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Burundi, 1960–67

Loyal Subjects and Obedient Citizens

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BETWEEN 1960 AND 1966, THE STATE IN BURUNDI WAS DESTROYED and reinvented three times. At the beginning of the decade, Burundi was one-half of the territory of Ruanda-Urundi, controlled by Belgium under the terms of a UN trusteeship, and just beginning to discover electoral politics. Two years later it was an independent kingdom, desperately attempting to cling to internal unity while beset by fears of invasion from its republican neighbor, Rwanda. In 1966, a military coup abolished the monarchy and instituted a new Republic of Burundi, dressed in the trappings of a revolution but dominated by an authoritarian and ethnically minded clique of army officers. In a few short years the people of Burundi saw the fundamental identity of the state shift so rapidly that the nature of their interaction with power and the terms of citizenship in their unstable nation were continuously under question.

To some extent, whether commanded by authoritarian institutions of chieftaincy, monarchy, or military rule, or dominated by an overarching Belgian administration that neither expected nor desired any engagement from the common people, the population of Burundi seemed to have little claim on the unstable yet hegemonic forms of control that ruled over them. The “field of citizenship” appeared dominated by the performance of subjecthood.¹ Each of Engin Isin and Bryan Turner’s “axes” of citizenship (its extent, content, and depth) was substantially characterized by subjection.² The extent of citizenship as a positional relationship—triangulating inclusion and exclusion between individual,

state, and the political community of the nation—was narrowly delimited to those who accepted the uncontested domination of king, party, or military dictatorship. The content of citizenship—its rights and responsibilities—was defined more as narrow duties and obligations of obedience and loyalty owed by subjects to sovereigns. And the depth of citizenship was remarkably thin, depending almost entirely on the public performance of subjection under the simple, bare labels of orthodox nationalism. The transformations of state might change the language and parameters of such citizenship, but the expectation of subjection as its primary expression was remarkably consistent.

To echo Mahmood Mamdani's influential dichotomy, therefore, the people appeared as subjects, not citizens;³ constrained by power, their relationship with the state took place primarily in terms of obedience and command, without recourse to the means of engagement or reciprocity that might provide them with the possibility of influencing the actions of authority. Yet the distinction of subject and citizen is simultaneously an informative and a misleading principle of analysis. On the one hand, it gives clarity in the search for patterns of behavior that may illuminate the nature of belonging within the political community of the nation, the practices that reproduce that community and mediate power within it, reflecting the agency and influence of people and state. At the same time, however, maintaining the distinction between the two concepts is impossible. The public performance of subjection offered a wealth of possibilities by which the position of the subject could be used to claim the opportunities of inclusion and manage the pressures of power; subjecthood was in part a discursive and constructive element within the field of citizenship, moderating both its extent and its content. As the terms and obsessions of state authority shifted, the people of Burundi certainly acted the subject, yet frequently too they made the claims of active citizens, blended obedience with negotiation and loyalty with invocation, and conformed to political realities while seeking to shift them toward their interest.

In short, citizenship is a moving target of analysis. Across each of the crisis states in the early 1960s, we must take the exploration of a changing field of citizenship as a goal rather than a premise and look to the daily practices and expressions of people and state under each brief regime to discern it.⁴ To illustrate more clearly the complex issues at stake across such rapid change, this study focuses on one small area of Burundi, a stretch of borderland in the central north that most volubly displayed

the dynamics of obedience and engagement that were present to varying degrees across the nation. The analysis begins with an overview of the premise of national political community that was exposed in the accelerated political development at the end of Belgian rule, a brief moment of internal democratic choice; the discussion then explores the transformation of such issues in an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, when the independent state faced crisis on its border. In both of these cases, the behavior of the population was substantially reactive to the state, and therefore we conclude with a glimpse at the early days of the military republic, seeing for the first time how individuals could instigate the same dynamics of citizenship in subjecthood to command the recognition and involvement of their undemocratic state. As Burundi stumbled on its way from colonial rule to independent nation, the nature of citizenship within it was molded and tested on its fractious edge. In the nature of popular engagement with each brief regime, we can see how the performances of citizen and subject can overlap and complement each other, less identities than strategies of political agency, providing both flexibility and stability in times of dangerous change.

Belgian Trusteeship: The Choice of the Subject

Burundi imagined itself as an ancient nation. In the last days of the colonial period, the actions and content of citizenship, of engagement between population and state, were partially encoded in the imagination of its extent, the recognition of identity and belonging within this time-honored nation. All the trappings of the archetypal imagined community were exerted to give substance to the identity of the “Barundi” as the corporate body of the nation, a “Murundi” being an individual member within this body. Politicians celebrated a deep, shared national history and reveled in the celebration of language, culture, and a supposed national character of peace, defined negatively against the supposed fractious violence of neighboring Rwanda.⁵

Central to this conception of the body of the nation was its relation to the head: the *mwami*, or king. The position of the sovereign over and above his people was fundamental to all political rhetoric of the time. Mwami Mwambutsa was hailed as Sebarundi, the “Father of the Barundi,” the royal motto *Ganza Sabwa* exerting his ordained right to “rule and reign,” and both his own sovereign right and his subjects’ duty of obedience were enwrapped in the ideology of the nation. This ideology denoted the extent of inclusion within the family of the nation as subjection to the king,

without consideration of political engagement with power. The content of such a citizenship of subjection was thus an obligation of obedience, reciprocated by a duty of protection from the “Father” to his children. Legal rights of citizenship did not exist; Africans under Belgian trustee authority were officially *ressortissants* of Ruanda-Urundi, a term simply denoting a territorial origin rather than the legal rights and membership of a *citoyen*, “citizen,”⁶ and both Africans and Europeans dwelt instead on the concept of the Barundi as a great family, subject to the mwami.

