

# 1 Introduction: The ‘Dilemma of Recognition’. On the ‘Experienced Reality’ of Ethnicised Politics in Rwanda and Burundi

La plus grande ressource, [...] ça soit au Rwanda ou au Burundi...le chemin le plus sûr et le plus rapide d’avoir accès aux ressources, c’est la politique. Donc, automatiquement, les gens vont étiqueter...Qui fait quoi? Quelle est son appartenance ethnique? Parce que c’est devenu une forme de compétition, ...de règle de compétition. [...] les politiciens voudront toujours croire qu’ils représentent une parti de la population. C’est ça qui les légitime, qui les rend légitimes. Mais dans la pratique ce n’est pas ça, je ne vois pas par exemple, pour un Hutu paysan [...] j’étais politiciens, je ne voyais pas ce que je faisais pour lui (interviewee R11).

How can (conflict-prone) salience<sup>2</sup> of ethnicity in Rwandan and Burundian politics be overcome? How can this salience be approached analytically? And why, precisely, is it that it is potentially conflict-prone? These questions drove my research and my interviews (their analysis and production) conducted with Rwandans and Burundians from September 2007 to May 2008. For one of these interviews, I contacted the former deputy cited above. I met him in Butare, the second largest town in Rwanda, located in the south, where he lives. When he came up with his explanations expressed in the quote, I felt vaguely satisfied, since what I had decided (more or less consciously by then) to focus on comes close to these interpretations. In this sense, the quote can be read as a rough answer to the questions just raised. What he mentions and what seems to be crucial to me is, broadly speaking, the general presence of ethnicity in politics. According to him, politics provide the fastest access to resources in Rwanda and Burundi. Hence, the people are labelling: Almost automatically, they are asking

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2 The contributions to this discussion are diversely labelled as contributions to “politicisation of ethnicity” (Kandeh 1992; Wimmer 2002), “ethnic politics” (Chazan 1982; Chazan, Lewis, Rothchild, Stedman, and Mortimer 1999), or “Ethnisierung des Politischen” (ethnicisation of politics) (Büschges and Pfaff-Czarnecka 2007a). Since later on I analytically distinguish between politicised ethnicity and ethnicised politics, for now I speak about salience of ethnicity in politics.

for the ethnic<sup>3</sup> affiliation. This is because ethnicity has become a rule of competition in politics. Consequently, the politicians want to believe that they represent one part of the population because it makes them legitimate. It makes them legitimate, although, as he finally adds, he does not see that a Hutu farmer benefited when he as Hutu still worked as politician.

Against the background of the ideas I had in mind when I listened to his explanations, I roughly interpreted his quote in the following way: When he spoke about automatically labelling with and asking for ethnic categories he drew my attention to taken for granted notions that relate ethnic categories to politics. Accordingly, ethnicity self-evidently works as political legitimisation. His doubts regarding the practical implications of ethnic political representation, however, made me especially aware of the power implied in notions taken for granted.

The ‘institutional engineering’-debate, to which the present analysis aims to contribute, of course, gives answers to the question of how conflict-prone salience in politics is to be overcome. However, it neglects the questions of how salience in politics is to be conceived of and why it is seen to be potentially conflict-prone. In principle, the implementation of institutional systems is seen to enhance conflict management and political stability (Esman 2004: 203; Norris 2002: 206; Reilly 2001: 105). For this purpose, it is pivotal to overcome the salience of ethnicity in politics. A great deal of the debate is dedicated to the question of whether an institutional system denying ethnic categories (majoritarian democracy) or one sharing power along ethnic categories (consociationalism) is more suitable to overcome the salience of ethnicity in politics and, hence, to implement conflict management and political stability (Horowitz 1985: 567; Nordlinger 1972: 117; Van den Berghe 1981: 82; Zartman 1990: 525). The arguments implied in the ‘institutional engineering’-debate draw upon a notion of institution, which, independently of the historical context, produces the same effects. I agree up to a point; however, I argue that ethnicity in politics – more precisely, ethnicised politics and politicised ethnicity, as I shall later analytically distinguish – are to be approached based on what “those living in that world” (Schütz 1972: 9) experience as real. Put differently, I approach institutions as well as ethnicity in politics on what ‘those living in that world’ know and take for granted: i.e., what is real.

