Ethnicised Politics: Patterns of Interpretation of Rwandans and Burundians

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Following Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1991) this study focuses on taken-for-granted notions, i.e. knowledge (defining ethnicised politics as exclusion *interpreted* with reference to ethnic categories). This represents a departure from the conventional academic discussion of ethnicised politics, which focuses on exclusion inherent to the structures of political systems when seeking to explain violent conflict aligned along ethnic cleavages. The study compares two neighbouring countries, Rwanda and Burundi, where different institutional models have been introduced to overcome ethnicised politics following comparable episodes of ethnic violence. Whereas the Rwandan system avoids political representation based on ethnic categories, the Burundian system prescribes ethnic quotas. Semi-standardised interviews with twenty-two Rwandans and twenty Burundians conducted between September 2007 and May 2008 investigated ethnicised politics as patterns of interpretation (i.e. knowledge). The study found that notwithstanding the different political institutional systems in Rwanda and Burundi (both aiming to overcome ethnicised politics), exclusion in both systems is interpreted with reference to ethnic categories, i.e. politics are ethnicised in both countries. This result points to the importance of conceiving ethnicised politics as historically produced knowledge, i.e. patterns of interpretation.

Violent political conflict is often assumed to be caused by ethnicised politics, while ethnicised politics, in turn, is thought to be caused by discrimination or elite rivalry (or both).[1] The argument goes that social and political discrimination along ethnic cleavages or struggles over national resources along ethnic cleavages organised by elites contribute to the salience of ethnicity in politics, which is widely acknowledged to increase the propensity of further (violent) ethnic conflicts (Hechter 2004; Snyder 2000; Gurr 2002, 1993; Wimmer 2002; Wimmer 1997; Brass 1985; Hechter 1999; Horowitz 1985; Kandeh 1992; Ali and Matthews 1999). Simply speaking about ethnic cleavages implies that ethnicity not only structures the society, but has been subject to coherent and organised political expression (Kriesi

1998, 167), i.e. has been politicised. In short, ethnicised politics – widely assumed to entail ethnic conflict – are seen to be induced by exclusion *inherent* to the structure (i.e. actors or institutions) of the political system.[2]

In a departure from these common approaches, my line of reasoning highlights the importance of conceptualising ethnicised politics as *patterns interpreting exclusion with reference to ethnic categories.* In doing so, it follows analyses which focus on the symbolic and semantic dimensions of "ethnicisation of politics" (Büschges and Pfaff-Czarnecka 2007). Understanding ethnicised politics as a pattern of interpretation places emphasis on what "those living in that world" (Schütz 1972, 9) take for granted and real. This

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The article is based on lines of reasoning developed and interviews conducted within the scope of a PhD project entitled "The Dilemma of Recognition: On the 'Experienced Reality' of Ethnicised Politics of Rwandans and Burundians."

1 The contributions to this discussion are diversely labelled, either as "politicisation of

ethnicity" (Kandeh 1992; Wimmer 2002) or "ethnic politics" (Chazan 1982; Chazan, Lewis, Rothchild, Stedman, and Mortimer 1999).

2 Basically, structure is understood as pattern or arrangement as opposed to randomness or chaos. Such patterns are predominantly thought of as being constituted either by social relations between agents (i.e. by agency itself)

or by institutional structures that are external to the agents (López and Scott 2009). These structures (thought of as either being created by agency or being external to agency) are often held to be external to a specific historical context. On the contrary, it is crucial to my argument that specific patterns of interpretation that are induced by a specific historical context are taken into account.

is what Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1991) call knowledge, which is seen to constitute social reality (1991, 15). This knowledge is produced by historical processes that are, consequently, relevant for understanding the knowledge (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 72). Accordingly, any analysis of institutional order has to take the knowledge of its members into account (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 82). Following Pierre Bourdieu, I work with the coexisting, and sometimes directly competing, supra-individual points of views reflecting social divisions in society (Bourdieu 1999, 125). In other words, the study reveals diverging, even, contradictory realities. Illustrating how Rwandans and Burundians conceive their realities, i.e. how they take notions for granted, required qualitative interviews: I conducted semi-standardised interviews with twenty-two Rwandans and twenty Burundians between September 2007 and May 2008. The focus on taken-for-granted notions and, hence, (diverging) social realities has clear implications for my understanding of the interview material. I take my interview material as "a form to talk – a 'discourse', 'account' or 'repertoire' – which represents a *culturally available* way of packaging experience" (Kitzinger 2004, cited in Silverman 2006, 129, emphasis added). The interview material is not assumed to give answers to questions concerning facts and events. Rather, the material is understood as a representation or account of the experiences of the interviewee (Silverman 2006, 117).