The reality of colonial domination doubled this subjection, as throughout the daily practice of indirect rule the king was exerted as a veil for Belgian authority, “the familiar décor that permits us to act in the wings without alarming the masses,” as a report from 1925 put it.⁷ The attitude toward these “masses” was clear, and no engagement with power beyond the direction of the dual royal and colonial authority was expected. Alongside the mwami and the Belgian administration, the population was ruled by a third node of subjugating authority. The mwami himself reigned as an inviolable figurehead, but the state largely functioned through the division of power among the chiefs around him, even if this meant a near-constant pervasion of internal feuds that sometimes came perilously close to civil war.⁸

The most outstanding of these chiefs was the great Pierre Baranyanka, who worked so passionately for the colonial project that the Belgians permitted him unchallenged authority within his territory along the central northern border with Rwanda.⁹ The archetypal “decentralised despot,”¹⁰ empowered by a dynastic claim to rule as well as strong colonial support, Baranyanka’s authority within his territory was enforced through regular assemblies and displays of power in which the people were summoned and directed to participate in forced labor, especially the cultivation of coffee as the cash crop of development. Tardiness, disobedience, or any other signs of marginal dissent were punished with physical abuse, such as the *kiboko* hippopotamus-nerve whip applied to the hands, feet, or buttocks of the disobedient subject.¹¹ They might glory in their subjection to the mwami, but the position of the population, firmly at the bottom of a stratified hierarchy that made the people doubly subjects of their chief, was readily apparent in the minds of the common people. “Umwansi utagira aho umuhungira uramusaba,” ran the proverb: you bow to the enemy you cannot flee.¹²

For much of the colonial period, political development was confined to the adjustment and balance of authority between the Belgian

administration, the chiefs, and the mwami. When Burundi finally caught up to the current of political change across Africa in 1959, however, and the Belgians hurriedly implemented a system of partial democratization, the ensuing political contest both exemplified the primacy of subjecthood within the field of citizenship and demonstrated the curious, if limited, possibilities of engagement with power that this position of subjection could, in fact, entail.

When local elections were announced in late 1959, the dynamics of the newly formed party politics adhered considerably to the preceding dynamics of state.¹³ Parties were largely formed and directed by the chiefs, and coalitions of parties somewhat matched the dynastic divisions of preceding chiefly contests. Baranyanka's family formed the Parti Démocrate Chrétien (PDC), which urged internal autonomy beneath a continued European stewardship; their principal rival was Uprona, Union et Progrès National, which demanded immediate independence and was led by Prince Louis Rwagasore, the eldest son of Mwambutsa and a chief in his own right. But quite aside from the question of independence, the sovereign authority of the mwami and the loyalty of the Barundi as his subjects became the vital stake of political argument between these forces, a field of ironic consensus over which the parties fought for ownership.

For the Uprona nationalists, kingship was tied to memories of glorious history and resistance to colonization; they played obliquely on the monarchist sentiments of the population by conflating Mwambutsa with his son, implying that the loyal obligation of Barundi subjects to their monarchy was to devote themselves to Rwagasore's nationalist cause. The PDC and Baranyanka, in particular, were portrayed as traitors to the crown, enemies of the people. In response, the PDC insisted loudly and incessantly on its loyalty to the mwami, adding its voice to the political consensus of the relationship between sovereign and subjects. But it extended this argument to proclaim that the mwami was so superior as to be beyond politics, that one could be a loyal subject to Mwambutsa and still vote for whichever party one desired. All Barundi could be included as subjects to the king, while the political rights of engagement with power that were proffered by electoral democracy were limited to the state beneath him. The extent of citizenship was delimited by subjection to the sovereign, while its content encompassed the contestation and claim on the power of state.

The Belgians, fearful of Rwagasore's success, duly held popular *réunions d'information*, information and propaganda meetings that

announced the mwami's position "above the parties," distributing public letters signed by Mwambutsa and bearing his photograph. So successful was the concatenation of political voices and popular imagination all devoted to royal authority that the administration soon found that the people were refusing to accept or believe any political tract distributed by the Belgians that did not carry the mwami's name or image.¹⁴ The celebration of obedient subjecthood to the mwami was never more emphatic than during the political contest over his perceived favor.

Such electoral politics also necessitated the acknowledgment of power within the position of the subject, however. A citizenship defined by subjection still offered possibilities of rights and responsibilities in the management of power. It was indeed a central plank of Uprona's nationalist platform that the subject had the right and duty to choose his or her sovereign; the party simply relied on the fact that the choice had already been made. One Uprona tract explicitly portrayed the question of independence as a choice between the king of Burundi and the king of Belgium: "We have our king," the tract declared; "[W]e shall not be subject to theirs."¹⁵ Uprona did not question that the Barundi would be subjects to power in the new independent order, but Uprona's conception of subjecthood required that the subjects themselves accept or reject the authority of their sovereign.

Furthermore, this necessity of consent and the possibility of choice within the position of the subject was brought even more powerfully to the fore in regard to the authority of the chiefs. Although the chieftaincy system was formally abolished at the beginning of the political contest, the chiefs themselves retained enormous political authority. With most parties strongly associated with chiefly leadership, people who had always been subjects to their local chief could find themselves in a situation of explicitly rejecting his authority by choosing to endorse a rival party. Powerful rumors passed around the country that a subject was obligated to vote for the party of his chief, rumors that were subtly endorsed by most parties within their own territory and angrily denounced in the territories of their rivals. It was a struggle over the nature of engagement between subject and state, the possibility of dissent and the endorsement of alternative authority balanced against the conceptions of duty, loyalty, and obedience that were fundamental to the position of the subject. As independence neared, the content of citizenship for a nation of proud subjects became the primary field of political contest.