Without following Alfred Schütz into a phenomenological analysis of life-world, I use his term ‘those living in that world’ in order to acknowledge the

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<sup>3</sup> Based on a general social constructivist perspective I understand ‘ethnic’ to be the same as ‘ethnicised’. The term ‘ethnicised’ emphasises the general assumption of social constructedness. I use the two words synonymously.

epistemological understanding he introduces: namely, that the social world “far from being homogeneous [...] is given to us in a complex system of perspectives” (Schütz 1972: 8). Unlike Schütz, however, I understand these perspectives, or the knowledge, as I call it, following Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1991), to be collective and supra-individual. More precisely, as will be discussed later in more detail, this collective and supra-individual knowledge is defined by social cleavages. In this sense, meaning is understood as not individualised but socially objectified (Keller 2001: 118). Accordingly, knowledge is seen to be historically produced (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 72).

Arguing in this way, the present analysis mainly follows Berger’s and Luckmann’s line of reasoning expressed in their seminal work *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise of the Sociology of Knowledge* (1991), which places emphasis on knowledge, i.e., taken for granted and self-evident concepts in order to conceive of institutions. For analysing the institutional order, the knowledge of its members has to be taken into account (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 82).

Having said this, I simply assume that how ‘those living in that world’, i.e., Rwandans and Burundians, experience their social world as meaningful might differ from how I as observer would interpret it. This is not to say that “scientific interpreters” (Schütz 1972: 9) do not experience their social world as meaningful or that ‘those living in that world’ do not theorise (see Nordstrom 1997: 27) and definitely not that ‘those living in that world’ cannot be ‘scientific interpreters’. Neither does the research project qualify to dissolve the power relations, which due to a specific political history potentially exist between me and my interviewees. As Hito Steyerl (2007) clearly asserts in the preface to the German translation of Gayatri Spivak’s seminal work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (2007), it is not enough to hold a microphone in front of the mouths of the excluded, since “its ‘speaking for oneself’ is really only the lip-syncing of the ‘experts’”.<sup>4</sup> I simply assume that approaching the social world based on the meaning experienced by those one speaks about as ‘scientific interpreter’ sheds new light on questions one is trying to answer. This is clearly true for the ‘dilemma of recognition’ focused on in the present analysis.

Focusing on the knowledge of Rwandans and Burundians, it becomes possible to show how in Rwanda as well as in Burundi, regardless of different political institutional models, one that denies ethnic categories and one that officially shares power along ethnic categories, ethnicity is salient in politics. More precisely, the analysis reveals how Rwandans and Burundians self-evidently interpret political and social exclusion along ethnic cleavages and, accordingly,

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4 For the translation into English, see Steyerl 2010.

take it for granted that rights, political claims, and political representation are based on ethnic categories. Moreover, diverging knowledge is present in any of the two countries. In this respect, the analysis focuses on ethnicised knowledge that yet answers the question, ‘Which ‘ethnic group’ is exactly excluded?’ in different, even contradictory ways. This roughly constitutes “the dilemma of recognition” (De Zwart 2005) I shall specify shortly, which the ‘institutional engineering’-debate faces when opting for either ‘denial of’ or ‘power sharing along’ ethnic cleavages in order to overcome the salience of ethnicity in politics and, hence, violent ethnic conflict.

To begin with, however, I want to point out in more detail three analytical foci that are crucial to my analysis. These foci imply answers to the questions of how salience in politics is to be conceived of analytically and why it is seen to be potentially conflict-prone. Setting these foci is necessary in order to finally make the ‘dilemma of recognition’ conceivable and to make clear in which way my answer to the question of how salience of ethnicity in politics is to be overcome differs from the answers the ‘institutional engineering’-debate provides. In doing so, I refer to the quote of the Rwandan former politicians and the ideas implied: First, the focus on what ‘those living in that world’ take for granted and, hence, what is real. In particular, I am interested in taken for granted concepts that concern the notional relatedness of ethnicity and politics. More precisely, I place emphasis on, second, how ethnic categories are taken for granted as a basis for *inclusion*, i.e., rights, political claims, and political representation. Third, this conversely implies the focus on how social and political *exclusion* is self-evidently interpreted based on ethnic categories.