But why is it that ethnicised politics, i.e. political and social exclusion along ethnic cleavages, is seen as particularly political and conflict-prone?[3] In modern nation states, it is taken for granted that social political and legal closure, i.e. exclusion and inclusion, is structured by the modern nation state (Wimmer 2002, 57; Bös 1993). Nation states are themselves ethnic (Bös 2008, 69).[4] Legitimate rule as it is taken-for-granted in the modern nation state is "rule by our people, that is, rule by people who are *like us*, people of our nationality" (Ringmar 1998, 534, emphasis added). Being part of an ethnic category (i.e. having a certain ethnic affiliation) entitles to (political, social and legal) rights (Wimmer 2002, 1). In this sense, inclusion (and, hence, exclusion) is structured along ethnic categories.

Given that nation states are ethnic, ethnic categories *that do not coincide with the nation state* necessarily involve exclusion. In other words, ethnic categories are symbolically unequal and thus imply exclusion (Sutterlüty 2006). Consequently, social and political exclusion interpreted in terms of ethnic categories is especially exclusive since it does not correspond to the taken-for-granted, i.e. legitimate form of exclusion structured along ethnic categories *coinciding* with the nation state. So exclusion interpreted in terms of ethnic categories (i.e. ethnicised politics) challenges the legitimate modern form of political organisation and representation (i.e. nation state) and, in this sense, is political and conflict prone.

To study ethnicised politics as patterns of interpretation, the present study looks at Rwanda and Burundi. In both countries, political institutional models have been introduced to end a very violent political history. In Burundi the constitution introduced in 2005 provides ethnic quotas of Tutsi and Hutu in all governmental and administrational institutions (usually 40:60) and in the army (50:50). By contrast, after the military victory of the FPR (Front Patriotique Rwandais) in 1994, Rwanda decided to avoid ethnic representation in political institutions.[5] Yet the two countries are similar in many aspects: The ethnic categories, and numerous relationships attributed to these categories, are comparable.

3 This discussion analysing ethnicity in politics, which is said to lead to instable democracy and "ethnic political conflict" (Rabushka and Shepsle 1971, 461), refers mostly to non-Western, post-imperial societies still in the process of nation-state-building (Wimmer 1997) and democratisation (Snyder 2000). Correspondingly, I focus on societies in which the political history (including large-scale massacres) is ethnicised in the sense that it is interpreted with heavy reference to ethnic categories. Of course, in general poverty, economic underdevelopment and

lack of democracy (e.g. political and civil rights, mechanisms for peaceful adjudication of disputes) (Sambanis 2001, 266--7) play a major role in fostering further violent ethnic conflict. All these criteria have to be taken into account in order to assess the propensity of violent ethnic conflict.

4 Of course, nation states follow different ideas about in- and exclusion and apply different practises to organise in- and exclusion (Thomas 2002). Usually, the academic discussion distinguishes between ethnic and political conceptions (Kohn

1944; Eley and Suny 1996; Thomas 2002; Smith 2003). Moreover, ethnic boundary markers are socially contested. Accordingly, ethnic boundaries can be challenged, changed and become meaningless (Eder, Rauer, and Schmidtke 2004, 35).

5 New constitutions were approved in 2003 in Rwanda and in 2005 in Burundi, with elections held later the same year in each case. Burundi's transitional constitution of 2003 also featured ethnic quotas. In Rwanda ethnic quotas were abandoned in 1994 after the FPR seized political power.

Both are composed of 85 percent Hutu, 14 percent Tutsi and 1 percent Twa.[6] In both countries, these categories are referred to as "Hutu" and "Tutsi". In post-independence political history, the ethnic cleavages have played a major role in very violent conflicts as well as in their interpretation. The current political systems in Rwanda and Burundi both aim at overcoming ethnicised politics. The Burundian Constitution prohibits the exclusion of any Burundian due to his ethnic affiliation (Article 13, Burundian Constitution) while the Rwandan Constitution states that all Rwandans are "free and equal in rights and duties", which includes the non-discrimination of Rwandans on the basis of their ethnic origin (Article 11, Rwandan Constitution).