Given Chief Baranyanka's great power and intense personal and political rivalry with Rwagasore, the dynamics of this contest were most fractiously fought out in Baranyanka's territory. Although the PDC portrayed itself as the champion of democracy against the supposedly "feudalist" calls of Uprona, Baranyanka reacted with fury to the possibility that his subjects might choose to reject his authority. When Uprona approached certain promising individuals within his chieftaincy, hoping to woo them toward becoming political pioneers in the PDC heartland, the men they chose were subjected to intense intimidation and threats by the local *sous-chefs*, Baranyanka's delegate agents.¹⁶ When this failed to curtail the Uprona incursion and more and more people began to express sympathy toward and loyalty to Rwagasore's cause, Baranyanka threatened extreme violence against his subjects. "I will bring to you the Twa and the soldiers," he is said to have declared in one region that showed growing Uprona sentiment, "so that they may have intercourse with your wives and daughters."¹⁷ He summoned individual Uprona propagandists to stand trial before him in his personal tribunal, punishing them with months in prison for failing to answer his summons.¹⁸ While the content of an electoral citizenship as a legitimate contest of power was being shaped across the nation, it was countered by the reinforcement of terrorizing authoritarianism toward the Murundi subject.

However, in response to Baranyanka's violence, Upronists in his territory continued to view party rivalry as a matter of the subject's choice between sovereigns, between obedience to a chief and obedience to a king. Rather than precluding any acts of political agency or dissent, the violence of the "decentralised despot" instead exacerbated the engagement of his subjects with alternative political possibilities. The struggle was so intense that by 1961 it had spilled into violence, as propagandists for each party attacked each other in the streets.¹⁹ Upronists were quickly dominant, glorying in their position as subjects to the mwami and obedient servants of Rwagasore. But this was by no means a passive stance; they had chosen this loyalty in the face of intense intimidation from their own authoritarian chief and fought to bring their desired political order into being. They were, and desired to be, subjects of sovereign authority, but this in itself required the engagement of consent and active political struggle. The extent of citizenship was delimited by subjecthood, but its content still encompassed the right and duty of powerful political agency.

Eventually the violence in the north became so dangerous that the Belgians flooded the region with metropolitan troops, arms, and

helicopters to bring it under back under control. The key Uprona activists were arrested, and the authority of Belgium and Baranyanka was reestablished. Yet the PDC had lost the political war. In the 1961 national elections, Uprona achieved a massive victory across the country, Rwagasore becoming prime minister-elect with around 80 percent of the popular vote. The political contest both demonstrated the predominance of subjecthood beneath sovereign authority and illustrated the possibilities of engagement within this authoritarian relationship. Subjects were dependent on their superiors, but this was a “productive dependency”;²⁰ the content of citizenship encompassed a competition for followers that created a degree of choice for the subject, one that he or she could, and did, fight to achieve.

This balance of engagement within subjection was exposed by the choice offered by democratic contest. Its incarnation was in direct response to the form of domination and contest that the state represented at the end of the colonial period, but while specific to this context, it also represented some of Burundi’s most fundamental dynamics and assumptions of power. In 1962 the mwami’s reign continued into independence, yet the choice of the subject was all but lost; the excitement of Rwagasore’s campaign was brutally cut short, and in its place reigned fear and doubt. In this new political world, subjection and engagement remained in precarious balance, refined in strategy and expression to speak to a domineering yet insecure state. It is to this anxious time that we now turn.

Independent Monarchy: Defensive Loyalty

Within weeks of his triumph, Prince Rwagasore was assassinated, and the sons of Baranyanka were held ultimately responsible for his murder.²¹ Independence came half a year later, on July 1, 1962, under a shroud of mourning and anxiety.

In the first turbulent postcolonial years, a climate of fear and a certain siege mentality altered the political dynamics of the nation. With the PDC destroyed by association with Rwagasore’s killers, Uprona dominated Burundi almost unchallenged, although the state officially remained a multiparty system. Yet having lost its talismanic and unifying leader, Uprona began to splinter, polarized into rival factions that seriously destabilized the state. Many leading politicians began to look more and more toward ethnicity as a means of interpreting and expressing their struggles.²²

All the while, relations with Rwanda deteriorated alarmingly as soon as the two halves of Ruanda-Urundi separated into independent nations. The last years of colonial rule had been dominated by a civil war in Rwanda, resulting in the abolition of the monarchy and the creation of a Hutu-dominated republic. The new government, controlled by the Parti du Mouvement de l'Émancipation des Bahutu (Parmehutu), implacably opposed the continuation of monarchy in Burundi, and things took a turn for the worse in late 1963, when monarchist Tutsi refugees from Rwanda used Burundi territory to launch a bloody invasion of their homeland.²³ The government of Rwanda accused Burundi of supporting these invaders, while Burundi denounced the Rwandan internal reprisals against Tutsi civilians as acts of genocide. The two countries teetered on the brink of war.

On September 1, 1964, it seemed that the anticipated catastrophe had finally arrived. Across a broad stretch of the Rwandan border, armed men appeared and attacked the local community, raiding and setting light to the thatched roofs of people's homes. "Invasion from Rwanda has burnt huts and pillaged the borderland region," reported the local governor in an urgent telegram; "Gendarmes totally spent, situation grave."²⁴ The initial violence lasted about a week, but repeated incursions marked much of the following two months. Rwandans and Barundi clashed in local skirmishes, more huts were burnt exactly a month after the first attacks, and in November the local authorities appealed for support when up to three hundred men invaded from across the border once again. Martial law was imposed across the borderland, and command was taken by an official *conseil de guerre*, a council of war.