First, the interviewee implicitly mentions knowledge, which is *taken for granted* and self-evident. Literally, he says, ‘The people are *automatically* labelling and asking who is doing what? What is his ethnic affiliation?’ According to the ideas of Berger and Luckmann, notions “those living in that world” (Schütz 1972: 9) take for granted, i.e., knowledge, constitute (their) social reality (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 15). The present line of reasoning illustrates social realities based on knowledge by ‘those living in that world’, i.e., by Rwandans and Burundians. In doing so, emphasis is placed on the legitimacy and, hence, the power implied in concepts that are taken for granted. In this sense, concepts that are taken for granted are understood as legitimate concepts (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 112).

Having said this, I hope that by moving “in the common world of men, close to what most of them would call real”, this book will make the reader not only “nod at the familiar scene” and “remark that one has heard all this before”. Ideally, the reader will be “brought up against an insight that radically questions everything one had previously assumed about this familiar scene“, which is how

Berger (1979: 33) describes the (desired) effect of sociological investigations in the first quote of his book.

The second and third foci that are pivotal to reproducing my argument can best be introduced together. Both imply taken for granted notions that are related to the idea of the modern nation state. Due to this idea, it is taken for granted, i.e., legitimate that inclusion and exclusion are structured along ethnic categories. More precisely, it is seen as legitimate that social, political, and legal closure, i.e., exclusion and inclusion, is structured along the modern nation state (Bös 1993; Wimmer 2002: 57). Nation states themselves are ethnic (Bös 2008: 69).<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, e.g., the legitimate rule in the modern nation state is the “rule by our people, that is, rule by people who are *like us*, people of our nationality” (Ringmar 1998: 534, emphasis added). In this sense, being part of an ethnic category (i.e., having a certain ethnic affiliation) entitles one to (political, social, and legal) rights (Wimmer 2002: 1). To illustrate this point, under current U.S. law, children of U.S. citizens born abroad can most often become U.S. citizens and in the view of most legal scholars should even attain the status of ‘natural born citizen’ needed to be eligible for Presidency. For instance, although not uncontested, John McCain, born in the Panama Canal Zone in 1936 became a 2008 Republican candidate. The law itself, however, defining ‘natural born citizens’ to be eligible for the office of President and excluding those who became citizens by naturalisation (Article 2, U.S. Constitution) reflects that ethnicity (i.e., common descent) is understood as a relevant criterion to represent the American political community.<sup>6</sup> Although undoubtedly representing a nation state, which is comparatively inclusive in terms of the possibilities for those not born as U.S. citizens to become U.S. citizens, these laws clearly reflect the idea of a political community, which is (amongst others) defined by descent. Being part of this community defined by ethnicity, e.g., entitles one to rights and, hence, structures inclusion and exclusion.

As the Rwandan former deputy clearly points out, he does not see in which way a Hutu might have benefited from his political presence being a Hutu. However, interestingly, the very idea of ethnic representation functions as political legitimisation: According to him, ethnic affiliation is exactly what legiti-

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5 Of course, nation states follow different ideas about inclusion and exclusion and apply different practices in order to organise inclusion and exclusion (see Thomas 2002). Usually, the academic discussion distinguishes between ethnic and political conceptions (Eley and Suny 1996; Kohn 1944; Smith 2003; Thomas 2002). Moreover, ethnic boundary mark is socially contested. Accordingly, ethnic boundaries can be challenged, changed and become meaningless (Eder, Rauer, and Schmidtke 2004b: 35).

6 By the way, the Burundian and the Rwandan law also require the president to be Burundian by birth (Article 72, Burundian Constitution) and to “be of Rwandan nationality by origin” and to “have at least one parent of the Rwandan nationality by origin” (Article 99, Rwandan Constitution).

mises politicians. In this sense, he describes the taken for granted notion that political representation is (to be) based on ethnicity. This implies that rights and political claims are thought up based on ethnicity, too. This taken for granted notion that ethnicity makes up the basis for rights, political claims, and political representation is what I call politicised ethnicity. Politicised ethnicity is the second focus crucial to my line of reasoning.

To the third focus, he drew my attention by saying that ethnic categories have become ‘a rule of political competition’. In the context of the quote, I understand ‘rule’ as meaning the pattern by which political competition is interpreted in Rwanda and Burundi. Put differently, Rwandans and Burundians interpret political struggle as being a struggle between ‘the Hutu’ and ‘the Tutsi’. If one ‘ethnic group’ is in power, the other is thought to be not in power and, thus, (politically and, consequently, socially) excluded. The interpretation of political and social exclusion based on ethnic categories is what I call ethnicised politics. Relating the notion of ethnicised politics to the modern idea of nation state, which I will do in more detail shortly, it becomes obvious that exclusion based on ethnic categories might be especially legitimate (as just described above) but, conversely, also especially non-legitimate and, hence, highly political and potentially conflict-prone.