By means of qualitative interviews, the present analysis aims to construct an ethnic interpretation of political power in the political institutional models of Rwanda and Burundi. The analysis of the interviews looks at similar ethnicised patterns of interpretation by Rwandans and Burundians describing opposing institutional models. I focus on assessments about who is in power and, hence, which "ethnic group" exactly is excluded, which follow contradictory (ethnicised) lines in each country.[7]

These conflicting assessments of the same political institutional system and even more the occurrence of ethnicised patterns of interpretation concerning totally opposed systems (both designed to overcome ethnicised politics) point to the necessity of rethinking ethnicised politics and, accordingly, the prevention of ethnic conflict. This line of reasoning suggests taking into account the knowledge of members of the institutional order in order to discuss political and social exclusion and, hence, the prevention of ethnic conflict.

1. Ethnicised Politics within the Context of the Modern Nation State
Whereas many authors regard ethnic conflict as inherently modern (Snyder 2000; Gurr 2002, 1993; Mann 2005),

implicitly relating it to ideas of democracy and political representation of ethnicity, Andreas Wimmer's understanding (2002; 1997) is special in that he *explicitly* takes the *notion* of the modern nation state and the resulting ideas of *legitimate* in- and exclusion into account. The idea of nation state is relevant for ethnic conflict since: "the formation of the nation state and the rise of nationalism and ethnicity are the products of the fundamental reorganisation of the main modes of inclusion and exclusion, of a reordering of the basic principles of membership and identity along national and ethnic lines" (Wimmer 2002, 42).

All legal, political, military and social rights are reserved for the citizens of the respective nation state in what Wimmer calls "ethno-political closure" (2002, 70). The idea of nation state comes with a specific idea of political legitimacy that is the rule of those who are both alike and equal. In this sense, being part of an ethnic category (i.e. having a certain ethnic affiliation) entitles to (political, social and legal) rights (Wimmer 2002, 1). To illustrate this point, under current U.S. law, exclusively "natural born citizens" are eligible to become President, excluding those who have become citizens by naturalisation (Article 2, U.S. Constitution). The law reflects how ethnicity (i.e. common descent) is understood as a relevant criterion for representing the U.S. political community. Even in a nation state which is comparatively inclusive in terms of the possibilities for naturalisation, these laws clearly reflect the idea of a political community defined (amongst other things) by descent. Being part of this community defined by ethnicity entitles to rights and, hence, structures in- and exclusion.

Given that nation states are ethnic, ethnic categories *that do not coincide with the nation state* must involve exclusion. In other words, ethnic categories are symbolically unequal and, in this sense, imply exclusion (Sutterlüty 2006). Consequently, social and political exclusion interpreted in terms of ethnic categories is especially exclusive since

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6 The percentages are based on censuses conducted during colonial times (Lemarchand 1994, 6).

7 Following Rogers Brubaker, who pleads against "groupism" and reification in research about ethnicity, I avoid speaking about "ethnic groups" since the term evokes the idea of "internally homogeneous,

externally-bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes" (Brubaker 2004, 8). The same is true for the notions of "the Hutu" and "the Tutsi". By using these terms I intend to highlight this very notion of "ethnic groups", "the Tutsi" and "the Hutu", which are assumed to

have common purposes and, hence, to be collective actors. These assumptions have far-reaching implications, e.g. that political exclusion necessarily implies the social exclusion of an "ethnic group".

it does not correspond to the taken-for-granted, i.e. legitimate form of exclusion structured along ethnic categories coinciding with the nation state. It questions both ideas, the "community of likes" and the "community of equals", that basically constitute the national principles (Wimmer 2002, 53). So ethnicised politics challenge the legitimate modern form of political organisation and representation (i.e. nation state) and are, hence, very political and conflict-prone. Put differently, unequal distribution of resources, services and costs leads to a struggle over "who owns the state" (Wimmer 1997)?

The criteria related to the idea of the modern nation state characterised by equality and likeness are "idealizations that are rarely, if ever, fully actualized" (Riggs 1998, 272). Nonetheless these dimensions bear the potential to generate ethnic conflict if they are not fully actualized (Riggs 1998, 272). I hold that the gap between – as Riggs puts it – the ideal and its actualisation creates a potential for political claims that are ethnically framed. Ethnicised politics has the potential to challenge the actual distribution of power and is an especially plausible, legitimate and powerful claim.

