contributed to the proliferation of violence within social media spaces.

### **Violence, fear, and limits on participation**

A lot has changed [since the end of the civil war]. But today there is political conflict, and sometimes this conflict escalates and people are killed. They are killed for their politics. People are afraid because they are not protected. So there is fear... there is fear that this might escalate, and generate more widespread conflict (Interview with male activist, 5 September 2014).

The words of this civil society activist, spoken back in 2014, now seem ominously prescient. When I met with individuals and organisations in the year running up to the 2015 elections, the word ‘fear’ cropped up again and again. Respondents shared their fears about the future, but they also discussed how past and present political violence and government repression affected their actions and behaviour, as well as those of the communities they worked with. The relational dimensions of violence became increasingly evident the more time that I spent with civil society activists in Burundi. They generate widespread fear, which stops activists from speaking out, and shapes the ways in which they think about and approach the future.

*‘You want to speak up, but sometimes you stop’: affective dimensions of violence*

One of the primary functions and effects of political violence is the promotion of widespread self-censorship. The Burundian authorities and pro-government supporters systematically harassed, intimidated, and even attacked civil society activists around the 2010 and 2015 elections. Prior to the anti-third term protests, this violence was targeted largely at one part of civil society; high-profile and often outspoken individuals who work on issues the government considers to be sensitive or political, such as human rights and good governance. The vast majority of civil society activists interviewed as part of this study between June 2014 and April 2015 had not experienced harassment or intimidation themselves, and described their relationship with the authorities in positive or neutral terms. Only those individuals who worked for high-profile advocacy organisations reported receiving threats from the authorities. Nevertheless, the harassment and intimidation of a small handful of prominent figures discouraged others from engaging in public debate. Speaking in August 2014, a representative of a multilateral organisation based in Burundi explained that:

What we see is a country dominated by fear. There is a semblance of free expression, people are talking on the streets, but there are some issues you can’t talk about. You can find yourself summoned by the police or to a tribunal where they ask why you said this or that. It’s often public figures, such as opposition politicians, civil society leaders, or journalists, that are summoned (Interview, 27 August 2014).

Some activists that I spoke to were not deterred by the harassment and intimidation of high-profile individuals. A male activist said that:

We haven’t been threatened but we are aware of the dangers and try to be careful. We are not afraid. We have to stand up for causes we believe in. If you are arrested or threatened, it’s for a good cause. We know what we are engaging in and we won’t stop because they have arrested others. We understand the dangers that are associated with being a peacebuilding activist in Burundi. We are determined to challenge injustices until there is change. (Interview, 5 September 2014)

However, the fear of reprisals had discouraged others from speaking out. Speaking back in September 2014, one female activist working with a high-profile human rights group explained that:

We work in an environment that is hostile and unfavourable. There are lots of potential pitfalls. Sometimes you risk having problems and you self-censor. As a human rights defender you want to speak up, but sometimes, because of the environment, you stop. (Interview, 30 September 2014)

These issues do not just affect high-profile individuals, such as prominent civil society activists or journalists. A male activist working with a human rights group based in Bujumbura explained how fear of speaking out also shapes the actions and behaviour of ordinary Burundians:

What [our organisation] is doing is to try to fight against the fear in the population... It is not very easy to express one's thoughts in Burundi. It is very dangerous, extremely dangerous... We intervene on civil liberties and freedoms because we are convinced that peace or democracy cannot be a reality in a context where people are afraid on a regular basis. People cannot be at peace when they cannot express their thoughts, when there is no freedom of expression... Everybody is fearful. When you meet a man or lady in the street, you ask him or her a question. It is not everyone who can answer. They are thinking what does my neighbour, my colleague think about what I am saying right now? In many villages, everyone is monitored. In many offices, everyone is monitored. People are scared of saying whatever because they know what can happen if it reaches the concerned person. (Interview, 8 September 2014)

Fear of reprisals has had a significant impact on how political space is perceived among activists in Burundi, which affected their willingness to engage in public criticism and political debate. Speaking about civil society and political opposition in Rwanda, Beswick finds that actions to limit political space for civil society and to discourage criticism 'build up over time to form an impression of what kind of politics and political debate is possible' (2010: 236). They generate fear and negative perceptions, which influence the actions and behaviour of other activists not directly targeted. Beswick finds that government efforts to close down political debate shape 'notions of acceptable political activity, encouraging self-censorship by activists and potential critics of the

government' (2010: 236). She concludes that 'Rwanda is suffering not only from a politics of fear... but also from what could be considered a fear of politics, or of occupying the political space that is, or may be, available'. (Beswick, 2010: 244). Beswick's findings from Rwanda clearly resonate with what has happened in Burundi over recent years. Harassment, intimidation, and violence directed towards a small number of individual activists and journalists discouraged many more from speaking out against the government and in doing so reduced space for the political in advance of the 2015 elections.

These fears intensified further following the violence sparked by the anti-third term protests. On 11 December 2015, the Burundian police and security forces killed at least 79 people in response to an attack on military installations, many of them young people who lived in pro-opposition neighbourhoods (Amnesty International, 2015a). Amnesty International argue that although this violence took place on a much larger scale, the methods – 'extrajudicial executions, systematic looting and theft, arbitrary arrests and targeting of perceived political opposition strongholds' did not differ significantly from those used in previous police operations (2015a: 2). They find that since the beginning of the protests in April 2015, the 'police have been responsible for numerous, smaller-scale, abusive operations.' (Amnesty International, 2015a: 2). Operations such as these, led to a climate of heightened fear following the 2015 elections. They also affected perceptions of political space for civil society, which worsened as levels of political violence increased. The attacks precipitated a further rise in self-censorship among activists, and forced a number of high-profile civil society actors to flee the country. Those who were unable to leave went into hiding. As a report from Amnesty International on political violence and government repression in Burundi following the anti-third term protests notes:

The country's once-vibrant human rights community has been dismantled piece by piece. On the legal and administrative front, human rights organizations are facing orders that suspend their operations and freeze their bank accounts. Even more worryingly, human rights defenders have suffered physical violence and threats. Most of the country's leading defenders have had to flee the country. "My children are scared," one of the country's few remaining human rights defenders told Amnesty International. (2015a: 8).

*‘Everyone fears for the future’: temporal dimensions of political violence*

It is important to note that this fear is informed not only by contemporary experiences, but also by collective and individual memories of past violence and suffering. For example, when talking about the upcoming elections, many activists would reflect back on what happened during the previous elections. A male activist said that:

In 2010, there was lots of tension between civil society and political actors. There were blockages, destabilisation during the electoral period... Today things are tense again. There is a lot of fear around the 2015 elections. The population fears there will be a catastrophic situation. (Interview, 8 March 2015)

Others would frame their current experience of political violence in relation to past episodes of violence, such as the civil war or sometimes even further back. When asked how they would describe the current situation in Burundi, two activists working for different organisations replied:

When we talk about peace in Burundi, it should be understood within the context of Burundi’s history... When we look at Burundi’s history, its characterised by interethnic violence, it’s a history of division. It’s marked in the memories of the Burundian people, its victims. (Interview with male activist, 8 March 2015)

We are not at war. But it’s relative... there is a lot of suspicion and fear. Everyone is afraid about the elections. It’s a relative peace. There is no gunfire, but in our hearts I am not so sure. People are afraid. (Interview with female activist, 22 September 2014).

Since independence, hundreds of thousands of Burundians have been killed as a result of genocidal violence and ethnic conflict. Several of the activists that I spoke to shared stories of personal loss during the civil war, and some even witnessed the killing of friends or family members. Many of these activists also viewed contemporary political violence through the prism of the past. But political violence can also impact how individuals think about and approach the future. As one male civil society activist working on human rights issues in Burundi explained:

It’s hard, you go to some communities and people will say no, there is no way to end corruption in Burundi, there is no way to educate people about human rights. Someone who

has been attending our session on human rights may go back [to his community] tonight, and he will see that people have been killed by the police. They don't believe that change is possible, and it's hard to do things when you don't believe things can change. It's related to all those years of conflict we have faced. (Interview, 9 April 2015)

These individual and collective experiences and memories of violence and injustice continue to shape how civil society actors perceive and respond to political space in Burundi today. They instil fears about the possibility of the past repeating itself – fears that have become even more pronounced following the widespread violence that took place around the 2015 elections. This violence may also have more lasting implications, traumatising another generation of young Burundians and creating new collective and individual memories of violence and injustice that will continue to shape perceptions of political space for many years to come.

## Conclusion

Contemporary policy narratives on political space for civil society are disempowering and reductive. They neglect the agency exercised by civil society activists who struggle to create and maintain spaces for participation in violent and restrictive contexts, and they reduce the multiple and diverse experiences of civil society in particular places to a single narrative that does not reflect individual and collective perceptions of political space and how they change over time. Violence and space are also poorly conceptualised within these narratives. They neglect the relational dimensions of violence and space, as well as the ways in which these processes interact with each other. When viewed relationally, it becomes clear that political space for civil society concerns the perceptions of activists, which are shaped by historical and contemporary experiences of political violence and government repression as well as individual emotions and subjectivities, and they tend to fluctuate over time. This is evident in Burundi, where fear of violence has encouraged a culture of self-censorship among activists. Government repression of the anti-third term protests and the violent security operations that followed are likely to create new memories of violence and injustice that will continue to shape perceptions of political space for civil society into the future.