Implied within the description just given of ethnicised politics and politicised ethnicity, the notion of ‘ethnic group’ will be equally focused on within the scope of the analysis. It will become obvious how crucial the notion is for ethnicising politics and politicising ethnicity. Following Rogers Brubaker (2004b: 8), the notion of ‘ethnic group’ (this is also true for the notion of ‘the Hutu’ and ‘the Tutsi’) implies the idea of “internally homogeneous, externally-bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes”.<sup>7</sup> Exclusively arguing based on this notion of a collective actor with common purposes, the idea of rights, political claims, and political representations based on ethnic categories makes sense. Conversely, the interpretation of exclusion along ethnic categories is necessarily based on the idea of a collective actor who pursues an ethnically defined interest (which is not realised when he is not politically represented).

But why are these three foci important at all? Revealing knowledge of ‘those living in that world’ is first and foremost a general interest leading my research, and, accordingly, my analytical approach to ethnicised politics and

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<sup>7</sup> 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’.

politicised ethnicity. Ethnicised politics and politicised ethnicity, though, are crucial to understanding ethnic conflict in modern nation states.

Ethnic categories are per se politicised in that they appear to be a particularly legitimate basis for political representation and organisation. In this sense, ethnic categories are especially powerful categories, which explains whether and why the salience of ethnicity in politics (either by interpreting inclusion or exclusion, i.e., politicised ethnicity or ethnicised politics) is highly political and potentially conflict-prone.

Of course, which ethnic categories are taken for granted as the basis for inclusion and exclusion and which are not depends on the historically produced knowledge of 'those living in that world'. Put differently, the national self-concept defines the idea of legitimate membership (Eder, Rauer, and Schmidtke 2004a: 11). The Rwandan government and probably many of the perpetrators took the category 'the Hutu' for granted as the basis for rights, political claims, and political representation in 1994. Claiming the Rwandan state for 'the Hutu' in 1994 (Des Forges 1999: 73) was done by depicting Tutsi as foreigners not belonging to Rwanda (Uvin 1997: 93) and denying them even the legitimate right to live in Rwanda. In doing so, the different ethnic origin of Tutsi was emphasised by pointing to the ostensible origin of Tutsi in Ethiopia (Des Forges 1999: 34; Strizek 2006: 74). This clearly reveals the relevance of the notion of ethnicity (a category that is defined by common descent) (see 5.3) for making inclusion and exclusion plausible and legitimate.

Legitimate inclusion and exclusion depend on the national self-concept. However, the example shows that ethnicised politics constitute an important resource for accomplishing and legitimising political ends (Büschges and Pfaff-Czarnecka 2007b: 8). In this sense, ethnicised politics and politicised ethnicity have the power to influence "the distribution, maintenance, or transfer of power" (Weber 2004: 33) of a given form of political representation and organisation, and they are political.

Exclusion interpreted based on ethnic categories not coinciding with the nation state questions the given political representation and organisation (and the implied given inclusion and exclusion). Hence, exclusion along ethnic categories is potentially 'conflict-prone' in that the given political representation and organisation is challenged based on notions that are taken for granted and, thus, powerful.

Having said this, ethnicised politics challenge the given political organisation and representation within the modern nation state and, hence, are political

and potentially conflict-prone.<sup>8</sup> This argument corresponds to the largely accepted assumption that exclusion along ethnic categories (not coinciding with the nation state, of course) increases the propensity of further violent ethnic conflict (Brass 1985; Gurr 1993; Gurr 2002; Hechter 1999; Hechter 2004; Horowitz 1985; Snyder 2000; Wimmer 1997; Wimmer 2002). These assumptions are also reflected in analyses explaining mass violence in Rwanda and Burundi (Byanafashe 2003; Lemarchand 2004; Lemarchand 2006c; Ndikumana 1998; Uvin 1998).