Within the predominant academic discussion about ethnicised politics two different strands can be broadly distinguished. Both build on the finding that ethnicity is particularly salient and relevant within the context of the modern nation state either when exclusion (i.e. discrimination) occurs along ethnic cleavages or when ethnic cleavages are instrumentalised for competition for resources (especially by the political elite) – or both. They are closely interrelated and both are inherently related to the notions of ethnicity and nation state.

To begin with, the academic discussion often refers to the finding that ethnic cleavages are (empirically) important in organising competition for resources in the modern nation state and to the high conflict potential that is implied (Brass 1991; Wimmer 2002; Mann 2005; Chazan, Lewis, Rothchild, Stedman, and Mortimer 1999; Geertz 1973). The nation state is discussed as a newly introduced political organisation where accumulated and centralised resources are allocated. Ethnicity is a form to organise competition for resources (Williams 2003, 105), leading to what Susan Olzak calls

"ethnic mobilization" (1983, 355). Such a focus on the role of ethnicity in its mobilising function for political ends has been very important in the instrumentalist approach. This approach understands the salience of ethnicity as being the result of political rivalry (Williams 2003). Here, the role of the elite gains particular relevance (Chazan 1999, 112; Brass 1985; Kandeh 1992; Ali and Matthews 1999).

The second strand of the discussion about ethnicised politics assumes that inequalities between ethnic groups and discrimination of ethnic groups foster their political relevance (Mann 2005; Chazan 1982; Hechter 1999; Horowitz 1985). In this respect, Michael Hechter's thesis of "Internal Colonialism" (1999) is very prominent. Hechter starts from unequal development and industrialisation within a nation state leading to unequal distribution of power and resources between core and the periphery. He then goes on to propose that the peripheral group would come to regard itself as the superior culture and might eventually seek independence. Similarly, Donald Horowitz describes the juxtaposition of backward and advanced ethnic groups, largely a legacy of colonial policy, as the source of many conflicts in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean (1985, 167). The idea of political and economic oppression of ethnic groups causing ethnic conflict is also implied in the prominent academic discussion about "greed" and "grievances" (Nathan 2005; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Wimmer, Cedermann, and Min 2009). While "greed" alludes to the ability to finance wars, "grievances" implies exclusion along ethnic cleavages (Wimmer, Cedermann, and Min 2009). Understanding ethnicised politics as patterns of interpretation as I do places emphasis on what "those living in that world" take for granted and real, i.e. their knowledge, which is historically produced. Focusing on the historically produced taken-for-granted and self-evident notions, i.e. knowledge of "those living in that world" by conceiving of ethnicised politics, I come close to Andreas Wimmer's definition of nationalism as the main cultural compromise of modern societies (involving the nation state as the main social closure) (Wimmer 2002, 52). He understands cultural compromise as acceptance by all actors in a communicative arena, a "consensus over the validity of norms, classifications and patterns of interpretation that lasts beyond the open process of its production" (Wimmer

2002, 29). The cultural compromise ultimately depends on patterns of interpretation and power positions of strategically competent individuals. In contrast to Wimmer and following Berger and Luckmann, I do not consider the strategic aspect as a factor creating specific patterns of interpretation. Yet, power positions were crucial for the selection of the interviewees because I consider knowledge to be influenced by social divisions.[8] I understand the coexisting, and sometimes directly competing, supra-individual points of views to reflect social divisions in society (Bourdieu 1999, 125). Accordingly, ethnicised politics are conceived as a pattern of interpretation "that lasts beyond the open process of its production". Neglecting the strategic intention of the speaker, ethnicised politics constitute an important resource for accomplishing and legitimising political ends (Büschges and Pfaff-Czarnecka 2007, 8). In the analysis of the interviews I understand the quotes as taken-for-granted notions, which constitute social reality. Following Berger and Luckmann (1991), I conceive ethnicised politics as legitimate, i.e. taken-for-granted, notions, according to which ethnic categories make up the basis for in- and exclusion. In this sense, notions are legitimate where they are taken-for-granted and self-evident (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 12).

This focus on taken-for-granted and self-evident notions, i.e. conceiving ethnicised politics as patterns interpreting exclusion in terms of ethnic categories reconciles, on the one hand, the strand conceiving ethnicised politics as a strategically deployable instrument in that it accepts it as a powerful resource for achieving political ends (without, though, considering the stratigical intention of the speaker) and the one considering the reality of exclusion as a relevant aspect for its understanding.