Consequently, this paper argues that it might be more helpful to think about spaces for participation, which emphasise the political dimensions of political space. Such an approach acknowledges the temporal and spatial aspects of participation in a nuanced and relational way. It also recognises that spaces are multiple, and that they often overlap and intersect with one another. Social media in Burundi are an interesting example of this. Although sites such as Twitter and Facebook had been used by activists in Burundi for a number of years, social media took on increased importance following the suspension of conventional media as a result of the anti-third term protests. Whereas anti-third term protesters used the space to communicate with international audiences and share vital information about the unfolding situation in Burundi, government supporters have used the same space to harass and intimidate anti-third term protesters and opposition supporters, and to spread discourses that delegitimise activists and make violence against them permissible. Thinking about spaces for participation also highlights the situated and embedded nature of these spaces, and the ways in which they exist in dialectical tension with social and power relations. It allows us to ask critical questions about the character of spaces for participation such as mass protests and social media, which are often romanticised by policy narratives on civil society space, and raise questions about their potential for transformation. Reconceptualising political and operating spaces for civil society in this way would allow policy-makers and those seeking to influence them to think more critically about civil society, develop a more nuanced understanding of the ways perceptions and experiences shape these spaces, and ultimately improve their support for civil society activists.

## Chapter 9

### *Spaces for peace: listening to experiences and perspectives of civil society activists*<sup>36</sup>

Countless understandings of peace exist, yet one form has come to dominate peacebuilding policy and practice, that of the liberal peace. Critical international relations scholars argue that it constitutes a hegemonic and governmental discourse that disciplines post-conflict populations and restricts transformative thinking about peace. These writers have sought to reassess liberal peacebuilding through adopting a subaltern or post-colonial perspective that focuses on sites of resistance, where the liberal peace is contested and reworked, and hybrid forms of peace are produced. However, many of these critiques remain focused on deconstructing the liberal peace rather than exploring different narratives on violence and peace situated within particular places. They are also inherently sceptical of civil society, which they regard as a liberal construct that is disconnected from local communities, marginalises everyday voices, and is incapable of producing an emancipatory peace – a view that diminishes the complex role of civil society activists in violent contexts. Located at the interface of the liberal peace and the everyday, these activists are, to paraphrase Lewis and Mosse (2006), ‘brokers and translators’ who mediate between international discourses and vernacular understandings. Often composites themselves, they are critical to the production of hybrid forms of peace and the struggle to create and maintain spaces where more emancipatory and transformative thinking on peace can emerge.

Drawing on the emerging literature on geographies of peace, this paper seeks to critically explore perspectives on violence and peace among civil society activists in Burundi, a country with a long

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history of ethnic conflict and genocidal violence. It is inspired by the work of Williams, whose research on everyday peace in northern India attempts ‘to understand the meaning of peace within a situated context’ through exploring subaltern perspectives on violence and peace (2014: 195). This paper presents the views of civil society activists in Burundi in their own words, yet it is important to note that these voices are not necessarily everyday or subaltern ones. For post-colonial theorists such as Spivak (1988), the ‘colonised *subaltern* subject’ is one that exists outside colonial discourse on the margins of society. Civil society activists are not among the most marginalised in Burundi. While some do come from modest backgrounds, most activists are comparatively well educated, speak French as well as Kirundi, and live in middle-class neighbourhoods.

However, they are also the subjects of liberal peacebuilding discourse as well as its intermediaries. As members of post-conflict populations, they are exposed to the harsh realities of neoliberal market reforms and the electoral violence that has become a common feature of many post-conflict contexts. Consequently, the perspectives of activists are also hybrids, which blend liberal values with traditional norms and embody vernacular understandings of peace as well as international ones. Their views are also situated; they both relate to and are shaped by the particular social and political context in Burundi. As a result they are also distinctly geographical. They traverse multiple scales, from that of the body to the global, and they are also relational and temporal. In other words, they negotiate the elite and the everyday, and mediate the past and the present, as well as reconciling the liberal and the local.

The paper is based on five months’ qualitative fieldwork in Burundi, conducted in two phases between June 2014 and April 2015. It draws on material from 83 in-depth interviews with Burundian civil society activists, including citations included from 23 of these interviews. All the activists interviewed worked with or for civil society groups that identified themselves as working on peace or peacebuilding in Burundi. Conversations were relatively unstructured, and participants were encouraged to define peace and peacebuilding in their own terms. The voices of activists are situated within the broader literature on violence, peace, and peacebuilding. The paper begins by looking at the emerging literature on geographies of peace (Koopman, 2011; Loyd, 2012; Megoran,

2011; Williams and McConnell, 2011; McConnell et al., 2014), and of violence (Gregory and Pred, 2007; Springer, 2011; Springer and Le Billon, 2016), before discussing the existing literature on civil society and the hybrid peace (Belloni, 2012; Mac Ginty, 2010 & 2011; Richmond, 2005, 2009, 2011a & 2011b; Richmond and Mitchell, 2012; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2016).

It then discusses how perspectives on violence and peace among activists mediate the past and the present through exploring their relational and temporal dimensions, particularly how they relate current experiences to individual and collective memories of past violence and how this affects their hopes and concerns about the future. The next section explores how these perspectives negotiate the liberal and the local through examining the way they reflect both the liberal peace and vernacular understandings, and how they draw on traditional values as well as Western values and religious teachings. Finally, it looks at how activists find themselves situated between the elite and the everyday, their concerns about the relationship between elite politics and everyday violence, and their attempts to create spaces for peace that challenge violence at the levels of the elite and of the everyday.

## Violence, peace, and peacebuilding

The relationship between violence and peace is complex and multifaceted. Many post-conflict countries remain dominated by institutions of conflict and the physical and structural violence associated with them, a situation that has become known as ‘no war, no peace’ (Mac Ginty, 2006; see also Daley, 2006; Richards, 2004; and Keen, 2000). Geographers have become increasingly interested in the study of violence and peace in recent years. They seek to deconstruct the binary between war and peace through exploring how violence is embedded in peace, and how spaces for peace can emerge in the midst of violence and repression, both of which are central to understanding perspectives on violence and peace among activists in Burundi and their approaches to peacebuilding.

## **Violence and peace**

The 'no war, no peace' paradox is often explained by distinguishing between positive and negative peace, a dichotomy that was first proposed by Johan Galtung in the late 1960s. Where 'negative peace' refers to the absence of war, 'positive peace' refers to a social condition where neither direct nor structural nor cultural violence exists (Galtung, 1969). By 'direct violence', Galtung means linguistic or physical violence, which involves the infliction of verbal or bodily harm. With direct violence, there is always a clear subject, object, and action, but this is less clear with structural and cultural violence, which are more abstract, subtle, and invisible forms of violence (Bourgois, 2004). The anthropologists Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois define structural violence as 'the violence of poverty, hunger, social exclusion and humiliation' (2004: 1). For Farmer, it relates to 'the mechanisms through which large-scale social forces crystallize into the sharp, hard surfaces of individual suffering' (1996: 263). Where 'structural violence' refers to the violence implicit in societal structures, 'cultural violence' relates to any aspect of a culture that legitimises direct physical or structural violence (Galtung, 1990). 'Positive peace' is not just about the absence of violence in all its forms, it denotes the presence of a just social order that promotes human well-being and flourishing (Galtung, 1969). This means that peace in its positive form can be very difficult to achieve. There can be substantial disagreement over what positive peace looks like in reality, and how to achieve it. This is in part because peace is a highly relative and relational concept: one person's understanding of what constitutes human well-being and flourishing is likely to be different to that of another.

The emerging literature on geographies of peace argues that it is multiple, situated, and spatial (Koopman, 2011; Loyd, 2012; Megoran, 2011; Williams and McConnell, 2011; McConnell et al., 2014). Koopman (2011) establishes that there are different ways of thinking about peace, and that understandings of the concept differ between particular groups and individuals and vary from one place to another and across different times and scales. This leads her to call on geographers to critically engage with peace and the way it is connected to violence through taking 'peace to pieces' (Koopman, 2011: 194). Koopman also finds that the concept is highly context-specific and is

shaped by both space and place: 'peace is shaped by the space in which it is made, as it too shapes that sphere' (2014: 109). She is interested in the production of spaces for peace and seeks to analyse the relational dimensions of the spaces for peace and how they are shaped by and shape social relations, as well as the memories and emotions that influence people's behaviours and actions within those spaces. Geographers have also highlighted the role of agency in the construction and maintenance of everyday peace. Williams argues that 'to understand the (re)production of peace we must take into account the (differential) role of agency and the specific cultural economies within which they are inspired, interpreted, and ultimately gain legitimacy, or not' (2014: 195).

Consequently, geographers view peace as a process (Megoran, 2011; Loyd, 2012; Williams and McConnell, 2011; Williams, 2014). For Megoran, 'peace is not a once-and-for-all outcome, but a continuously negotiated social relationship' (Megoran, 2013: 203). Loyd (2012) argues that we should also look at how peace is connected to violence and nonviolence. Along with Williams and McConnell (2011), she argues that viewing peace as a process illuminates the full spectrum of violence and nonviolence embedded in and legitimised by peace. This leads her to argue that peace is a highly differentiated landscape, and to challenge conceptions like structural violence and positive peace for being unclear, unspecified, and under-theorised. She argues that left this way, these concepts 'contribute to the same undifferentiated landscape of war and peace scholars and activists set out to critique' (Loyd, 2012: 480).