In order to highlight the relevance of the notion of the modern nation state implying certain ideas of social justice for the present line of reasoning, I use the term 'recognition'. Following Nancy Fraser (2003), the term 'recognition' captures notions and claims that refer to and are based on the current idea of social justice. Conversely, to clarify this point, 'misrecognition' is understood as a violation of justice (Fraser 2003: 33). These ideas of social justice, including the central principles of equality and likeness already mentioned above, are related to the idea of the modern nation state. Hence, the term 'recognition' is crucial to presenting the line of reasoning in that it places emphasis on the idea of the modern nation state.

Having roughly clarified the analytical approach to salience of ethnicity in politics and its conflict propensity, the question remains, how, exactly, does the 'dilemma of recognition' appear? Explaining ethnic conflict against the backdrop of the idea of the modern nation state, ethnicised politics and politicised ethnicity become crucial concepts in order to prevent further violent ethnic conflict. This leads back to the 'institutional engineering'-debate introduced at the very beginning that my analysis aims to contribute to. This debate, in turn, aims at developing:

rules of the game structuring political competition so that actors have *in-built incentives* to accommodate the interests of different cultural groups, leading to *conflict management, ethnic cooperation and long-term political stability* (Norris 2002: 206, emphasis added).

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8 I do not assume a direct relation between ethnicised politics and violent ethnic conflict. The discussion analysing political salience of ethnic cleavages, which leads 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). I focus on societies, in which the political history (including large-scale massacres) is ethnicised in that it is interpreted by heavy reference to ethnic categories. In general poverty and economic underdevelopment as well as lack of democracy (e.g., political and civil rights, mechanism for the peaceful adjudication of disputes) (Sambanis 2001: 266/7) play a major role for the propensity of further violent ethnic conflict. For assessing the propensity of violent ethnic conflict all these criteria are to be taken into account.



Hence, conflict management and political stability are assumed to be reached by ‘rules of the games’, hence, political institutions. In principle, following the ideas of ‘institutionalism’ institutions are assumed to have *in-built* incentives shaping social action (Hasse and Krücken 1999; Schneiberg and Clemens 2006) – more precisely, leading to conflict management and political stability.

Two different concepts currently dominate the ‘institutional engineering’-debate. The model of consociationalism introduced in 1967 by Arendt Lijphardt and Gerhardt Lehbruch, on the one hand, implies the representation of ethnic and ideological cleavages in the political institutions. In contrast, the model of majoritarian liberal democracies, on the other hand, is based on the political representation of individuals and their (allegedly individual) interests (Phillips 1996: 141; Van den Berghe 2002: 436). Since the analysis clearly focuses on the aspect of ethnicised politics and its conflict propensity, I chose labels that directly describe dealing with ethnic cleavages, referring to them as ‘denial of’ (De Zwart 2005) and ‘power sharing along’ (Lijphardt 1979: 500) ethnic cleavages. The discussion about divided societies and the institutional effects on them assumes a direct relationship between institutions, incentives inherent to them, and social actions (Barnes 2001; Congleton 2000; Horowitz 1998; Mozaffar 1995).

In contrast, it is to be emphasised again that following Berger and Luckmann (1991), I conceive of institutions as ‘experienced reality’, which is to be analysed based on the historically produced knowledge of ‘those living in that world’. Thus, “the analysis of [...] knowledge will be essential for the analysis of the institutional order” (Berger and Luckmann 1991: 82).

In respect to the analysis of ethnicised politics and the aim (due to its conflict propensity) to overcome ethnicised politics, this notion of institution leads to interesting considerations: First, based on a similar (historically produced) knowledge, the two opposing political institutional models might be experienced in a similar way. Second, based on diverging (historically produced) knowledge in any of the two countries, any of the two political institutional models might be experienced in ethnicised yet diverging ways. Due to the conflict propensity of ethnicised politics, I place emphasis on interpretations of social and political exclusion based on ethnic categories. Showing how politics are ethnicised in the model denying ethnic cleavages as well as in the one sharing power along ethnic cleavages, on the one hand, as well as how the question of ‘Which ‘ethnic group’ is excluded?’ is answered in ethnicised yet different terms, on the other hand, makes the ‘dilemma of recognition’ apparent.