The attitude of the state toward its border peoples in this crisis was immediately clear. Soldiers swept into the regions affected, but despite the common belief that Burundi had been invaded by a hostile Rwanda, the principal targets of state repression were the Barundi of the borderland. The army arrested anyone found out in the open. People traveling home from their fields or gathering in groups of more than two to share a drink in the evening were taken away for interrogation under suspicion of revolt.²⁵ The national population were treated not as citizens attacked by a foreign enemy and therefore owed a duty of defense by the state but as alien enemies of the state. The inclusion and exclusion of citizenship continued in much the same national terms as before but was expressed ever more negatively through political contrast with Rwanda. The notional unity of "the Barundi" was held up against "Rwandan" ethnic

divisions, and in the unstable political atmosphere the state began to doubt that the borderlanders could still be counted within the national family. Inclusion meant not only subjecting oneself to the mwami but also passing a political test that displayed voluble endorsement of Upronist orthodoxy against Parmehutu contagion. Deeply suspicious of the borderlanders' proximity to and quotidian interaction with Rwandans across the border, the Upronist state believed the borderlanders to be "infected" by ethnic, republican, Rwandan politics, their loyalty to the state and their belonging in the nation fundamentally undermined. The field of citizenship presumed a national community coterminous with a political one, and in the eyes of the nervous state the rights of inclusion for a "Murundi" could be sacrificed by suspected political betrayal.

As the investigation proceeded, the state's anxiety over the possibility of internal responsibility for the attacks was revealed to be not entirely a matter of paranoia. The initial reports of Rwandan invasion soon gave way to a detailed account of a conspiracy, supposedly concocted by Burundi dissidents who were exploiting the territory of Rwanda and the border area as a resource for mobilizing their opposition to the government of Burundi.²⁶ Faced with an internal plot, the military urgently required the establishment of intelligence, and only the suspected local people could provide it. Civilians arrested en masse were given a chance at freedom by becoming informants for the state. It was a collaborative process; the state approached the community aggressively, intent on purging its undesirable elements, and members of the community responded by volunteering identification and evidence of these undesirables. The interdependence of two axes of citizenship, its extent and its content, was powerfully demonstrated; with their inclusion denied, members of the local community sought to engage with the state on its own terms to display their loyalty and claim the rights of recognition as obedient subjects. Naming names and telling the soldiers what they wanted to hear, confirming the suspicions and rumors the state already feared, the borderlanders could prove their doubted loyalty to Burundi, show their usefulness to the state, and regain their inclusion in the political community of the nation.

The loyalty displayed by these informants was substantially the loyalty of the subject. They had been arrested by a state that viewed them as the enemy, that denied their right to belong within the nation and suspected them of holding greater allegiance to Rwandan politics than to Burundi, and therefore their response was to show total obedience to

the overbearing authority of government orthodoxy. There was no space to express the slightest hint of independent political thought; safety lay in the ability to perform loyalty, to show oneself as the obedient subject to state authority by agreeing and engaging with the state's fear and suspicion of others. Adopting the position of the subject was an effective defensive measure, taken under duress.

However, it could also be a far more active tactic, pursued by others who were not under arrest but wished to engage with the power of the state. Despite its open hostility to the local population, the army stood as a potential resource of defense against the self-evident danger of true rebel militants on the border, and emphatic statements of political loyalty proved the key to acquiring the army's protection. This political invocation was put into action by one small community that sought to exclude one of their neighbors. Named Rukushi Isaac, he was a proud member of the pro-Hutu *Parti du Peuple* and therefore an open opponent of the Uprona government. His arrogant political polemics terrified his neighbors, and a group of them took it into their own hands to imitate the state and place this dissident under a citizen's arrest.²⁷ Dragging Rukushi before the authorities, they recounted all the allegations that would most alarm the state. He visited the exiled leaders of his party in Rwanda, they said, and received Rwandans into his home; he conducted door-to-door propaganda, they claimed, in which he denigrated the mwami himself. Most venomously, according to one woman's testimony, he "declared that if ever our children should attempt to flee to him, he will take a sickle and cut off their arms and legs . . . [and] he declared that it would be better to cut off the right arm, the right leg and the right breast of each woman, and in that way the women would become wise."²⁸ As if such violent rhetoric might be insufficient to prompt the state to take the action she desired, the woman continued with a statement of proud political loyalty to the government: "He said that because we are Upronist women." These informants positioned themselves as obedient members of the state's political order but did so to engage actively with state power toward shared objectives and against shared enemies, shaping and displaying the content of citizenship as a project of mutual dependency.

The possibilities made available by engaging with the state to confirm its own prejudices were nowhere more powerfully exemplified than in the claims made by one enterprising man, named Kabanda Samson, on the border. The conseil de guerre was looking for evidence that the

attacks were a “racist” plot, concocted by the political enemies of the state to commit acts of genocide against Tutsi and overthrow the monarchy.²⁹ Despite the fact that the raids were characterized by arson, not by murder, and that no one else had identified ethnicity as a factor in the selection of targets, Kabanda gave the state exactly what it wanted. He claimed to have been present at repeated meetings in Rwanda, where he heard political figures such as the brilliant Hutu politician Paul Mirerekano, widely known as a passionate monarchist,³⁰ plot to become president of a new Republic of Burundi; in Kabanda’s account, Mirerekano declared that “every Tutsi, even though he may have done good things in Burundi, must be put to the fire with his wife and children.”³¹ The informant seemed to be taking matters to the extreme in his active appeal to the state’s prejudice, winning substantial favor by confirming all the worst fears and accusations that the government held against its enemies. Kabanda displayed the loyalty of the subject by repeating the state’s own beliefs back to it, but in his remarkable testimony he showed that there was considerable potential for advancement and engagement in the adoption of the subject position. He was only able to make his claims because he routinely traveled to Rwanda, a fact that would naturally make him a person of high suspicion, yet through his bloodcurdling evidence Kabanda won a personal audience with the governor of the province and even maneuvered himself into a position to request a face-to-face meeting with the mwami. Volunteering himself as a subject loyal to king, nation, and political orthodoxy, Kabanda doggedly pursued a share in power as the reward of active citizenship.

