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**Regional Sanctions against Burundi:
A Powerful Campaign and
Its Unintended Consequences**

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of regionally imposed sanctions on the trajectory of the Burundian regime and its involvement in the peace process following the 1996 coup in the country. Despite the country's socioeconomic and geopolitical vulnerability, the Buyoya government withstood the pressure from the sanctions. Through a vocal campaign against these sanctions, the new government mitigated the embargo's economic consequences and partially reestablished its international reputation. Paradoxically, this campaign planted the seed for comprehensive political concessions in the long term. While previous literature has attributed the sanctions' success in pressuring the government into negotiations to their economic impact, the government actually responded to the sanction senders' key demand to engage in unconditional, inclusive peace talks under the auspices of the regional mediator once the economy had already started to recover. The regime's anti-sanctions campaign, with its emphasis on the government's willingness to engage in peace talks, backfired, with Buyoya forced to negotiate after having become entrapped in his own rhetoric.

Keywords: sanctions, signals, argumentative self-entrapment, Burundi

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1 Introduction

With his successful coup d'état on 25 July 1996, the former Burundian president Pierre Buyoya brought the ongoing regional mediation efforts to a standstill, an occurrence that marked the preliminary failure of Burundi's democratic transition process and pulled the country even deeper into the civil war.¹ The neighboring countries reacted swiftly and agreed to "exert maximum pressure on the regime in Bujumbura including the imposition of economic sanctions" (Second Regional Summit on the Burundi Conflict 1996). They demanded the imme-

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diate restoration of Burundi's National Assembly and the reinstatement of political parties as well as peace negotiations. Simultaneously, the international donors froze all assistance other than emergency aid.

The subsequent unfolding of the sanctions episode against Burundi was characterized by two seemingly contradictory developments: On the one hand, the regime resisted the external coercion, to the surprise of the sanction senders, who, given Burundi's economic and geopolitical vulnerability, had expected to force Buyoya into negotiations. The sanctions' initial effect on Burundi was indeed harsh; they further paralyzed the already war-torn economy (Kamungi et al. 2005; Khadiagala 2003). This thus raises the question of how the Buyoya government managed to withstand the pressure of one of the most comprehensive sanction regimes since the end of the Cold War. In addition to sanction-busting activities, the regime launched a vocal campaign against the sanctions that

- 1) helped it to lobby for exemptions,
- 2) contributed to it regaining some international legitimacy so that the international donor community renewed its engagement, and
- 3) shifted the blame for economic problems to the embargo.

On the other hand, Buyoya eventually engaged in the kind of regionally mediated negotiations that he had previously rejected. According to the assessment of scholars and contemporary witnesses alike, the sanctions contributed significantly to reviving the peace process because of their severe economic consequences (Khadiagala 2003; Lemarchand 2001: 91; Maundi 2003; Ndikumana 2000; Interview, Leonidas Nijimberere; Interview, Frederic Bamvuginyumvira). However, the fact that the regime agreed to the Arusha negotiations when the sanctions' economic impact had withered casts doubt on this interpretation. This paper argues that the controversies surrounding the embargo became so deeply ingrained in the domestic struggle that they shaped the domestic political contestation between the Buyoya government and the political opposition, beyond the embargo's mere economic impact. The Buyoya government became argumentatively "self-entrapped" in its own diplomatic campaign against the sanctions, which stressed the government's willingness to engage in peace talks. This paradox underscores the need to go beyond the assessment of how sanctions coerce regimes into compliance (for example, see Hufbauer et al. 2007; McGillivray and Stam 2004; Morgan and Bapat 2003) and to seriously examine their signaling dimension (Giumelli 2011). Against the backdrop of the embargo's severe economic consequences, the sanctions against Burundi serve as a "critical case" (Flyvbjerg 2006: 230) with which to explore the importance of the signals sent by sanctions.

The paper's findings are based on 34 semistructured interviews with diplomats, policymakers, military personnel, and journalists conducted in Burundi in August and September 2013. These interviews were crucial to understanding the respective actors' perceptions of sanctions as guiding their responses to the regional and international pressure. Press releases from political parties and sympathizer groups as well as official documents collected in Bu-

rundi were used to supplement the analysis whenever they were available.² Although the sanctions were imposed on Burundi during the late 1990s, they still constitute an integral part of the country's (diverse) contemporary historical narrative(s) and were thus remembered by all interviewees in great detail. Moreover, former political elites who are no longer in office were able to speak more openly about past events than they could have done at the time the sanctions were in place (Vorrath 2012).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, it situates the unfolding of the sanctions against Burundi in the broader context of the country's democratization in the early 1990s and the subsequent civil war. Next, it explores how the Buyoya government responded to the embargo with an aggressive and fairly successful anti-sanctions campaign. Building upon this, the fourth section analyses how the regime's international and domestic campaign backfired. The conclusion then discusses the findings in light of past studies on the sanctions against Burundi and the current research on sanctions more generally.