Critical geographers are also concerned with exploring the intersections between violence and space. The emerging literature on violent geographies, or geographies of violence, as it is sometimes called, seeks 'to interrogate and demonstrate the ways in which violence is woven through everyday lives, institutions, and structures' (Springer and Le Billon, 2016: 2). Springer and Le Billon argue that violence is inherently spatial, and are concerned with exploring how violence shapes space and 'the constitution of violence through space' (2016: 2). Exploring the spatiality of violence can have an important impact on the way that we understand violence, which Springer argues 'can be more appropriately understood as an unfolding process, arising from the broader geographical phenomena and temporal patterns of the social world' (2011: 91). Many geographers interested in

violence and space draw on the work of Massey (1994 & 2005), who understands space ‘as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny’ (2005: 9). Viewing space in relational terms enables critical geographers to explore the co-constitutive nature of violence and space, and highlights the ways in which violence is embedded in structures and institutions associated with peace.

### **Civil society and the hybrid peace**

Peacebuilding can be broadly defined as the means by which positive peace is constructed, through building the capacity of societies to address the underlying causes of conflict and prevent further violence (Galtung, 1975; Boutros-Ghali, 1992). The dominant form of peacebuilding over the past two decades has been liberal peacebuilding, which promotes a particular model of social, political, and economic organisation known as the ‘liberal peace’. A number of multilateral, bilateral and civil society actors are involved in liberal peacebuilding, all largely pursuing the same strategy of securitisation, institutionalisation, and political and economic liberalisation on the assumption that this will create the optimum conditions for peace and prevent a return to violent conflict. The promotion of a vibrant and active civil society is a core component of liberal peacebuilding, and international interveners have invested a huge amount of resources in capacity-building in post-conflict contexts.

Critics argue that liberal peacebuilding is a hegemonic and governmental discourse that disciplines post-conflict populations (Richmond, 2011a & 2011b; Duffield, 2001 & 2007). Laliberté (2016) argues that peacebuilding has become increasingly dominated by neoliberalism, which prioritises individual responsibility and reinforces governmentality. When combined with racialised and orientalist discourses, this results in peacebuilding interventions that ‘are based on the assumption that the behavior of the conflict-affected population is the problem.’ (Laliberté, 2016: 28). Laliberté finds that this ‘downscaling of responsibility to the site of the individual in combination with international Orientalist narratives’ has come to define peacebuilding in certain parts of Africa (2016: 28). Together, they produce ‘uneven geographies of intervention – geographies in which

racialized bodies and intimate spaces are associated with war and thereby seen as appropriate sites for peacebuilding' (Laliberté, 2016: 24). Many of these peacebuilding programmes are conceived and implemented by civil society organisations that seek to change community attitudes and individual behaviours among post-conflict populations.

Critical international relations scholars also regard liberal peacebuilding as a governmental discourse that restricts emancipatory and transformative thinking about peace. Richmond (2011a, 2011b) argues that the liberal peace constitutes a disciplinary framework based on coercion, lack of consent, and conditionality, which constructs local communities as the political subjects of peacebuilding. He seeks to reassess liberal peacebuilding through adopting a local or 'post-colonial' perspective that focuses on sites of resistance, where the liberal peace is contested and reworked. What he and other critical peacebuilding scholars are particularly interested in is how everyday agency interacts with liberal peacebuilding to produce hybrid forms of peace (Richmond, 2011a & 2011b; Mac Ginty, 2010 & 2011; Belloni, 2012; Millar et al., 2013). Hybridity is understood as a social process, and refers to the composite structures and forms of thinking and practice that emerge as the result of social interactions between different groups (Mac Ginty, 2011). Everyday negotiation and mediation are central to the concept, which Mac Ginty and Richmond view as 'a long-term process involving social negotiation, co-option, resistance, domination, assimilation, and co-existence' (2016: 221).

Richmond and Mac Ginty seek to promote 'a positive hybrid – and therefore emancipatory and socially just – peace', which would involve the gradual resolution of problems 'from the perspective of those caught up in them from a marginal position' (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2016: 230). However, much of the critical international relations literature remains focused on deconstructing the liberal peace rather than exploring these subaltern perspectives within particular places affected by violent conflict. An interesting exception is Heathershaw (2007), who explores the reproduction of alternative peacebuilding discourses across different scales in post-conflict Tajikistan. As well as international understandings, he identifies the elite discourse of *mirostitelstvo*, which is the Russian for peacebuilding, and the vernacular discourse of *tinji*, which means wellness or

peacefulness in Tajik. He analyses the ways in which different actors draw upon these narratives and reproduce them through everyday practice of building peace. Williams argues that by focusing on discourses rather than the actors themselves, Heathershaw reveals little ‘about what local agency looks like, and how the actions of some may acquire the legitimacy to actually maintain peace, whilst the actions of others may not’ (2014: 198). Conversely, this paper explores how one group of actors – civil society activists – reproduce different narratives on peace, and the everyday agency implicit in the construction and maintenance of spaces for peace that challenge violence at different scales.

Much of the existing literature on the hybrid peace is extremely critical of civil society. Critics of liberal peacebuilding argue that international interveners have focused on constructing a new civil society rather engaging with pre-existing grassroots associations and local forms of organising (Mac Ginty, 2011; Cubitt, 2013; Pouligny, 2005). Richmond (2011a & 2011b) contends that this has resulted in the construction of an artificial and externalised civil society that comprises professional, urban-based NGOs, which he compares with more local forms that he considers to be more representative, authentic, and local legitimate. However, most post-conflict civil societies are actually complex and heterogeneous ecologies populated with hybrid entities that are both liberal and local, which are situated between and transcend the elite and the everyday. Civil society activists are both the intermediaries and the subjects of liberal peacebuilding. They are brokers and translators of the hybrid peace, who traverse multiple scales from the international to the grassroots, and mediate between the various discourses that circulate at each of these levels. In doing so they encapsulate both the agency and the ‘in-between-ness’ associated with hybridity and the production of alternative forms of peace.

## The past and the present

Perspectives on violence and peace in Burundi among civil society activists are varied and diverse. One thing that they have in common is that they are situated within the social and political context within Burundi, and are shaped by individual and collective memories of past violence as well as

hopes and fears about the future. Burundi has endured several cycles of ethnic conflict and genocidal violence since it gained independence from Belgium in 1962 (Daley, 2008; Lemarchand, 1996 & 2009; Uvin, 1999 and 2009; Watt, 2008). In 1993, the assassination of Burundi's first democratically elected Hutu president precipitated a civil war that lasted for over a decade, resulting in the deaths of at least 300,000 people and causing extensive displacement within Burundi and across the broader Great Lakes region (Daley, 2008; Uvin, 2009). Peace negotiations led to the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Accords in 2000, which provided for the establishment of a power-sharing government, and multi-party elections held in 2005. While the election of the former rebel leader, Pierre Nkurunziza, as President officially marked the end of the conflict, fighting continued until as late as 2008. Sustained violence and militarism, and continued economic marginalisation and political exclusion characterised the post-war decade (Daley, 2008). The persistence of structural violence in all its forms, but particularly widespread poverty and hunger is also notable. Although the saliency of ethnicity declined, political divisions between the ruling party and opposition supporters have increased among elites and within communities.

When asked whether they would describe Burundi as a country at peace, most activists replied in relative terms. They explained that if you compared the situation at that time to what it was like at the height of civil war then you could say that Burundi was a country at peace. A male activist working for a youth organisation explained:

When we talk about peace in Burundi, it should be understood within the context of Burundi's history... When we look at Burundi's history it's characterised by interethnic violence, it's a history of division, it's marked in the memories of people, its victims. So today there is no rebellion, we live in cohesion. (Interview, 8 March 2015)

Many of the activists I spoke to had lived through the war and had personal experience of violence. Nearly everyone had lost friends and family in the war, and some had witnessed or experienced acts of physical violence. Others had been forced to leave their homes, and many had either lived in internally displaced camps within Burundi or had fled with their families to refugee camps in neighbouring countries. This individual experience often informed their perspective on peace. The

following quote comes from a male activist working for a grassroots peacebuilding organisation, speaking back in August 2014.

I experienced the war, and became a genocide survivor. People were killing each other, friend against friend, neighbour against neighbour, just because of political manipulation. I saw young people become involved in violence. I saw people shot dead in the road, people being killed by the army... So now, I live in a place where I can travel at night without expecting anyone to shoot me. So I would say the country is at peace, because I compare it with the other experience I have. However, when I think about where we should be I would say that we are not at peace because I still see the factors that led to war in 1993. (Interview, 27 August 2014).

Many also felt that, despite a reduction in conflict since the end of the war, rising political violence and sustained poverty and inequality meant that the country could not be considered to be a peaceful one for the vast majority of Burundians. A male activist working for a youth organisation explained:

It's relative. If you talk about the existence of rebellion, this is not an issue today so yes we are at peace. But at the global level, if you compare us to other countries we are not at peace. There is a climate of mistrust. In 2005 we aspired to change, we had known 12 years of war. There was an agreement among different ethnicities... we hoped this would bring about peace, rule of law, a reduction in ethnic tensions, economic growth, and good governance. But since then we have had difficulties. (Interview, 20 August 2014)

However, different groups and individuals within Burundi experienced the war in different ways. One female activist working for a women's organisation explained how these different experiences influence individual perceptions on peace.