Constrained by violence and fear and deprived of the personal authority of Rwagasore and the vibrant choice of the last colonial years, the inclusionary extent of citizenship during the independent monarchy was still defined by subjection. However, this subjection was understood not only as obedience to the king but also as political obedience to corporate Uprona party strictures. Furthermore, whereas the decolonization contest had seen subjecthood marshaled as a means of contesting power through the choice of authority, the instability of the independent state limited the content of citizenship to a complex yet binary relationship of recognition and mutual dependency between citizen and state; citizenship entailed not the contestation of power but its mediation. Individuals and communities claimed the reciprocal, protective obligations of the state toward its loyal subjects by performing the nascent actions of a political citizenship that incarnated political orthodoxy. Becoming

the obedient political subject was a sensible defensive tactic when confronted by a hostile state or an aggressive, deviant enemy, but it also offered its own oblique possibilities of agency within local and national politics. “The positive content of citizenship,” as James Ferguson frames it in relation to southern Africa, rested “precisely on being a rightful and deserving dependent of the state.”³² Denouncing or apprehending those who transgressed the orthodox political order allowed the population to present themselves as the active political subjects the state lacked, engaging with power by making themselves essential to the state and not simply tolerated by it.

Soon, however, the parameters of the field of citizenship would be transformed yet again. The year 1965 compounded disaster upon disaster, as the Hutu prime minister was assassinated by a Rwandan Tutsi refugee, new elections delivered a Hutu majority that was prevented from forming a government by an interfering mwami, and an abortive coup attempt was met with mass executions of Hutu politicians.³³ By 1966 the country was falling apart. Mwami Mwambutsa seemed to have abandoned his subjects, eventually taking up permanent residence in Switzerland, and his son, Rwagasore’s younger brother, took his place as king. Soon enough, the army stepped in to neutralize the new mwami and declared a Republic of Burundi under the single party leadership of Uprona. The monarchy, an institution of deep authority and affection among its subjects, however diminished it had been by the preceding years of crisis, was replaced by an institution of force, albeit one that claimed to aspire to reformist and progressive politics. Choice of leadership was officially abolished, not to be achieved again for twenty-seven years. Yet even in this context of ominous military domination it is possible to find the modalities of engagement playing out within the terms of subjection, and we may finally witness how this relationship of dependency could arise not only from the imposition of the state but also from the instigation of citizens.

Republican Rule: The Vigilant Citizen

The military republic was heavily dominated by Tutsi officers from the south of the country, but one of their priorities was easing relations with the Hutu republic in Rwanda. With rapprochement in the air, the new government no longer feared invasion, and by 1967 the northern border had lost a lot of its urgency in the eyes of the state. Political contagion remained a concern, however, as rumors suggested that the borderlanders

were in contact with Rwandans who spoke disparagingly of the “half-republic” that had brought the Tutsi-dominated army to power.³⁴

In a relatively new development, the word *citoyen* began to creep into the state’s vocabulary. Officials discussed how *nos concitoyens* (our fellow citizens) were being wooed by subversive Rwandans who wanted to see a violent revolution south of the border.³⁵ It was a possessive concept, the citizen imagined as an anonymous loyalist who was devoted to the propaganda of the peaceful military coup, standing in opposition to the bloodthirsty Rwandans. The latter were described ambiguously as simply *ressortissants*, “nationals” of their country; the word recalled the legal limbo of the colonial period, in contrast to the positive inclusive figure of the Murundi *concitoyen*. With the mythic sovereignty of the mwami no longer relevant, the inclusionary extent of citizenship had gained a new vocabulary but still remained defined by the negative example of the alien and continued to lack any formalized content of political engagement with the military government other than the expectation of obedient loyalty. The citizens of the republic were still subjects of an aspiring hegemonic state. However, given the necessary circumstances, the possibility of limited engagement remained within the grasp of these subjects, open to their invocation even when it appeared counter to the interests of the new politics.

It so happened that one Saturday afternoon in July 1967, a man drove his cattle along the southern bank of the river that marks the border with Rwanda, seeking better pastures in the higher ground.³⁶ It was his regular routine, yet as he followed the line of the border this time, he was followed. A group of Rwandan civilians had crossed the frontier and penetrated a kilometer into Burundi territory. They gave chase; he was caught and forcibly taken across the river, into Rwanda. There were Rwandan soldiers waiting on the far bank of the stream, and the man was stripped naked, dragged away to a hill at some distance from the frontier, and tied to a tree. The Burundi witnesses could not follow, and in the words of the provincial vice governor a week later, “to this day, the fate of Monsieur Nkurunziza is unknown.”³⁷

He shares a name with the current president of Burundi, but Nkurunziza was Rwandan. He had lived in the area for over fifteen years, first moving under Belgian rule when the border was officially just an internal administrative divide within the single territory of Ruanda-Urundi. Local authorities believed that Nkurunziza, along with members of the other six Rwandan families who lived on the same hill, had

long been suspected by the Rwandan state of being spies for militants among the Tutsi refugees, who were known as *inyenzi*, “cockroaches,” and had launched numerous bloody attacks back into Rwanda across the previous years.³⁸ “The Rwandan authorities,” reported the vice governor, “have decided to liquidate systematically these seven persons.”³⁹

Nkurunziza was not, therefore, a Murundi, and the state’s language noted that his identity partially excluded him from the national community. But for all that it may have been a largely Rwandan affair, the kidnapping of Nkurunziza was a shocking moment in the borderland. It was a violent incursion by a foreign power that disconcerted the state and terrified the local people, and despite the pressure from the government to get along with Parmehutu, the crime was sufficiently alarming to reawaken old fears. And the local people did all they could to fuel these proven paranoias. They described how they had confronted their Rwandan neighbors on the border and had been met with ominous threats: “It will not take more than nine days to achieve what we have planned to do,” the Rwandans reportedly claimed. “Go and tell your leaders that we do not want *inyenzi* among the people, that Parmehutu will achieve its ends.”⁴⁰

