Elusive Tactics: Urban Youth Navigating the Aftermath of War in Burundi

PhD defense of
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The dissertation, based on fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork research, 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 (16-30 years) on the northern periphery of Bujumbura. It reveals the ways in which male and female youths in marginalized circumstances grapple with insecurities and uncertain prospects concerning violence and exclusion, which 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. Among others, it argues that some of the prevalent practices in Burundi can be termed ‘elusive tactics’. Elusive tactics refer to practices that allow people to remain or become more versatile, flexible and, quite literally, difficult to pin down. They foster the desire for or belief in openness and alternatives, beyond the knowledge and power that constrain everyday life. Yet, they also perpetuate and foster mistrustful social relations: extraordinary circumstances and betrayal remain a looming possibility.