We are not just talking about the absence of war, peace is complicated. Peace depends on needs and context. To reconcile different people, I think we must sit down and exchange and speak from the heart... Different groups have very different needs. This is because conflict in Burundi was not experienced in the same way, people had very different experiences... Peace remains very complex but in the places we work, the groups who participate in our programme attempt to define peace in relation to their needs, and their common vision for Burundi. (Interview, 29 September 2014)

It is important to note that the views of activists analysed within this paper both relate to and capture a particular moment in time within Burundi, a period marked by rising political violence and government restrictions. Two significant events bookended the fieldwork; the arrest of one of Burundi's leading human rights defenders in May 2014, and the outbreak of mass protests following the announcement that the president would run for an unconstitutional third term in April 2015. The perspectives of activists reflect concerns about what was happening in Burundi at that time, but were also disconcertingly prophetic. The anti-third term protests turned violent and the government closed independent radio stations, suspended civil society groups, and issued arrest warrants for activists following a failed coup d'état in May 2015. In the months after the elections, the security services launched several violent and abusive military operations in pro-opposition neighbourhoods (Amnesty International, 2015a). The government and security services have continued to rule the country in a violent and repressive manner, and many civil society activists have either been forced or have chosen to leave the country.

Rising levels of political violence were an important concern among activists that participated in this research. This included mounting tensions between the regime and the political opposition, incidences of violence between supporters of rival political parties, arbitrary arrest and killings of opposition supporters, government restrictions on civil society groups, and attacks on human rights defenders and journalists. The detention of the leading civil society activist Pierre Claver Mbonimpa was cited in almost every interview conducted between July and October 2014. Activists argued that ongoing political violence meant that Burundi could not be considered to be at peace. A male activist working with a human rights and democracy promotion organisation explained that:

Burundi is not a country at peace. We are in a context; how would you call it technically? Negative peace... People think we are at peace but we are not at all. If you see what is happening to political space, the state of public freedoms and liberties, the human rights abuse we are undergoing. Some of the crimes that are taking place are truly unthinkable. (Interview, 8 September 2014).

Although they welcomed the establishment of democratic institutions following the signing of the Arusha agreement, most activists recognised that this was not sufficient in itself, and was unlikely to bring about peace within such a divided political context. Speaking in August 2014, a male activist working with a faith-based organisation said that:

We are moving towards peace. We have established new democratic institutions following the war... But this isn't enough to guarantee peace. There are issues with governance, there is lots of corruption and human rights violations, and divisions within political parties particularly within the opposition. The ruling party has sought to entrench these divisions so there is no effective opposition. (Interview, 22 August 2014)

Many activists recognised that past elections had strengthened elite divisions, created tensions between civil society and political actors, and resulted in political violence. They reflected fears among the broader population that the fallout from the 2015 elections would be particularly severe and could result in widespread violence. Speaking in March 2015, an activist working with a youth organisation echoed these concerns:

In 2010, there was lots of tension between civil society and political actors. There were blockages, destabilisation during the electoral period... Today things are tense again. There is a lot of fear around the 2015 elections. The population fears there will be a catastrophic situation. (Interview, 8 March 2015)

The perspectives on violence and peace among activists are inherently temporal and relational, as these quotes demonstrate. They reflect the assertion of geographers that peace is a situated and spatial process that unfolds over time. As one female activist working for a faith-based organisation explained: 'Peace is something you have to keep working on. It's not a house that you build and then it's done. It's a work in progress.' (Interview, 22 September 2014).

## The liberal and the local

Perspectives on peace and violence among civil society activists in Burundi are composites, which blend western or liberal values with more traditional ones. This is unsurprising given that the vast

majority of civil society organisations in Burundi could be considered to be local—liberal hybrids to varying degrees. However, this hybridity comes not just from the recent mixing of the liberal and the local resulting from peacebuilding interventions, but builds on decades of prior hybridisation. Other international, transnational, and regional influences, which are not necessarily liberal or local, are also an important part of this mix, such as religious teachings and pan-African discourses.

### **Liberal peace**

Most organisations were committed to promoting liberal values to a certain degree, although some organisations such as those that work on democracy promotion or human rights were more liberal in their outlook than others. A female activist working with a democracy promotion organisation explained that their mission was ‘to make sure that democratic principles are really respected in the whole country. It’s mainly the promotion of good governance and democratic principles’ (Interview, 1 March 2015). However, many faith-based organisations and community-based structures such as peace committees also framed their work using language associated with the liberal peace, such as human rights and good governance.

Several activists alluded to the security-development nexus, which has become a core tenet of liberal peacebuilding and argues that strengthening institutions and developing their capacity to provide security and development is critical to building a lasting peace (Chandler, 2007; Duffield, 2001 & 2007). A female activist working with a human rights organisation stressed the importance of strengthening state institutions to creating and maintaining peace, arguing that, ‘you need sustainable peace for sustainable development. With no peace, there is no stability and we cannot develop. To reach peace is about building stable institutions, reducing insecurity, reducing corruption, and increasing democratic values,’ (Interview, 30 September 2014).

The promotion of basic rights and freedoms, such as the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, were also cited frequently by activists as integral to the construction and maintenance of peace. A male activist working for a youth organisation explained that: ‘peace is about freedom of expression, to be able to choose your

activities freely, it's about freedom of action,' (Interview, 21 March 2015). Supporting broad-based participation was also central to their understandings of peace. The male head of a democracy promotion organisation explained how participation and accountability was at the heart of their mission: 'to encourage communities to participate in decision-making. It's about educating citizens to hold government to account. We want the leadership to be more democratic and support the participation of the population in decision making processes,' (Interview, 25 September 2014). Liberal values were not the preserve of those working for human rights or democracy promotion organisations. A male activist working for a faith-based organisation explained that peacebuilding involved the promotion of basic rights and freedoms, as well as ensuring broad-based participation.

It's about creating a climate of mutual agreement and respect for human rights. A climate where the population enjoys its fundamental rights. A climate where the population is consulted, where it participates in decision-making. In short, a climate where even elected representatives try to realise and take into account the concerns of the people, but also account for what they do for the people and above all, consult the population in advance. (Interview, 30 March 2015).

## **Hybrid peace**

Activists also drew upon traditional values and practices as well as liberal ideals. A male activist working for a faith-based organisation that supports a national network of grassroots peace activists discussed how they draw on traditional Burundian values to support their work.

Our values are traditional Burundian values. Unity is an important cultural value for Burundians. In the hills, people share. If someone is ill, and the family can't pay, the community takes charge. It doesn't matter if they are Hutu or Tutsi, everyone helps. If there is a birth in the community, everyone brings a gift in the spirit of unity. It's a richness for the community. Solidarity is another value. People help regularly, if someone in the family dies, all the community help. They are not abandoned. (Interview, 11 March 2015)

Several community-based organisations also draw upon traditional or customary approaches to mediation developed by the *bashingantahe*, a customary structure responsible for promoting social cohesion and conflict resolution that for many epitomises traditional values of tolerance and

neighbourliness. They have even adopted symbolic practices associated with this customary structure, such as sharing a drink following a mediation, which has helped to bolster the authenticity and legitimacy of these newer organisations. The male founder of a faith-based organisation that draws on many of these traditional practices explained how hybridity is central to their understanding of peace and approach to peacebuilding.

We have our culture, our values, traditional values. And we are putting them into modernity, marrying them you could say with Western and universal values. The Western values are married with the traditional values to create something new... we adapt traditions to modernity and modernity to traditions. (Interview, 12 March 2015).

This hybridity does not come only from the mixing of the everyday and the liberal, as some proponents of the hybrid peace assume. Rather this more recent mixing builds on decades of prior hybridisation, first under colonialism and later during decolonisation and the post-colonial period. This is evident in the influence of religious teachings, as well as Pan-African ideas such as *ubuntu*; a concept that emanates from Southern Africa and roughly translates as humanity, goodness, or kindness. A male, member of the clergy who volunteers with a faith-based organisation explained what the concept means and how it informs their work on peace and development: ‘It’s what separates humans from animals. It’s our humanity, generosity, dignity, compassion, wisdom – everything that makes us human... we analyse situations in which people live and how their lives can be improved through the values of *ubuntu*.’ (Interview, 5 September 2014).

Values and teachings associated with Christianity, which arrived in Burundi during the pre-colonial period and flourished under German and later Belgian rule, are also an important component of many activists’ perspectives on peace. A male activist working for a Catholic faith-based organisation explained that their mission was ‘to promote peace and justice in line with Catholic Social Teaching doctrine,’ (Interview, 30 March 2015). A male member of the clergy working for the same organisation said that their mission was ‘to promote justice, peace, and human dignity. We are concerned with supporting all of man, and all men. That is all dimensions of what it means to be human, their dignity and integrity,’ (Interview, 27 March 2015). The principle of nonviolence,

which features in many world religions, was also an important part of many activists' understanding of peace and their approach to peacebuilding. Active nonviolence, a practice that was central to Gandhi's teachings, was mentioned by a number of activists. When sitting in one office, I saw a picture of Gandhi on the wall and asked about its significance. The male activist I was talking to explained:

Gandhi is very important because of his active nonviolence. Gandhi inspires our work. Gandhi is the person that we can really follow, we can try to walk in or take the path he took during his fight for the independence of India... You may be in different corners of the world and still have the same dream, the same ambition to build a world, a peaceful world, to use nonviolent means to build peace. (Interview, 6 April 2015).