Once again the border people were eager to present themselves as faithful subjects of the regime, and they exploited the rich possibilities of the border to illustrate this loyalty by graphic opposition to foreign politics. The republican government might still have been a little doubtful over the susceptibility of the borderlanders to Rwandan influence, but unlike in similar circumstances under the monarchy, it no longer treated its peripheral citizens with open aggression. Rather, the borderlanders themselves worked hard to rekindle the old border hostility of the state. In Dereje Feyissa’s terms, they labored to show themselves as “more state than the state”; they insisted on the “rigidification” of the frontier against the particular interest of the government, “mobilizing the state in a local struggle.”⁴¹ They had long been at odds with their neighbors in Rwanda, engaged in reciprocal cattle raids that the state had done little to halt. Now they exploited Nkurunziza’s abduction to paint their pains in the language of political danger that the state understood. Molested by the alien Other, Nkurunziza was retroactively incorporated within the inclusionary extent of citizenship, his neighbors utilizing Rwandan aggression to perform the necessary political orthodoxy that might invoke political recognition from the state. With the nights echoing with “cries of alarm . . . intended to create a spirit of

insecurity amongst the peaceful population of Burundi,” the inhabitants piqued the interest of the state by their revelation that their own Barundi political exiles, now refugees in Rwanda, were “at the base of these ploys,”⁴² all the time “motived by a spirit of racism.”⁴³ The opposition between peaceful citizens and destabilizing Others was played out just as the state conceived it, only set in striking contrast by the fear and danger conjured in the borderlanders’ words. Engagement between state and society might only take place on the state’s terms, but through the judicious performance of loyalty and political peril, the limited content of citizenship, the rights and responsibilities of protection against foreign hostility, could be instigated by subjects even when the state was keen to move on from the antagonistic past.

The people were no longer just borderlanders but border guards; having confronted Parmehutu militants on the frontier, they began to take the unusual step of enforcing a customs regime that they had previously flouted with little concern. The republican state had shown an increasing interest in regularizing and bureaucratizing the border regime through identity checks and border passes, all the better to control the population and gather tax revenue, but the borderlanders themselves had never ceased to cross the border wherever and whenever they felt like it. Yet three days after the abduction, “thirty pigs, three goats and a bullock coming from Rwanda were seized by the people. . . . The animals had been sent to market by six Rwandans, without a transport document and without a customs visa.”⁴⁴ It was a transparent attempt to appeal to the state’s interest in taxation and control, something that offered little to the borderlanders themselves. But it was a judicious act; as the state began to speak of the citizen in terms of bureaucratic recognition, tested by inspection on the border and distinction from the foreigner, the people both offered to endorse this nascent language of authority and showed themselves necessary to bring the state’s desires into reality. The designation of the *citoyen* had been tentatively raised as a legalistic and possessive act of state, but the borderlanders offered to push it further and transform it into a collaborative engagement of mutual benefit to state and society. The state responded and once more flooded the borderland with soldiers, this time for the protection of its loyal citizens.

This border dynamic was the realization of a nationwide project between state and citizen. Covertly expanding the Tutsi domination of power, fearful that monarchist sentiments remained strong, and terrified

of a potential Hutu political movement, the military was desperate to see stability in the faithfulness of the people. It formed the Jeunesse Révolutionnaire Rwagasore (JRR), a youth league that invoked Prince Rwagasore's name to serve the republican order, and gave as its commanding slogan the word *Vigilance*.⁴⁵ Watchfulness against political deviance, contagion, and incursion was to be the shared purpose of the state and its loyal citizens. Through universal vigilance, the reproduction of the political community of the nation could be achieved, a performance that maintained a loose link between citizens and state, kept them in contact, and confirmed the mutual ties of loyalty and obligation. To be a good citizen was to be a vigilant citizen. "Vigilance is a frontier phenomenon,"⁴⁶ and it lent itself well to performance on the border, but it was only a local representation of a national mode of engagement. By reporting the incursion of individuals or ideas, one presented oneself to the state as belonging to the nation, claiming inclusion within the positional identity of citizenship, and deserving of state endorsement, sharing in the content of citizenship as interdependent obligations of mutual defense. Citizen and state spoke to each other in shared terms of vigilant political orthodoxy, and each provided a degree of protection to the other. There could be reciprocity, mutual obligation, and mutual protection in the collaboration of citizen and state.

It was, nevertheless, a state-centered act, collaboration entirely on the state's terms. The citizen performed vigilance as service to the state's definitions of order and legitimacy. Even while the government became more and more dominated by Tutsi, few could denounce this insidious creep without falling foul of the powerful orthodox line that declared all talk of ethnic division to be a matter of Rwandan "racism and violence."⁴⁷ Displaying one's belonging within the nation, acting on behalf of the state and claiming its responsibility to protect, remained an acceptance of subjection to the state's hegemonic political orthodoxy. "Citizenship is Janus-faced,"⁴⁸ and when the state considered any other path of action or expression to be treasonous, then the duties of citizenship appeared synonymous with the obedience, even the silence, of the subject. Vigilance was a "ritual of citizenship," as described by Burgess, training a "new kind of citizen" who embodied both the political ideals and the needs of the aggressive state,⁴⁹ but it retained much of the expectations of submission from previous modes of power. The political limitations on the extent of citizenship, the restrained content of citizenship as defined by Uprona paranoia under the mwami, had been formalized and

enhanced by the military state. Dissent was as prohibited as ever, the army demanding the subjection of the population to its new version of Uprona and acting swiftly to eliminate those who expressed dissatisfaction with the new path of the state. But with the emotive power of the monarchy lost, the language of political orthodoxy provided the subject with its own means of engagement with power. The state had changed, but still one had to play the subject and find means of engaging and ameliorating one's situation within the terms of subjection.