2. Two Options, One Intention: Political Institutional Systems in Rwanda and Burundi

The declared objective in Rwanda and Burundi is the promotion of peace and development (Vandeginste 2006, 27).

In order to achieve their respective aims they introduced different political institutional models: Whereas Burundi opted for a consociationalist model in 2005, the system Rwanda introduced in 2003 corresponds to the model of majoritarian democracy. In terms of the way they deal with ethnic cleavages, I label Rwanda and Burundi respectively "denial of" and "power sharing along" ethnic cleavages.

Since its seizure of power by military force the Front Patriotique Rwandais (FPR) has pursued the objective of establishing a "true democracy" understood as "political majority rule based on a genuine program uniting all Rwandans" (ICG 2001, 3). The official main aim is the eradication of ethnicity from public life (ICG 2001, 3). Rwanda seeks to establish a Rwandan identity based on a legalistic understanding of citizenship emphasising equal rights (Buckley-Zistel 2006, 102).

In order to overcome ethnic division and promote national unity Rwanda implemented majoritarian, liberal democracy. The model focuses on individuals (as opposed to collectives) as the bearers of rights and accepts the government-versus-opposition-pattern and winner-takes-all character of majority rule. Concerning the concrete institutional implementation, Rwanda is a presidential parliamentary system whose legislature is composed of an elected eighty-member Chamber of Deputies and a Senate whose twenty-six members are partly elected and partly appointed (Article 76 and 82, Rwandan Constitution). These political institutions involve "censorship and self-censorship" concerning issues related to the violent past (Buckley-Zistel 2006, 112), which of course strongly implies ethnicity. Discussing ethnicity has become a "taboo" (Burnet 2007, 11) enforced by very broad definitions of "divisionism" and "genocide ideology" that basically cover ethnicity and the history of the genocide (HRW 2008, 36). Ethnic identities are officially denied and "denying their non-existence involves severe penal sanctions" (Lemarchand 2006b, 7).

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8 In order to capture competing knowledge I treated social divisions between "political elite" and "citizens" and between being "oppositional" and "conforming to the regime in power" as relevant.

In Burundi the option of resolving the conflict by negotiation emerged because neither party believed it could win the conflict by force (Nimubona 2007, 502). The Burundian constitution adopted in 2006 is described as "markedly" and "largely consociational" (Vandeginste 2006, 4; Reyntjens 2006, 119) since "classical instruments, such as minority over-representation, quota, and minority veto" are applied (Reyntjens 2006, 119). The peace negotiations that started officially in 1998 were based on ethnicity and the representation of ethnicity, as the political parties regrouped themselves along ethnic lines (Nimubona 2007, 497). The Arusha agreement signed in 2000 and the Pretoria power-sharing agreement of 2004 produced a draft constitution that was approved by referendum on 28 February 2005. It takes into consideration the ethnic composition of the government, parliament, senate, military and police. Ministerial portfolios and places in the national assembly are shared 60:40 between Hutu and Tutsi whereas in the senate Hutu and Tutsi hold equal numbers of seats. Three Batwa are co-opted. Thirty percent of the members of government have to be women. In the defence and security forces there is parity. The two vice-presidents are a Hutu from a predominately Hutu party and a Tutsi from a predominately Tutsi party. On the local level no more than 67 percent of mayors may be from one ethnic group (Lemarchand 2006a).

So Rwanda pursues a strategy of "denial of" ethnic cleavages while Burundi seeks "power sharing" along them.

3. Ethnicised Patterns of Interpretation of Politics in Rwanda and Burundi

I conducted qualitative semi-standardised interviews with twenty-two Rwandans and twenty Burundians between September 2007 and May 2008.[9] To select interviewees I used "selective sampling" designed to include maximum variation of cases (Kluge and Kelle 1999, 47, 51), since the project primarily seeks *competing* knowledge, in particular

with respect to the question "Which 'ethnic group' is excluded?" In order to capture competing knowledge I treated social divisions between "political elite" and "citizens" and between being "oppositional" and "conforming to the regime in power" as relevant. In making the selection, ethnic and regional criteria were used to define citizens as being "oppositional" and "conforming to the regime in power". When selecting members of the political elite, party affiliation was taken into account.