### **Everyday peace**

Creating and maintaining an everyday peace was at the heart of the perspectives of many activists. Vernacular understandings of peace articulated by activists transcended multiple scales from that of the body to the society as a whole. A male activist working for a faith-based organisation defined peace as 'the flourishing of the person in all their fullness. It's about inner calm, tranquillity, and prosperity. It's a quiet life,' (Interview, 27 March 2015). Another male activist, this time one who worked for a youth organisation, explained that he saw peace as a state of mind; 'Peace for me is a state of mind. It is a state of mind that someone feels when he is not in insecurity,' (Interview, 9 March 2015). The activist went on to explain that this peaceful state of mind was the foundation for peace on other scales.

It must start with the heart, and then the body feels it, and then outside the body, people around feel it, and then the community, and the province, and the whole country. Whenever my heart is not in peace I do not think I can give peace, I have to feel it first before I can even give it to other people. (Interview, 9 March 2015).

Everyday forms of peace in Burundi are also composites. They are rooted in the concept of *amahoro*, which roughly translates as 'wellness' or 'peacefulness' in Kirundi. A male activist working for a faith-based organisation defined the concept as; 'all the good things that you can wish

to someone, or to the nation. It's roughly translated as peace,' (Interview, 24 March 2015). Another male activist explained its meaning and significance in greater depth:

Peace represents many things. In our culture, the word is *amahoro* and this can mean many things. It's a greeting like *shalom*. When you greet an elder you say *amahoro*. It's also about having peaceful, good relations with your neighbour. Peace is not just an absence of war, but this is an important element of what we call peace. It's also about harmony within your society and your community. It's about relations, establishing relations through dialogue. But it's also about prosperity. This is why development is part of this. It's really this dynamic of harmony that we are talking about when we talk about peace. (Interview, 19 March 2015).

Everyday peace is associated with values such as humanity, dignity, tolerance, and compassion, which are also associated with global or regional doctrines found within Burundi such as liberalism, Catholicism, Hinduism and *ubuntu*, as well as more local traditions. Ultimately, for most Burundians, when they are talking about peace they are referring to peaceful coexistence, and the presence of harmony, not only within oneself but also among neighbours and at a societal level. They often emphasised the importance of bringing people together. A male activist working for a faith-based organisation told me that peace is 'about bringing people together to talk and share things. It's about restoring relations by addressing the cause that separated people and helping promote acceptance and tolerance.' (Interview 27 March 2015). Most believe that peaceful coexistence is contingent on the protection of basic rights and freedoms. Some argue that this requires the presence of strong institutions, accountable government, and broad-based participation, tenets that are often associated with the liberal peace. Others have chosen to concentrate on supporting conflict resolution and mediation within communities; practices that are more commonly associated with traditional or customary approaches.

## The elite and the everyday

Civil society activists in Burundi are situated between the elite and the everyday, a position that is reflected in their views on violence and peace. Many activists that I spoke to were critical of the

liberal peace because it has done little to challenge hidden forms of violence or the norms and structures that perpetuate them, as well as more overt acts such as the killings of opposition supporters or the arbitrary detention of activists and journalists. Of particular concern is the impact of divisive and violent politics among elites on the everyday lives of ordinary Burundians. Activists have sought to challenge the reproduction of violence through the creation of spaces for peace. These spaces – many of which have been closed since this research took place – fell into two main categories: the spaces for mediation created by civil society groups that seek to promote dialogue and reconciliation and address everyday violence within and between communities; and the spaces for participation created by democracy promotion and human rights organisations that seek to influence political elites and hold them to account.

### **From elite divisions to everyday violence**

Although Burundi is classed as a post-conflict country in the international community, activists do not consider it to be at peace. Peace negotiations and peacebuilding interventions at the elite level have successfully reduced the saliency of ethnicity in Burundi, but they have done little to challenge political violence. Activists were particularly troubled about the impact of divisive and violent politics among elites on the everyday lives of ordinary Burundians. Many expressed concerns about how political conflict at the elite level have resulted in rising political violence within communities. Several respondents discussed how members of a youth militia associated with the ruling party had targeted members of opposition parties within the communities in which they work. A female activist working for a national democracy promotion organisation said, ‘It is not a peaceful country. There are killings, sporadic violence. It is targeted at individuals. Previously it was targeted at those of different ethnicities but today its political, between different parties,’ (Interview, 2 September 2014). When asked whether he would describe Burundi as a country at peace, a male activist working with a grassroots peacebuilding organisation replied; ‘I think that we are not at peace when I hear a woman crying for her husband being in jail just for belonging to an opponent’s political party without committing any crime,’ (Interview, 27 August 2014).

A number of activists discussed the intersection between political and structural forms of violence in communities. A male activist working with a human rights and democracy promotion organisation explained how the majority of victims of political violence are ordinary Burundians:

If you listen carefully to local media they report one, two, five people being killed... They are killing ordinary people who cannot afford soap, who are not able to wash their clothes, who cannot afford health care or food. It is these people who are targeted... They are killed because they are a member of an opposition party, or because they spoke out against abuses by local authorities. It is not a state of peace, (Interview, 8 September 2014).

Many activists raised concerns about how political elites were able to manipulate poor and vulnerable people living on the margins of society in order to propagate divisions and violence at the everyday level. The same activist went on to explain that: 'we are extremely poor, and when people are poor and illiterate they are easy to manipulate,' (Interview, 8 September 2014). A number of activists were particularly concerned about the manipulation of economically and politically marginalized young people, especially those living in urban areas. As one male activist working for a youth organisation explained:

In the recent past, the conflict that happened, youth was thoroughly manipulated and involved in the conflict because of unemployment, lack of resources, ignorance... Someone who doesn't have a job, an occupation, family, can easily get manipulated. There is a strong connection. (Interview, 18 March 2015).

### **Elite politics, everyday spaces**

Before the 2015 elections, most civil society activists were involved in creating spaces for peace. These spaces fell into two main groups, spaces for mediation and reconciliation created by civil society groups that seek to promote dialogue and resolve conflicts within and between communities; and spaces for participation created by groups seeking to promote human rights and democratisation and hold political elites to account. Spaces for participation were few and far between, yet many civil society groups sought to navigate restrictions on association and assembly,

such as the prohibitive law on public gatherings, to create spaces where people could come together to express critical views in ways that demonstrated great creativity and agency.

These spaces included targeted demonstrations, mass protests, independent radio stations and newspapers, and social media. They are informed by and promote liberal values such as participation and accountability. The anti-third term protests and those that preceded them sought to challenge dominant power relations that have historically sustained militarism, political marginalisation, and economic mismanagement, in a peaceful and nonviolent manner. Activists also used these spaces to counter violent and divisive politics at the elite level, and challenge the ways in which violence is embedded in institutions. However, in doing so they were seen to challenge the political authority and legitimacy of these elites, who responded by closing spaces for participation in the run-up to and following the 2015 elections. The government responded to mass protests against the third term with violence. According to Amnesty International the police ‘used excessive and disproportionate force, including lethal force, against protesters, at times shooting unarmed protesters running away from them’ (2015b: 1). Following a failed coup d’état, the government closed independent radio stations, suspended and then later banned a number of civil society groups, and issued arrest warrants for prominent activists. The security services launched violent military operations in pro-opposition neighbourhoods, which were characterised by ‘extrajudicial executions, systematic looting and theft, arbitrary arrests’ (Amnesty International, 2015a: 2). As a result, the vast majority of these spaces for participation have now been closed by the very elites that they sought to hold to account.

Spaces for mediation and reconciliation, on the other hand, were often created by civil society groups at the grassroots and sought to promote dialogue within and between local communities. These spaces include peace committees, community-based structures that seek to mitigate violence and resolve conflicts; community mediation committees, which are similar structures established by the Catholic Church; peace clubs established by youth organisations and focusing on dialogue and reconciliation among young people within schools and in the broader community; and *bashingantahe* councils, customary structures that promote social cohesion and conflict resolution.

A male activist involved in setting up some one of the first peace committees in Burundi described it as ‘a space of dialogue’ which he saw as ‘an important tool for resolving conflict’ (Interview, 1 April 2015). These spaces are informed by and seek to promote traditional values, religious teachings, and vernacular understandings of peace, as well as liberal values. A male activist working for an organisation that runs peace clubs for young people in schools explained the rationale behind establishing their first group: ‘We wanted to create a formal space for dialogue, discussion, a school of democracy. Democracy we understood at the local level, as where people can meet, interact, talk about the issues they are facing’ (Interview, 9 April 2015). A male activist working for the same organisation described one of the projects established by members of the first peace committee, a revenue-generating activity designed to bring together women from different backgrounds.

They established a project, where women would come together to weave mats from banana leaves. It created a way to bring women from different groups together. It was also a revenue-generating activity. They talked as they made the mats. They talked about their past. And built good relations... The benefit wasn’t felt just by the women, but the community as a whole. It was about reconciliation. ... It resulted in positive and peaceful cohabitation. (Interview, 30 March 2015).

However, like many other peacebuilding interventions, peace clubs and other structures like them place responsibility for conflict resolution on individuals. A male activist who works for an organisation that supports peace clubs explained that part of their work was ‘to teach the peace club members how to resolve conflict peacefully, so they can promote peaceful cohabitation in their communities. It’s about building social cohesion’ (Interview, 24 March 2015). Laliberté argues that ‘the downscaling of responsibility to the site of the individual’ is a core part of neoliberal governmentality (2016: 28). While these spaces for peace did seem to support peaceful coexistence within communities, they also bear the hallmarks of neoliberalism. Furthermore, through downscaling responsibility to the level of the individual and even the community, these interventions do little to address political conflict at the national or elite level, which can so easily disrupt the peaceful coexistence that ordinary people have worked so hard and for so long to establish, and which has often taken years to build. It is difficult to establish the extent to which the

pre- and post-election violence in Burundi has affected these spaces at the grassroots. Even at the time, a number of the activists that I spoke to were concerned about the impact that the elections might have on everyday peace. Speaking in March, just a few months before the elections, a male activist who works with peace committees said, ‘we are approaching elections. Every time there are elections in Burundi they are often followed by violence. You see your work in a community going back to zero,’ (Interview, 19 March 2015).