Citizenship is not about the realisation of a fully coherent and harmonious rational contract, but rather about the temporary (and never fully achieved) stabilisation of the polity around a set of participatory practices and new agreements, rooted in democratic and non-democratic contracts and rule making.

—Steven Robins, Andrea Cornwall, and Bettina von Lieres,
“Rethinking ‘Citizenship’”⁵⁰

The pace of change in early 1960s Burundi was extraordinary, evidence of a state careering out of control. The flashes of engagement between people and state were frantic, improvised attempts at stabilizing this dangerous and often violent interaction of politics and power. In this compressed period of recurrent transformation, the potential for change within the field of citizenship was demonstrated in the adjustments that individuals made to relate to the new character of the state above them, while the resiliency of the fundamental premise of subjecthood stood in stark reminder of the continuities shared by colony, monarchy, and republic. Whether faced with a choice between rival authorities in the electoral moment of decolonization, confronted with a hostile state in the crisis period that followed, or seeking to involve a martial government in local troubles, engaged and active citizens adjusted their actions and expressions to suit the time but did so within the constraints of the subject position. Loyalty and obedience were the performative language of engagement, demanded by the assumption that the state represented a dangerous, potentially violent hegemonic authority that would punish deviance, from Chief Baranyanka's fury to the suspicious postcolonial Uprona or the covert military ethnicization of the republic. Within these parameters of loyal subjecthood, however, there lay the possibility for a citizen to include him- or herself in the politics of the nation and deflect or direct the dangerous powers of the state to

suit the circumstances of the subject community through the display of obedience. The fluctuating field of citizenship was delimited by political subjection and encompassed rights and duties of interdependence, but it was above all a performative act.

The willingness for the subject to embrace the definitions and preoccupations of the state and the potential for action, inclusion, negotiation, and engagement within this febrile relationship proved to be powerful tools of mutual benefit to state and society. Rather than a choice between citizenship and subjecthood, it was a matter of productive dependency, “a form of agency that seeks its own submission,”⁵¹ a means by which people could not only include themselves in the nation but also advance their interests beneath and within the state. And it found temporary success in each incarnation because the state, too, knew itself to be partially dependent on its subjects. Each form of state needed to see subjects beneath it, subjects that accepted and endorsed its right to rule. The decade was defined by political instability, and while the fatal divisions most often emerged within the state itself, a nation of united, loyal subjects seemed to offer the only possibility of security for the aspirational hegemony. A citizenship of mutual dependency, predicated by the latent or active violence of the state yet nevertheless available to the instigation of the individual, offered a means of stabilization and marginal benefit for all concerned, most powerfully expressed in the settlement of vigilant citizenship under the republic.

In Burundi, unlike many other African states around the time of independence, the nature of the nation was relatively settled and provided the most basic parameters of citizenship; the nature of the state and of the relationship between state and people was what troubled the fleeting regimes of the 1960s, as the extent and content of citizenship were contracted and transformed. While placed under strain by the Rwandan threat in the early postcolonial years and then shriven of its royal component and redressed in modern language in the republican years, the imagination of Burundi familial unity provided a veneer of shared identity by which citizen and state could meet. Yet despite such stability, as Burundi emerged from its furious change in the early 1960s, this axis of citizenship was what would be most fundamentally transformed as ethnic divisions took the place of proclaimed familial unity. As Tutsi supremacists consolidated power in the republic, the state they dominated increasingly excluded Hutu from belonging within its ranks. When a Hutu revolt triggered a genocidal repression from this state in 1972,⁵² this

incarnation of Burundi's political community was fundamentally broken, extraordinary violence firmly establishing the primacy of ethnicity over nationhood and redefining the "depth" of citizenship through the unofficial, yet pervasive, triangulation of national, political, and above all ethnic identity. The rapid transformations around independence saw the performance and action of citizenship adapt to extreme instability, but the most fundamental challenge to the limits and claims of belonging and engagement between people and state was still to come.

Citizenship, as was said at the outset, is a moving target, evolving and reforming according to the pressures of the moment. But for all that greater and more disastrous changes were on the horizon, the shifting field of citizenship across the triple transformations of the Burundi state in the early 1960s illustrates the crucial potential in the behavior of citizen and subject as a spectrum, not an opposition. Emerging from colonial rule in crisis and uncertainty, with dangerous divisions within and aggressive enemies without, the Burundi in the 1960s refined a kind of citizenship that balanced the position of the dependent subject before an unstable yet hegemonic state with a degree of freedom within which citizens might engage with power, win inclusion and recognition, and somewhat mediate the political forces that raged around them. To the skillful actor, accepting the definitions of subjection could itself give access to the deflection, negotiation, and mediation of power. The subject could embrace dependency and still invoke the fruits of a citizenship of mutual obligation, if not of rights.

Notes

1. James Tully, "Two Meanings of Global Citizenship: Modern and Diverse," in *Global Citizenship Education: Philosophy, Theory and Pedagogy*, ed. Michael A. Peters, Alan Britton, and Harry Blee (Rotterdam: Sense Publications, 2008), 15–41.

2. Engin F. Isin and Bryan S. Turner, "Citizenship Studies: An Introduction," in *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*, ed. Engin F. Isin and Bryan S. Turner (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 1–10.

3. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary African States and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

4. See Steven Robins, Andrea Cornwall, and Bettina von Lieres, "Rethinking 'Citizenship' in the Postcolony," *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 6 (2008): 1069–86.

5. This imagination of national identity could also serve to exclude others who claimed membership in the Burundi nation, especially Swahili-speaking Muslims. See Geert Castryck, "The Hidden Agenda of Citizenship: African

Citizenship in the Face of the Modern Nation-State,” in *Citizenship in Historical Perspective*, ed. Steven Ellis, Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, and Ann Katherine Isaacs (Pisa: Edizione Plus Pisa University Press, 2006), 189–202.