I understand ethnicised politics as the interpretation of exclusion in terms of ethnic categories. In this sense, political power interpreted along ethnic cleavages (implying the exclusion of the other "ethnic group") ethnicises politics. To discover how Rwandans and Burundians interpret exclusion in ethnic terms, I developed – following the method of content analysis introduced by Philipp Mayring (2000) – categories based on the interview material.[10] In the following I present two of these categories, which exemplify ethnicised politics *independently* of the structures inherent to the political institutional models, since the quotes included in the categories *Ethnic Interpretation of Formal Power* and *Ethnic Interpretation of Informal Power* directly refer to exclusion implied in the political institutional models.

3.1 Ethnic Interpretation of Formal Power

The category *Ethnic Interpretation of Formal Power* comprises statements that interpret the regime in ethnic terms, generally equating the government with an "ethnic group", either Hutu or Tutsi. This likening can be found in statements from citizens of both countries, notwithstanding their different institutional models. Despite the ethnic quotas in Burundi, the regime is described as a Hutu regime, while the regime in Rwanda is referred to as a Tutsi regime.[11]

The Rwandan interviewee quoted in the following is a genocide survivor who works as a car mechanic in Gisenyi, a town in the north of Rwanda. He clearly sees "the Tutsi"

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9 Most of the interviews were conducted, recorded and written down in French, and translated by the author for the present article.

10 For my PhD project I developed about forty categories, some of which identify ethnicised politics.

11 Being Hutu or Tutsi was a relevant criterion for selecting interviewees. Yet, as will be emphasised later on, the present analysis does not aim to analyse whether "the Hutu" or "the

Tutsi" are oppositional or conform with their current governments in Rwanda and Burundi. Hence, the ethnic affiliations of the interviewees who are quoted are not mentioned.

in power. In the course of the interview I ask him what he understands by an "ethnic group". He does not directly reply to my question and refers to the political system:

> They are there: the one who is Hutu is Hutu. He knows his limits and he accepts them. And then the Tutsi, … you have to see who is the head of these things …, hence, the main principles: who is in power? The Tutsi are in power and the Hutu did not accept it. If you are normal, and you see that the other is in power, you have to accept it.

The interviewee equates the present political regime in Rwanda with "the Tutsi" who according to him are in power. Saying that it is important to see who constitutes the head, he is suggesting that there might be some Hutu in political positions as well. However, the crucial political position(s) (the head) are held by "the Tutsi" so "the Tutsi" are in power. To him, it seems self-evident that "the Hutu" could not accept that. He describes a strong dichotomy between Hutu and Tutsi with respect to political power: Either Tutsi or Hutu can be in power. He even refers to them as "the other" as if Hutu and Tutsi were two collective actors struggling for power. Assuming that there might even be some (powerless) Hutu in the government, points to the ethnic interpretation of informal power discussed in the next section.

Burundians also interpret political power distribution and exclusion in ethnic terms. In the following, a Burundian bashingantahe (a traditional mediating authority) answers my question about the most important social cleavages in Burundi today. He does not really refer to the question, and instead expresses his lack of understanding for the continuing existence of the FNL-PALIPEHUTU, which was still fighting at the time of the interviews in spring 2008:[12]

> I am saying that I do not understand why the FNL is fighting against an entirely Hutu government, a quasi-Hutu parliament, a quasi-Hutu administration. And PALIPEHUTU, that is a movement that aims to liberate the Hutu. I am asking: Are the Hutu liberating the Hutu from the Hutu? That is absurd; totally absurd. … The rebellion of the Hutu was once directed against

the Tutsi. … Today the rebellion is directed against the Hutu government, a Hutu senate, a Hutu parliament, a Hutu administration, … Hutu power.

Speaking of a "Hutu government", a "Hutu senate" and a "Hutu administration" he establishes a strong relationship between "ethnic groups" (understood as collective actors with common purposes) and political power. In the case of Burundi, these patterns of interpretation are even more striking since there are clear formal regulations requiring all political institutions to be composed of 60 percent Hutu and 40 percent Tutsi. Note the interesting juxtaposition with the first statement in the next section, which is made by a member of the FNL-PALIPEHUTU rebel movement that according to the bashingantahe has no "raison d'être".