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to understand the meaning of peace within a particular context through exploring the perspectives of civil society activists, the brokers and translators of peacebuilding in Burundi. Much of the prominent thinking on the creation and maintenance of everyday forms of peace has come from within international relations. However, a significant amount of this literature remains focused on deconstructing the liberal peace rather than exploring situated perspectives. They also neglect the role played by civil society activists, many of whom are situated at the interface between the liberal and the local and the elite and the everyday, in the production of hybrid forms of peace. Unsurprisingly, the perspectives of activists reflect their position as the brokers and translators of peacebuilding. They are distinctly hybrid, combining liberal concerns with traditional values, religious teachings, and African philosophies. They are also geographical. Although they are situated within and shaped by the social and political context within Burundi, they also span multiple scales, from the body to the global. Shaped by individual and collective memories of past violence as well as hopes and fears about the future, they are also temporal and relational.

For most Burundians, including civil society activists, everyday peace means peaceful coexistence, and the presence of harmony, not only within oneself but also among neighbours and at a societal level. Most activists recognise that this is contingent on the security of basic rights and freedoms. However, their views differ on how to achieve it this everyday peace. Some sought to create spaces for participation that challenge the violent and divisive politics among elites, and support broad-based participation. Others sought to create spaces for mediation within communities that

encourage dialogue, and facilitate nonviolent conflict resolution. While these spaces for mediation supported the emergence of peaceful cohabitation and mutual acceptance among communities that were once divided along ethnic lines, they did little to challenge the divisive and violent elite politics that continues to disrupt everyday peace in Burundi, such as that witnessed around the 2015 elections. They have placed responsibility for securing everyday peace on ordinary Burundians rather than challenging institutions and structures within which violence is embedded in Burundi and the elites that abuse it for their own personal gain. Although spaces for participation had the potential to challenge political elites that fostered violence and division, the activists that created them were seen as a threat to the power and authority of these elites, who moved to close these spaces in the run-up to and following the anti-third term protests.

# Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine civil society, political space, and peacebuilding in Burundi through exploring the experiences and perspectives of civil society groups and the people who work with them on the ground. Burundi is treated as a case study for exploring wider issues about the evolution of civil society, the extent to which it becomes embedded, and its ability to transform social and political dominant norms in post-conflict contexts. At the beginning, two main questions were identified that relate to these broader concerns. The first was the extent to which international discourses on political space and peacebuilding relate to everyday experiences and perceptions of civil society activists working on the ground in post-conflict contexts characterised by violence and repression. The second concerned the ability of civil society activists to create and maintain spaces for peace that transform dominant norms and support everyday peace in these environments. This final chapter will consider the extent to which the research has answered these questions, and explore its contribution to the literature on Burundi, as well as the theoretical literature on civil society, political space, and peacebuilding. It also considers the broader significance of the research and looks at some of its possible practical implications. The chapter begins by looking at the main research findings in relation to political space, and then civil society and peacebuilding. The next section considers the extent to which civil society groups have been able to create spaces for peace in Burundi. The chapter ends with a reflection on what might have been done differently, and discusses some of the questions that have emerged from the research and remain unanswered.

## **Political space: contrasting international discourses with everyday experiences**

The first question that this research sought to answer concerned the international discourses on political space relate to everyday experiences and perceptions of civil society activists working on the ground in post-conflict contexts. Put simply, this research concludes that international discourses on political space are overly simplistic and reduce the multiple and diverse experiences of civil society in particular places to a single narrative that does not reflect individual and collective

experiences among activists in Burundi. International discourses argue that political space for civil society is closing as governments in partial democracies and semi-authoritarian regimes across Africa, Asia, and South America place restrictions on activists and organisations. Burundi is often considered to be a paradigmatic example of this shrinking space narrative. However, this research has established that the picture on the ground is much more complex than this narrative suggests. For example, the literature on political space claims that organisations that work on human rights and democracy promotion issues are more likely to experience restrictions than those working on less political issues. This research found that although government restrictions were targeted at prominent human rights and democracy promotion organisations and outspoken activists, there were other organisations that were able to continue working on these issues in the months preceding the 2015 elections without experiencing violence and intimidation. This suggests that these individuals and the organisations they work for were not targeted because of the issues that they worked on, and that vulnerability to restrictions was related to other factors, such as their approach to advocacy and claim-making. This conclusion supports those of van der Borgh and Terwindt, whose study of pressures on civil society in partial democracies found that:

The political space of NGOs is indeed not systematically repressed... even though a number of NGOs faced strong stigmatisation, threats and even killings, many other informants argued that political space actually increased in the past decades. This is also the case for organisations that are most vulnerable to pressures – those making claims vis-à-vis other actors, such as the state, corporations or religious elites. Thus, even NGOs that touch on more sensitive topics do not necessarily experience pressures. Moreover, where they do experience pressures there are marked differences in the type of pressure and the intensity (2014: 164–5).

This research found that an organisation's experience of restrictions was also related to their legitimacy. Groups that had more pragmatic, normative, and cognitive legitimacy among domestic constituencies were able to work on sensitive issues with fewer restrictions. Those with less legitimacy in the eyes of the government were more likely to experience pressures when they spoke out against human rights abuses or government corruption. Furthermore, this legitimacy was

affected by the strategies that an organisation adopted and the way it behaved. Confrontational strategies and behaviour undermined perceptions of normative legitimacy among some domestic constituencies, and organisations that used them were often more likely to experience restrictions. They reinforced the unfounded view that they were working either with or for the political opposition in Burundi, which further undermined their normative legitimacy and increased perceptions that they were challenging the political authority of the regime.

Civil society actors may challenge the legitimacy of state in a direct or an indirect way. They may openly contest the legitimacy of elites and institutions through advocacy and claim-making, or they may challenge the legitimacy of the state simply through being an alternative site of legitimacy. Here, I found the work of Walton (2013) on civil society legitimacy in conflict zones particularly compelling. Walton argues that governments whose own political legitimacy is contested may seek to weaken perceived opposition to their regime through undermining the legitimacy of those groups they see as a threat. This was evident in Burundi, where the government targeted organisations and the individual activists associated with them that challenged the political legitimacy and authority of government elites in Burundi. It responded to the protests by systematically attacking the legitimacy of vocal civil society groups, using anti-civil society discourses which designated them as insurgents and terrorists – labels used by the government to justify the implementations of restrictions on organisations and legitimise the use of violence against activists. The regime also challenged the regulatory legitimacy of organisations through banning and suspending organisations it perceived as a threat. This is precisely what happened to Ligue ITEKA, which was closed down following the publication of a prominent report that criticised the government's human rights record.

The harassment and intimidation of a handful of prominent figures within civil society and the independent media discouraged others from engaging in public criticism and political debate in the run up to the 2015 elections. It resulted in widespread fear, which intensified further in the wake of violent security operations that followed the anti-third term protests. These attacks precipitated a rise in self-censorship among activists, and forced a number of high-profile civil society activists

to flee the country, while those who were unable to leave went into hiding. The rise in self-censorship is particularly concerning, because it functions to restrict space for the political as well as space for civil society in politics. Government repression of the anti-third term protests and the violent security operations that followed are also likely to create new memories of violence and injustice that will continue to shape perceptions of political space for civil society into the future. This research has shown that dominant discourses on political space have failed to engage with the ways in which violence shapes the everyday lives of activists and their ability to challenge institutions and structures within which violence is reproduced. It has highlighted the temporal and relational dimensions of violence and space, and has shown that it is only through viewing space as something that is relational that we can begin to understand how memories and experiences of political violence and government repression shape perceptions of political space, and the behaviour of activists.

Much of the existing academic and policy literature on political space fails to get to grips with the historical, political and discursive nature of restrictions on civil society. The exception is Lewis (2013), who notes that most authoritarian regimes tolerate some civil society groups, and place severe restrictions on others, namely those that seek to challenge the political authority and legitimacy of the regime. Consequently, restrictions are often focused on what Lewis calls 'discursive activities', actions that contribute to the production of spaces where groups can develop and articulate alternatives that might disrupt the prevailing hegemony (2013: 333). This is something that comes through strongly in the Burundian case, where individuals and organisations (and even activities) that the regime saw as a threat to its political authority and legitimacy were more likely to experience restrictions. This is evidenced in both the ban on public gatherings and protests in the run-up to the 2015 elections, and the subsequent closure of organisations implicated in the planning of the anti-third term demonstrations.

It is important to note that previous regimes have also targeted organisations seen as rival sources of authority and legitimacy, such as the Catholic Church and the *bashingantahe* and introduced restrictions designed to check their power and influence. Situating the experiences of civil society

in historical perspective demonstrates that there was arguably a lot more space for civil society in the post-war decade, including the 18 months leading up to the 2015 elections, than at any other time. It could be argued that what we saw was a president and government intent on clinging on to power at all costs, attempting to reassert themselves through moving to close the spaces for participation where its political authority and legitimacy were being challenged. Viewed in this way, it becomes clear that attacks on civil society leading up to the elections were about limiting space for the political in Burundi at a time when criticism and dissent were considered a threat to the power of the regime.