6. André Verbrugge, “Introduction historique au problème de la nationalité au Burundi,” *Revue administrative et juridique du Burundi* 6, no. 18 (1972): 5–8. This situation contrasted with that of the formal colony of Belgian Congo, where Africans could theoretically be recognized as citizens if they achieved the status of *évolué*.

7. René Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970), 66.

8. See Roger Botte, “La guerre interne au Burundi,” in *Guerres de lignages et guerres d'états en Afrique*, ed. Jean Bazin and Emmanuel Terray (Paris: Editions des Archives Contemporaines, 1982), 271–317.

9. Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, 313–15, 336; Charles Ndayiziga, “Banyarwanda et le chefferie Kunkiko-Mugamba” (mémoire de licence, University of Burundi, 1987); Aidan Russell, “Talking Politics and Watching the Border in Northern Burundi, c. 1960–1972” (PhD diss., Oxford University, 2013), 87–147.

10. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 37–61.

11. Russell, “Talking Politics,” 89–91.

12. *Ibid.*, 96.

13. See Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*; Christine Deslaurier, “Un monde politique en mutation: Le Burundi à la veille de l'indépendance (circa 1956–1961)” (PhD diss., Université Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2002).

14. Valère Vandenbulcke, *Rapport Hebdomadaire Ngozi*, March 5, 1960, Archives Africaines, Brussels (hereafter AAB), BUR 74 (4).

15. Uprona, *Ijwi ry'abadasigana*, n.d., AAB, BUR 65 (1).

16. *Les incidents de la région Rukecu-Busiga-Mihigo*, May 4, 1960, AAB, BUR 73 (5).

17. *Incidents Rukecu*, May 4, 1960, AAB, BUR 73 (5).

18. Pierre Ngendandumwe, *Jugement de Mparamirundi*, August 3, 1960, AAB, BUR 79 (8).

19. Russell, “Talking Politics,” 97–147; Deslaurier, “Un monde politique,” 1021–31.

20. See James Ferguson, “Declarations of Dependence: Labour, Personhood, and Welfare in Southern Africa,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2013): 226.

21. For discussions of the assassination, see Ludo de Witte, “L'assassinat du Premier ministre burundais Louis Rwagasore” (2013), http://cas1.elis.ugent.be/avrug//forum_2013pdf/rwagasore_fr.pdf; Guy Poppe, *L'assassinat de Rwagasore, le Lumumba burundais* (Bujumbura: Iwacu, 2012).

22. Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, 343–60.

23. *Ibid.*, 197–228, 383–401; Filip Reyntjens, “Rencontres burundaises: Inyenzi du Rwanda et rebelles du Kivu,” *Cahiers du CEDAF* 7–8 (1986): 123–37; Augustin Mariro, *Burundi 1965: La ère crise ethnique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005).

24. Bizimana Septime, telegram to deputy prime minister, September 7, 1964, Archives Nationales du Burundi (hereafter ANB), BI 6.94.
25. Cyprien Ntahomereye, Interrogations: Nsabuwanika, Ntirumveko, Sebiganiro, Sebihehero, Mbitse, Kavamahanga, September 17, 1964, ANB, BI 5.19.
26. Conseil de guerre, *Audience publique*, April 10, 1965, ANB, BI 5.22.
27. Misigaro Tharcisse, Interrogation: Rukushi Isaac et al., August 29, 1964, ANB, BI 5.18.
28. Ibid.
29. Conseil de guerre, *Audience publique*, April 10, 1965, ANB, BI 5.22.
30. Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, 306–8.
31. Kabanda Samson, *Inama y'ukuri*, October 29, 1964, ANB, BI 6.34.
32. Ferguson, "Declarations of Dependence," 237.
33. Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, 416–22; Mariro, *Burundi 1965*, 173–94.
34. Zibakwiye Athanase, *Rapport mensuel Ijene*, April 7, 1967, ANB, B 9.
35. Sakubu Lucien, letter to Immigration, February 16, 1967, ANB, BI 6.120.
36. Paul Rusiga and Mathias Rwamo, *Situation frontalière de Kabarore*, July 24, 1967, ANB, B 11.2.
37. Ibid.
38. The word *inyenzi* later became notorious as a term of extreme hate speech against all Tutsi during the 1994 genocide. In the 1960s, however, it referred specifically to the refugee militants, who were said to embrace the name themselves.
39. Rusiga and Rwamo, *Situation frontalière*.
40. *Affaire Nkurunziza*, July 25, 1967, ANB, B 11.2.
41. Dereje Feyissa, "More State Than the State? The Anywaa's Call for the Rigidification of the Ethio-Sudanese Border," in *Borders and Borderlands as Resources in the Horn of Africa*, ed. Dereje Feyissa and Markus Virgil Hoehne (Oxford: James Currey, 2010), 43.
42. Rusiga and Rwamo, *Situation frontalière*.
43. *Affaire Nkurunziza*.
44. Ibid.
45. See Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, 448, 458–59; Russell, "Talking Politics," 168–179.
46. Ray Abrahams, *Vigilant Citizens: Vigilantism and the State* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 24.
47. Although note the courageous and perspicacious report written by Martin Ndayahoze, minister of information and the most senior Hutu politician in government, on the pervasive ethnic rivalries that overwhelmed the state in 1968. René Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 85–86. He was later murdered by his rivals in 1972.
48. Robins et al., "Rethinking 'Citizenship,'" 1080.
49. Thomas Burgess, "The Young Pioneers and the Rituals of Citizenship in Revolutionary Zanzibar," *Africa Today* 51, no. 3 (2005): 3–29.
50. Robins et al., "Rethinking 'Citizenship,'" 1073.

51. Ferguson, “Declarations of Dependence,” 237.
52. Jean-Pierre Chrétien and Jean-François Dupaquier, *Burundi 1972: Au bord des génocides* (Paris: Karthala, 2007); Lemarchand, *Burundi*, 76–105.

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