For illustrating the ‘dilemma of recognition’ Rwanda and Burundi seem particularly suitable. René Lemarchand (2006a: 4) asserts that “no other two states in the [*African*, author’s note] continent are more alike in their ethnic

map”. More precisely, both are assumed to be composed of 85 per cent Hutu, 14 per cent Tutsi, and 1 per cent Twa.<sup>9</sup> Even more importantly, ethnicised politics are especially strong in both countries due to a political history that is interpreted based on ethnic categories, namely Hutu and Tutsi: Political and social exclusion and even massacres and violent conflict are seen to have been aligned along ethnic cleavages (Lemarchand 2006c: 35). The climax of these violent conflicts was reached in Rwanda with the genocide of Tutsi in 1994 and the preceding war from 1990-94, and in Burundi with the systematic killings of Hutu in 1972 and the Tutsi pogroms of 1993. The ambitions to overcome ethnicised politics are the aftermath of these very violent and cruel massacres.

Accordingly, both of the two countries I focus on, Rwanda and Burundi, 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). Aiming at overcoming ethnicised politics, both the countries opted for opposing political institutional models.

Rwanda introduced a system that I call ‘denial of’ ethnic cleavages, and Burundi opted for a system I call ‘power sharing along’ ethnic cleavages: Agreements in Arusha (2000) and in Pretoria (2004) led to an officially elected Burundian government in 2005. The constitution (also approved in 2005) provides ethnic quotas of 40 per cent Tutsi and 60 per cent Hutu in the government, the legislation, and the administration, as well as quotas of 50: 50 in the military (Reyntjens 2006a). In contrast, in Rwanda after the military victory of the FPR (Front Patriotique Rwandais)<sup>10</sup> in 1994, the decision was taken to avoid any ethnic representation in the political institutions; “the existence of separate ethnic identities is officially denied” (Lemarchand 2006b: 7). Laws were even passed in order to ban the reference to ethnic categories in the political and public discourse (Lemarchand 2006b: 7). Susanne Buckley-Zistel (2006a: 102) speaks about a “form of *de-ethnicisation*”.

The empirical background just given, allows an enhanced understanding of what I conceive of as a ‘dilemma of recognition’. Ethnicised politics, understood as exclusion along ethnic cleavages, are assumed to be potentially con-

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9 The percentages are based on a population census conducted during colonial times (Lemarchand 1994a: 6).

10 The former military organisation and today’s ruling party in Rwanda is often also referred to as RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front), since originating in Uganda it is (until now) rather Anglophone than Francophone. Yet, due to the predominance of French denominations in the political party system in Rwandan and in Burundian, I use the French names.

flict-prone. Consequently, Rwanda and Burundi aim at overcoming ethnicised politics. For this purpose, they opted for different political institutional models, namely ‘denial of’ and ‘power sharing along’ ethnic cleavages. Focusing on the knowledge of ‘those living in that world’, I illustrate based on qualitative interviews, conducted from September 2007 to May 2008, how Rwandans and Burundians – given two opposing political institutional models pursuing the same aim – interpret political and social exclusion based on ethnic categories (i.e., Hutu and Tutsi). Moreover, I illustrate diverging knowledge (hence, diverging realities) of ethnicised politics. More precisely, based on ethnic categories the question of ‘Which ‘ethnic group’ (‘the Hutu’ or ‘the Tutsi’) is excluded?’ is interpreted in different, even somewhat opposing manners. Given the conflict propensity of ethnicised politics, I assume this to constitute a dilemma, which the ‘institutional engineering’-debate faces, when opting between ‘denial of’ and ‘power sharing along’ ethnic cleavages.

In doing so, I argue that the institutional (re)organisation in both states is challenged by a ‘dilemma of recognition’. Both forms of dealing with ethnic cleavages – that is, ‘denial’ in Rwanda as well as ‘power sharing’ in Burundi – are subject to ethnic interpretations of social and political exclusion (ethnicised politics). Put differently, the project reveals how Rwandans and Burundians experience social and political exclusion along ethnic categories. Unlike very important and prominent analyses (Byanafashe 2003; Lemarchand 2004; Lemarchand 2006b; Lemarchand 2006c; Ndikumana 1998; Uvin 1998), I do not give an answer to the question of who, either ‘the Hutu’ or ‘the Tutsi’, is socially and politically excluded in Rwanda and Burundi. If anything, I intend to challenge the ethnic categories, on which these analyses are based.

In summary, my argument goes that societies with a heavily ethnicised political history, where political and social exclusion is interpreted based on ethnic categories, are confronted with a ‘dilemma of recognition’. As the cases of Rwanda and Burundi are meant to show neither ‘denial of’ nor ‘power sharing along’ ethnic cleavages can prevent ethnicised politics.