A crosscutting theme that runs throughout this thesis is the distinction between politics and the political. Swyngedouw (2011) conceptualises ‘politics’ as something that is concrete and particular, while ‘the political’ is more abstract and universal. Politics often refers to institutions of government, the political actors that populate and engage with them, the strategies and tactics they use, and the routines they follow. The political, on the otherhand, relates to the intrinsic heterogeneity within society and the continuous debates and disagreements that result from this difference, which constitute the social. This research found that international discourses on civil society space tend to focus on spaces for civil society in politics, that is in decision making processes and access to institutions of politics, or what Cornwall (2004) calls ‘invited’ spaces for participation. An example cited earlier in this thesis is the Civic Charter, a document produced by some of the largest international NGOs and private foundations, which seeks to support ‘local, national, regional and global struggles to defend the space for civic participation’, and defines ‘effective participation’ as where ‘people and their organisations can genuinely participate in, and influence, public policy and decision-making at local, national, regional and global levels’.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Civic Charter – The Global Framework for People’s Participation. Available online at: [https://icscentre.org/downloads/Civic\\_Charter.pdf](https://icscentre.org/downloads/Civic_Charter.pdf). Accessed 10 March 2017.

The distinction between politics and the political can also be used to analyse government constraints on civil society in Burundi. This research found that the government in Burundi has placed restrictions on both space for civil society in politics and spaces for the political. Numerous civil society activists explained how government ministers refused to meet with them, and prevented them from participating in decision-making processes. This was especially the case for high profile human rights defenders working at the national level. However other activists who worked on less controversial issues, often at the grassroots level, explained that they had been able to access and sometimes even influence government officials. While restrictions on civil society participation in politics are concerning, the restrictions placed on spaces for the political – that is spaces where disagreement and debate take place – are for me much more troubling.

Examples of such spaces cited in this research include protest movements such as Mardi Vert, where activists encouraged ordinary Burundians to show support for imprisoned journalists and human rights defenders who had spoken out the regime, and the anti-third term protests, which became important spaces of contestation where multiple grievances and concerns were aired and activists sought to challenge the prevailing political hegemony. The government systematically sought to close spaces such as these, especially those where its political legitimacy and authority could be challenged, in the run up to the 2015 election through the introduction of prohibitive laws on public gatherings, and through the use of violence, whether that the use of excessive force to disperse protests or the targeted harassment of activists. The closure of such spaces for the political is significant, as this is where alternatives to the current political order could be articulated, discussed and potentially become a reality – something that now seems a very distant prospect.

The emphasis on the historical, political, and discursive nature of restrictions is an important contribution to the existing literature on political space for civil society, because it helps to increase our understanding of how and why governments target certain groups and not others. This knowledge is particularly useful when it comes to developing practical responses to restrictions in particular contexts. Understanding how restrictions work in practice can help practitioners to challenge them and provide more effective support to civil society groups and activists that

experience them. Understanding which organisations are targeted and why allows for the provision of more focused and appropriate support to at-risk organisations. For example, in places where restrictions are targeted at organisations that are considered to challenge the political authority of the government, international donors may wish to avoid using language that reproduces antagonisms, and positions civil society in opposition to the state or conceptualises them as political adversaries. This is certainly the case in Burundi where international discourses reinforced liberal perspectives on civil society, which position activists and organisations in opposition to the state, and in doing so, contributed to the discursive construction of civil society activists as political opponents and even insurgents. In cases where groups are targeted because they are perceived to be foreign agents that are dependent on external support, they and the international actors that support them may wish to develop their capacities for domestic resource mobilisation and work to become more rooted within their society. Where restrictions relate to legitimacy, organisations may wish to consider how they can increase their legitimacy with certain domestic constituencies, such as local communities.

### **Civil society and peacebuilding: dominant thinking versus grounded realities**

The research has also sought to critically engage with dominant thinking on civil society and peacebuilding, and contrast it with realities on the ground in Burundi. There is already a considerable amount of literature which deconstructs international discourses on peacebuilding, most notably that of the liberal peace, and examines how it is contested and reworked by national and local actors on the ground, resulting in messy and diverse outcomes and the production of hybrid forms of peace (Mac Ginty, 2006 & 2011; Richmond, 2011a; Richmond and Mitchell 2012; Curtis, 2012a). In Burundi, a wide range of peace-making and peacebuilding initiatives have been implemented over the past two decades, including liberal approaches such as security sector reform and the introduction of multi-party elections, as well as more grassroots measures, such as the establishment of peace committees and mechanisms for resolving conflict within and between communities. Inclusion and power-sharing were fundamental to the peace agreement, which supported the development of a new constitution and provided for the establishment of a

government based on consociationalism. The existing literature on peacebuilding in Burundi shows that encounters between international and national actors have been defined by friction and resistance (Wodrig and Grauvogel, 2016). Domestic political elites delayed the introduction of reforms, and reinterpreted the institutions and practices promoted by international and regional actors; tactics that exposed contradictions within the language and practice of peacebuilders (Curtis, 2012b). One way in which the research has contributed to this literature on friction and resistance in peacebuilding encounters is the assertion that restrictions on activists and organisations are part of a broader pattern of resistance to international intervention and the expansion of the liberal project in Burundi. Attacks on civil society organisations and the suppression of critical voices should be situated within this wider context and viewed as another form of obstruction and subversion.

The research contributes to the wider literature on civil society and peacebuilding through complicating relations between the international and the local. It has found that the distinction between liberal and local peacebuilding is rarely so clear in practice. In Burundi, approaches considered to be local were often funded by the international community, were based on models developed elsewhere, and were both shaped by and shaped international discourses as well as traditional ones. Activities considered to be international, such as electoral monitoring, often relied on the support of locally-based networks like church groups or community-based activists for their implementation. The research shows that the same was true for civil society itself. Civil society in Burundi traversed multiple scales from the global to the everyday, and was populated with various forms, many of which were composites or hybrid entities. Although they were supported by international NGOs and other liberal interveners, many remained rooted within communities and possess a relatively high degree of local legitimacy. Even grassroots organisations situated within specific neighbourhoods and concerned with everyday problems were connected to the global in that they are sites where international discourses were not only reproduced but also contested and reworked.

Activists also had a complex relationship with liberal peacebuilding. Located at the interface of the international and the local, and the elite and the everyday, they mediated between liberal discourses and vernacular understandings of peace, and are perhaps best described as the ‘brokers and translators’ of peacebuilding (Lewis and Mosse, 2006). Civil society activists are also the subjects of liberal peacebuilding discourses as well as its intermediaries. As members of post-conflict populations, they are exposed to the harsh realities of neoliberal market reforms and electoral violence, which has become a common feature of many post-conflict contexts. Even those activists that work for organisations that could be regarded as liberal constructs can be deeply ambivalent and even openly critical about certain aspects of the liberal peace and its implementation. It is this position at interface of global and local that makes them vulnerable to restrictions.

This analysis of ‘actually existing’ civil society in Burundi, challenges dominant critiques of civil society in post-conflict contexts, which divide it into forms that are ‘externally-supported’ and those that are more ‘locally-based’. Richmond (2011a, 2011b) argues that where the former marginalises more authentic voices and is unable to promote radical social change, the latter has more local legitimacy. This research has shown that this understanding is problematic because it is overly simplistic, fails to capture the complexity and diversity that characterises post-conflict civil society, and reproduces a problematic binary between the global and the local. Establishing a more accurate and empirically based understanding of civil society in post-conflict contexts matters because it enables us to adopt a position that is more nuanced and complex, and move away from conceptualisations that depict civil society as something that is either all good or all bad. In practical terms, it enables those who wish to support organisations in post-conflict contexts to develop a more detailed understanding of civil society in that country, and how their partners fit in to that bigger picture.

Building upon this critique, the research sought to rethink how we conceptualise civil society in post-conflict contexts. Edwards (2004) identifies three ways of depicting civil society; as the space between the family and the state, as a group of organisations, and as a set of values. I would argue that in practice, civil society is at once all and none of these things. Rather, this thesis conceptualised

civil society in post-war Burundi as a heterogeneous assemblage. Within anthropology and geography, the term assemblage is used to denote groupings of diverse phenomena, including human and non-human forms (Li, 2007; Anderson and McFarlane, 2011). I used it to describe civil society in Burundi for five reasons. First, the term captures the differences and diversity that characterise civil society in Burundi, which is made up of a wide range of individuals, associations and movements. Chapter 2 discussed the different groupings that existed within civil society prior to the 2015 elections, from community-based mediation committees that worked at the grassroots, to high profile human rights organisations operating at the national and even international scale. Other prominent groupings included trade unions and professional associations, organisations representing victims and ex-combatants, the women's movement, faith-based and religious associations, and the numerous youth and sport clubs that are found throughout the country. The research found that these groupings are hugely diverse, yet are relatively loose and have porous boundaries.

The second reason that the term is used, is that it encompasses both the human and non human elements that make up civil society. This thesis found that civil society in Burundi was made up of a wide range of elements, including activists and organisations, projects and programmes, offices and signs, practices and behaviours, actions and mobilisations; as well as less tangible ones such as ideas and values, understandings and perceptions, networks and relations, and legitimacies and authorities. Much of this study has focused on the discourses both on and used by civil society in Burundi, from international discourses on civil society space to government discourses that seek to stigmatise activists, which are also part of this heterogeneous assemblage.

