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## Elusive Tactics

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## ENGLISH SUMMARY

### *ELUSIVE TACTICS: URBAN YOUTH NAVIGATING THE AFTERMATH OF WAR IN BURUNDI*

This ethnographic study explores the social genesis of war and peace in Burundi. The topic is approached through a focus on everyday practices of classification and identification among youths on the northern periphery of Bujumbura. The study reveals the ways in which male and female youths grapple with insecurities and uncertain prospects concerning violence and exclusion that characterize Burundi in the aftermath of the civil war. Therewith, the study gives insight into purposive action in indeterminate contexts and illuminates the agency of 'ordinary people' – here, youths – in reinventing peace.

The thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter describes the methodology and theory that underpin this study. In the chapter, I propose to focus on the immediate present and embrace a more open-ended anthropology as a way to deal with the indeterminacy that affects fieldwork findings and relations and to start exploring the still emerging effects of everyday practices. The chapter also reflects on current anthropological theory on war and peace as constituted through and moderated by social action, youths as key actors in peace-building and theory developed to grasp tactical practices, which allegedly prevail in contexts marked by high levels of uncertainty, insecurity and contingency.

The second chapter serves as a historical background. Writings about history in Burundi help to contextualize the contemporary situation of 'no war, no peace'. In the chapter, I argue that war-peace dynamics in Burundi are embedded in regional and global power struggles and that in Burundi's recent past, a political system strongly based on exclusion and violence has emerged. I point to the importance of regional and ethnic identity categories as bases for discrimination and the significance of vertical ties between the ruling elite and ordinary people. Purportedly, Burundian history is partial and highly politicized. In addition, I suggest, the contested nature of history itself appears to become a tool in struggles over truth, power and impunity.

The subsequent chapters present my main empirical findings regarding the ways in which youths deal with uncertainty, insecurity and contingency in their surroundings. In Chapter 3, I argue that youths are engaged in 'mapping' practices, through which youths categorize others according to their neighbourhood residence; apparently as a way to get grip on the people around them and to prepare against latent danger. The 'mapping' practices also feed into a 'standardization' of differences between neighbourhoods and their residents. The categories are strongly based on wartime categories and experiences and follow the logic of hierarchy. They thus have a potential as

'mythical maps' for processes of exclusion, though youths also 'disturb' and 'contest' the assumptions based on the emergent categories.

Chapter 4 looks at how youths navigate the uncertainty about the salience of ethnic and other identity categories. Identification practices were often seen as omens of imminent violence. Not the categories themselves but the employment of the categories was questioned and feared. This leads to a preoccupation with hidden realities and an engagement in protective measures geared at remaining difficult to define, which results in conflicting narratives that reaffirm the existence of hidden and potentially treacherous realities. Yet, the youths' practices also help to imagine and prepare an alternative, more peaceful future. I argue that, here, emotions like hope or fear seem to strongly affect the youths' navigation.

Chapter 5 looks at youths' engagement in politics in view of their preparations for their futures. I show that the 'crisis dynamics' in Burundi, which are characterized by periods of relative stability alternating with periods of heightened tensions, affect the kind of practices youths engage in. In periods of relative stability, youths appear more inclined to focus on themselves. They try improving their skills and capabilities and they abstain from clear side-taking. By increasing versatility and encouraging the patience to endure, they try to create alternatives. In periods of turmoil, the possibilities for such practices drastically narrow. Many youths feel compelled to display their political allegiance and make exclusive choices. In this, youths have to take into account both immediate and more distant horizons. Their choices and actions appear to have a spiralling potential: the space to operate outside or despite power structures increasingly diminishes – for themselves, the people close to them and possibly, for next generations.

The last chapter – the conclusions – highlight my findings in view of what they contribute to current anthropological theory on tactical practices and their effects on peace-building. I suggest that some of the practices I described in the thesis can be seen as 'elusive tactics'. Elusive tactics refer to practices that allow people – here, youths – to remain or become more versatile, flexible and, quite literally, difficult to pin down. These tactics can be protective and can help foster the desire for or belief in openness and alternatives. They help challenge the knowledge and power that constrain everyday life. Yet, elusive tactics also perpetuate and reiterate mistrustful social relations. Amidst indeterminacy, extraordinary circumstances and betrayal remain a looming possibility.