Despite the explicit aim of both institutional systems to overcome an ethnic interpretation of political power, these interpretations persist. The quoted statements establish a direct relationship between a regime and an "ethnic group", interpreting the regime in Burundi as a Hutu regime and the regime in Rwanda as a Tutsi regime, and conversely implying the exclusion of "the Tutsi" and "the Hutu" respectively. If we consider statements that refer to informal political power, the interpretations of power distribution, exclusion and the question "Which 'ethnic group' exactly is excluded" become more complex.

3.2 Ethnic Interpretation of Informal Power
Instead of simply equating Hutu and Tutsi with a regime, statements included in the category *Ethnic Interpretation of Informal Power* (implicitly) affirm the formal presence of Hutu and Tutsi in the political systems but deny the relevance of that merely formal presence. The interviewees insist that the informal power lies elsewhere (with either Hutu or Tutsi).

The first interviewee is an active member of the rebel movement FNL-PALIPEHUTU. In contrast to the bashingantahe, who described the rebel movement as having no "raison d'être" since "the Hutu" were now in power in Burundi,

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12 Initially the armed wing of the rebel movement PALIPEHUTU (Parti pour la Liberation du Peuple Hutu) was called "FNL" (Forces Nationales de Libération).).In January 2009, the PALIPEHUTU-FNL changed its name to FNL (HRW 2010, 1).

he interprets the political situation very differently. After I have described my research project and the purpose of the interviews, he starts talking:[13]

> The CNDD-FDD is infiltrated by the Tutsi. When they could, they joined the movement and they still hold the positions in the upper echelons of power. The Hutu might drive a big car. He is very satisfied that he is the president, but does he really have power? The most important positions are held by Tutsi. For instance, the Minister of Defence is Tutsi.

Although referring to the same political system as the bashingantahe, which is formally composed of 60 percent Hutu and 40 percent Tutsi the FNL-PALIPEHUTU fighter's interpretation of the power structure of Burundi is the exact opposite: "the Tutsi" still hold the political power. He acknowledges that Hutu are present in the government and that a Hutu (Pierre Nkurunziza) is president. But he strongly doubts that "the Hutu" really have power since the most important positions are held by Tutsi. He refers to informal power in acknowledging that Hutu are present in the government, but asserting that they do not have power.

The next interviewee is a medical doctor in Bujumbura whose views about the power structures in Burundi are fairly close to those of the bashingantahe. Asked if there are also Tutsi in the present Burundian government, he responds:

> Yes, that is because they want to demonstrate … in order to be accepted as political party, you need to meet a certain quota … that is all! They are obliged to proceed like this. But they do not have any power. They are told that they have to include a certain number of Tutsi … they are there, but they are never the president of the party, they do not have the big ministries. This is the problem.

The doctor admits that there are Tutsi holding positions in the present political institutions but insists that they are only there in order to fulfil the ethnic quotas. According to him, Tutsi do not have any (informal) power, although he acknowledges their presence and representation. The reference to informal power echoes that of the FLN fighter (both

interpret political power and, hence, exclusion in ethnic terms, and both refer to informal power in order to underpin their assessment), yet their interpretations of the power distribution are exactly opposite. These patterns of interpretation appear in both countries. The following Rwandan interviewee is an NGO employee living in Butare. He has just been speaking about the privileged situation of "the Tutsi" and especially "the Tutsi from Uganda" when I ask him if the Hutu do not feel well represented at the political level. He answers:

> I acknowledge that in the political, administrative system in Rwanda the Hutu occupy as many places as the others. But does it allow the people who are categorized in this category, Hutu I want to say, access in the same manner as the others? I do not think so, … besides there are certain persons who say that it is simply a representation, in fact, abstract. … It is there, but it cannot influence anything, cannot decide anything, simply in order to bluff.

The interviewee acknowledges the equal representation of Hutu in the administrative and political system but believes that formal representation does not necessarily guarantee representation of interests. According to him, formal power does not necessarily mean real informal power. In this respect, he sees Hutu as unprivileged because their representation does not have any real impact: in terms of informal power they cannot influence anything. In this sense, Hutu are excluded.

The next interviewee challenges these interpretations of informal power (exemplified by the quote of the NGO employee) as not corresponding to reality. He is a genocide survivor and priest living in Kigali. Asked about social cleavages in Rwanda he speaks about ethnic cleavages that the regime aims to overcome. Although the regime was making a real effort, "the Hutu" were not willing to acknowledge it:

> But for the Hutu who lost, they say no, it is useless what you are doing, you will privilege your own. That is clear. They say it in the newspapers, in the print media, there are no places anymore for Hutu. In the government there are almost eleven … more than the majority of ministers are Hutu. … One does this

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13 I was not allowed to record, but took notes in German.

explicitly to be able to say we are trying to overcome the ethnic cleavage.