Third, the term allows for the contradictions and blurriness that other definitions often overlook. It is often said that civil society represents the space between the family and the state, but in Burundi, as in many other places, these boundaries are permeable. This thesis has argued that civil society in Burundi is characterised by negotiation and resistance, where the dominant hegemony is sometimes supported and at other times contested. The boundaries between the state and civil society are often indistinct. An example that is highlighted in this study is the presence of shadow

organisations, or GONGOs. These are associations established by supporters of the ruling party that seek to undermine the credibility and legitimacy of civil society organisations that are more critical of the current regime, and advance a counter narrative that is overwhelmingly supportive of the government and the president.

Fourth, the term assemblage highlights the processes of gathering and dispersal that have defined civil society in Burundi, and emphasises its fragility, evidenced by its tentative and contested emergence over many decades, and ultimately its vulnerability in the face of elite power and dominant social and political norms. This thesis has shown that political space for civil society has waxed and waned over time. Examples of these processes at work include the closure of organisations associated with the Catholic Church during the Second Republic and their gradual reformation following the downfall of President Bagaza, or the brief flourishing of civil society that accompanied processes of economic and political liberalisation in the early 1990s, which was halted abruptly by the civil war. Sometimes processes of gathering and dispersal occur simultaneously. While the activities of many organisations were suspended during the civil war, others emerged in response to specific tragedies, or to meet particular needs. A notable example which is discussed in this thesis is the peace committees that were established throughout the country in the midst of the conflict, which sought to bring people together to find a solution to local problems.

Finally, I like the term assemblage because it can be used both to describe civil society as a whole and certain elements of it, such as the anti-third term protests. The protests were comprised of diverse actors; representatives of formal civil society groups were joined by young people from across the country. Protestors expressed multiple reasons for taking part in the demonstrations. While for civil society leaders the protests were about defending the constitution from creeping third-termism, for many ordinary Burundians they were also about unemployment, corruption, and political exclusion (Van Acker, 2015). Non-human elements also played an important role in the protests, whether that was the barricades erected by protestors to protect them from the police, or the placards that expressed discontent with the regime. The protests can also be viewed as processes

of gathering and dispersal, as people came together on the streets, united around a common cause, and then subsequently dispersed as police used excessive force to break up the demonstrations.

A related question that this research sought to address concerns the extent to which civil society, as a concept and an empirical reality, becomes embedded in a post conflict society, once international support and attention begins to tail off and peacebuilding activities begin to wind down. Civil society in Burundi has become embedded in some ways and not others. It's clear from the restrictions placed on civil society that the Burundian state has not accepted the concept and it continues to view certain elements as a threat to its political authority and legitimacy. However, it has accepted the continued presence of some organisations and certain activities, as evidenced by the new laws on civil society passed in December 2016. These laws provide the Burundian government with greater discretionary powers which enable it to ban some forms of organising, while allowing others to continue, albeit under much greater scrutiny. What is less clear is the extent to which civil society has become embedded at the local level. Structures such as peace committees and some faith based groups appear to have become relatively well embedded within communities and seem to have earned quite a high degree of trust and legitimacy. However, there is little information about the extent to which the violence that occurred during and since the 2015 elections has impacted grassroots forms of organising.

### **Spaces for peace: transforming dominant norms and supporting everyday peace**

The second question this research sought to answer concerned the ability of civil society activists to create and maintain spaces for peace that transform dominant norms and support everyday peace in post-conflict environments dominated by violence and repression. Evidence from Burundi shows just how difficult this task is. This research identified two types of space that existed in the run-up to the 2015 elections: spaces for participation that sought to challenge political violence and divisions at the elite level, or the spaces for dialogue and mediation that sought to support peaceful cohabitation within communities. Spaces for participation included demonstrations, protests, and social media, while spaces for dialogue and mediation comprise structures such as peace

committees, community mediation committees, peace clubs, and *bashingantahe* councils. The research also considered the factors that prevented activists from creating and maintaining these spaces, from the continued influence of past experiences of violence and trauma, to the climate of fear and uncertainty that emerged following the 2015 elections, and the divisive and violent elite politics that continue to disrupt everyday peace.

It found that spaces for participation were few and far between, but civil society groups and activists sought to navigate restrictions on association and assembly, such as the prohibitive law on public gatherings, in order to create spaces where people could come together to express critical views and discuss alternatives in the approach to the 2015 elections. These spaces included targeted demonstrations, mass protests, independent radio stations and newspapers, and social media. Generally speaking, they were informed by and promoted liberal values such as participation and accountability. The individuals that created these spaces for participation had diverse objectives. The anti-third term protests sought to challenge hegemonic power relations and dominant social norms such as militarism, political exclusion, and economic marginalisation in a peaceful and nonviolent manner. Other spaces for participation included the targeted demonstrations that preceded the anti-third term protests as well as the spontaneous protest that erupted following the release of the journalist Bob Rugarika from jail in February 2015, and the use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Activists used these spaces to counter violent and divisive politics among elites, and challenge the ways in which violence is embedded within institutions. However, in doing so they were seen to challenge the political authority and legitimacy of these elites, who responded by closing spaces for participation in the periods preceding and following the 2015 elections. Since the protests, it has become increasingly difficult for activists to create spaces for participation that support debate and dissent, from which alternatives that are emancipatory and transformative can emerge.

Spaces for mediation and reconciliation, on the other hand, were often created by civil society groups at the grassroots and sought to promote dialogue within and between local communities. Although spaces for dialogue and mediation were also informed by and sought to promote

traditional values, religious teachings, and vernacular understandings of peace, they too bear the hallmarks of neoliberalism. Here the work of Laliberté (2016) on peacebuilding in Northern Uganda was particularly influential. Laliberté found that neoliberalism dominated the grassroots interventions that she studied, which were ‘based on the assumption that the behavior of the conflict-affected population is the problem’ (2016: 28). This ‘downscaling of responsibility to the site of the individual’ (Laliberté, 2016: 28) was also evident in Burundi. Community-based structures such as peace committees have supported the emergence of peaceful cohabitation and mutual acceptance among communities that were once divided along ethnic lines. However, they have placed responsibility for securing everyday peace on ordinary Burundians rather than the political elites which govern them. As a result, they have done little to address political conflict that persists among elites, which can so easily disrupt the peaceful coexistence that communities have worked so hard to rebuild following decades of ethnic conflict.

That said, I met some groups that were working to redress this balance, using their experience of supporting mediation and reconciliation within communities, and the pragmatic legitimacy this bestowed on them, to begin influencing elite politics at the national level. However, these initiatives were in their infancy at the time of research, and the organisations themselves recognised that this process would be a slow and difficult one. Consequently, I do not think that we should dismiss grassroots peacebuilding efforts that focus on the creation of spaces for mediation and reconciliation out of hand. Rather, international peacebuilding practitioners seeking to support peaceful coexistence in countries such as Burundi, should work with grassroots civil society groups to identify and address more structural issues that contribute to political divisions and the reproduction of violence across different scales. This is especially important in contexts such as Burundi, where spaces for reconciliation and mediation created within communities are often the only spaces for peace that are permitted to exist. Lewis (2013) argues that even in the most repressive societies, authoritarian governments tolerate some civil society groups, while placing restrictions on others. International peacebuilders that wish to facilitate the emergence of everyday peace should work with domestic civil society groups to identify the spaces for peace that are

permitted to exist, and support them to challenge dominant social norms that reproduce violence whilst remaining under the radar. This process will be gradual, but it may provide the foundations upon which political divisions at the elite level, and the violence embedded in structures and institutions, can be challenged in a more explicit way as the context changes.

## **Final reflections**

In this final section, I will consider a few things that I could have done differently, and look at some questions for further research. One thing that I would have like to have done differently is to include the experiences and perspectives of other groups within Burundi, such as government representatives, members of political parties, and even those who work for pro-government civil society groups. I tried on numerous occasions to gain access to the relevant government ministry, and to parallel civil society organisations, but without any success. It would have been interesting to hear the other side of the story and, in doing so, hopefully build up a better understanding of how national political elites view civil society and why they have sought to constrain certain elements of it. I would also have liked to spend more time with a smaller number of activists, and to have learned more about their social backgrounds and personal relationships. One way of doing this would be through conducting ethnographic portraits of activists. Not only would this have enabled me to gather more details about their past experiences and how these affected their perceptions, it would also have enabled me to examine how social networks and personal relationships might affect political space. However, this would have required spending much more time in the field, something that I was not able to do because of the political situation in the country. I would also have given myself more time to gain access to organisations and individuals, in retrospect; I grossly underestimated the amount of time this would take.

Conducting more in-depth ethnographic fieldwork, and undertaking research with government elites are two potential directions for future research in this area. Another is the comparative dimension. One rather large outstanding question that I have concerns the extent to which the Burundi case is representative of the experiences of civil society elsewhere. Consequently, there is

a need for more comparative research on the issue of political space for civil society in conflict-affected and post-conflict environments, which contrasts the experiences of activists in Burundi with those in other African countries, such as DR Congo or South Sudan, as well as those further afield, in regions such as the Middle East or Central Asia. The final outstanding question that I have is more practical in nature. I think further research is required into how civil society activists respond to restrictions, and more specifically what works and what does not in different contexts. This research should be participatory with researchers working in collaboration with activists to define the research problem, write the research questions, collect and analyse data, and develop practical solutions. Such an approach would ensure that activists that experience restrictions have ownership over and benefit from the research.

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