The interviewee explicitly accuses "the Hutu" of saying that they are excluded when they are not. He interprets the power configurations in ethnic terms: Since "the Hutu" lost power they say that they are politically not represented. Their assumption is that the government (presumably composed of Tutsi) is going to benefit its own group (that is to say "the Tutsi"). The interviewee believes these accusations to be false since "the Hutu'" make up more than the majority in the government. Hence, he opposes his interpretation (referring to formal power) to an interpretation that assumes the distribution of *informal* power to be relevant. His specific interpretation of Rwandan power structures diverges from those quoted above. He does not believe "the Hutu" to be politically excluded, even though "they" claim to be. Two Burundian interviewees and one Rwandan stated that persons of one ethnic group hold merely formal political positions in order to show that all Rwandans (or Burundians) are integrated into the government. Thus, the power distribution and, hence, exclusion is interpreted in ethnic terms. These interviewees refer to informal power to underpin their argument. In contrast, the priest refers to formal power in order to contradict the ethnic interpretation of informal power.

Although different political institutional models have been introduced in Rwanda and Burundi, similar ethnicised patterns of interpretation concerning the political and, consequently, social exclusion are found. The quotes imply contradictory interpretations of the power structures and the implied question "Which 'ethnic group' exactly is excluded?" The Rwandan regime is described as a Tutsi regime in which "the Hutu" hold political positions but have no political power. This interpretation is opposed by one asserting that despite the political positions "the Hutu" hold, they insist on claiming that all political power lies with "the Tutsi". Interpretations of formal and informal power structures and, thus, exclusion are even more contradictory in Burundi where "the Hutu" are described as puppets acting in the interest of "the Tutsi", whereas, on the other hand, "the Tutsi" in the regime are believed to hold no power (occupying only formal positions).

4. Conclusion

The academic discussion considers exclusion (discrimination) to be a relevant aspect for explaining (violent) ethnic conflict. Ethnicised politics – widely assumed to entail ethnic conflict – are held to be induced by exclusion inherent to the structure of the political system (i.e. actors or institutions). In contrast to the focus placed on the structures *inherent* to the political institutional systems, which predominates in the academic debate, the present article emphasises the taken-for-granted notions that constitute social reality. Accordingly, ethnicised politics are to be understood as political and social exclusion interpreted in terms of ethnic categories. And ethnicised politics constitute an important resource for accomplishing and legitimising political ends (Büschges and Pfaff-Czarnecka 2007, 8).

Despite different political institutional models, formal and informal political power and, hence, exclusion are interpreted in *both* countries in terms of ethnic categories of Hutu and Tutsi. Furthermore, the power distribution within the country and the answer to the question "Which 'ethnic group' is seen to be excluded?" is interpreted in diverging ethnic terms: "the Hutu" or "the Tutsi" are seen to be excluded.

The present analysis does not, however, aim to analyse whether "the Hutu" or "the Tutsi" are oppositional or conform with their current governments in Rwanda and Burundi. Nor did I intend to discover whether the Rwandan or Burundian government is predominantly seen as Tutsi-dominated or Hutu-dominated by its respective citizens. On the contrary, I intended to show that political and, thus, social in- and exclusion are self-evidently interpreted in terms of ethnic categories. In this sense, ethnicised politics are taken for granted.

Up to a point I agree that ethnicised politics entails violent ethnic conflict. But in a discussion that bases its arguments predominantly on the assumption that there are structures inherent to the political institutional model, I place emphasis on the knowledge of "those living in that world". According to this argument, the intention to overcome ethnicised politics and, hence, ethnic (violent) conflict implies overcoming the patterns of interpretation of political and,

thus, social exclusion referring to ethnic categories. Following the argument that reality is constituted by knowledge, which is constituted by taken-for-granted notions points to the necessity to challenge the taken-for-grantedness of these notions. Challenging this knowledge can be done by

stressing on different (not ethnicised) patterns of interpretation. In doing so, however, it is most crucial that these interpretations relate to the knowledge that "those living in that world" already have.

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