2 Setting the Context

The struggle surrounding the sanctions against Burundi not only affected domestic politics³ but was also shaped by long-standing internal and regional dynamics. From 1966 to 1993 Burundi was governed by three military regimes under the unitary party Union pour le Progrès national (UPRONA, Union for National Progress). The ruling elite, composed exclusively of the Tutsi ethnic minority, repressed its citizens to sustain its grip on power (Uvin 1999). A series of violent outbreaks in 1965, 1972, and 1988 were characterized by similar patterns: Local-level (Hutu) rebel attacks were followed by retaliatory action from the Tutsi-dominated military forces (Bhavnani and Backer 2000; Ndikumana 2000; Sullivan 2005)⁴. In response to the violent retaliation against the Hutus in 1988, the international community forced then president Buyoya to pave the way for democracy (Ngaruko and Nkurunziza 2000; Curtis 2013). A multiparty system was subsequently introduced in response to the growing international pressure (Laely 1997).

After losing the 1993 elections, which were widely praised as free and fair, Buyoya accepted defeat and ceded power to Melchior Ndadaye, the candidate of the major opposition

2 Unfortunately, many documents such as the relevant editions of FRODEBU's party magazine *l'Aube de la Démocratie* as well as the releases by the UPRONA-affiliated press agency Net Press, which would be useful sources for reconstructing the discursive struggle about the embargo, were lost during the civil war.

3 In examining the domestic dynamics of contention in light of regional sanctions, this paper focuses on FRODEBU as the main political opposition to Buyoya rather than on the civil war with the rebel movements CNDD-FDD and PALIPEHUTU-FNL, as the regional sanctions played a particularly crucial role in the political struggle between FRODEBU and UPRONA/Buyoya.

4 Despite the broader pattern, these violent outbreaks differed unquestionably. The 1965 events have been described as a coup attempt by several Hutu politicians, while the categorization of the 1972 rebellion is still very controversial with respect to the actors involved (Nsanze 2003).

party, Front pour la Démocratie au Burundi (FRODEBU, Front for Democracy in Burundi) (Young 1996). Although it made attempts at coalition and confidence building with the former ruling elite (Lemarchand 1994; Reyntjens 1993; Sullivan 2005), the new government also initiated the “Frodebisation” of the civil service (Reyntjens 2000: 13) and promoted the redistribution of national resources (Reyntjens 1993: 579) as well as the return of Hutu refugees (Prunier 1994), thereby creating anxiety among the Tutsi population. Moreover, the transition process was deeply flawed insofar that the former elite maintained its control over the army, which became an important veto player in domestic politics (Reyntjens 1993). After the elections, elements of the armed forces assassinated President Ndadaye on 21 October 1993 in the context of an attempted coup d’état. These events resulted in a “creeping coup” (Reyntjens 2006: 117), which *de facto* shifted power back into the hands of the military. Subsequently, new Hutu-dominated rebel movements such as the Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD, National Council for the Defense of Democracy) and its armed wing Front pour la Défense de la Démocratie (FDD, Front for the Defense of Democracy) were created and existing groups renewed their activity (Ndikumana 2000).

In reaction to this conflict and the accompanying threat to the region’s stability, the presidents of Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zaire launched the Great Lakes Regional Peace Initiative on Burundi in November 1995 (henceforth, regional initiative). The former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere was designated as mediator. At the same time, UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali proposed the deployment of a standby force of 25,000 soldiers in Burundi (Dupont 1997); however, this proposal was turned down on 5 March 1996 by the UN Security Council in Resolution 1049, which expressed preference for regionally led efforts for peace in the Great Lakes region (Neethling 2005). In June and July 1996, the regional mediation culminated in a series of summits, which advocated a negotiated settlement and national reconciliation but also considered instituting an arms embargo and visa bans for those undermining the peace process (Daley 2007). The situation escalated when President Ntibantunganya, fearing a military takeover of power, fled to the US embassy (New York Times 1996a). On 25 July 1996, the army installed Buyoya, who had prevailed over former president Bagaza in an intra-ethnic power struggle, in a bloodless coup d’état (Nsanze 2003: 423).

Only six days after the coup, the heads of state of Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, and Zambia as well as Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) met in Arusha. Using the framework of the regional initiative, these states strongly condemned the coup and imposed sanctions to achieve a return to constitutional order and “immediate and unconditional negotiations with all parties to the conflict” (Second Regional Summit on the Burundi Conflict 1996). Nyerere, who had already suggested sanctions against Burundi before the coup and felt that the military takeover had severely undermined his mediation efforts, forcefully articulated the pro-sanctions case (Wolpe 2011). The regional leaders affirmed his approach as they feared a further spillover of the conflict, which had already led to an influx of Burundian refugees to the neighboring

countries (Nimubona 2007: 505). In addition, most heads of state had grown impatient with the former (Tutsi) elite's reliance on unconstitutional means to hold on to power (Wolpe 2011). The region's response to the crisis in Burundi was coordinated by the regional initiative, but negotiations about the continuation of sanctions also took place at OAU summits (Hoskins et al. 1997). Moreover, a regional sanctions coordinating committee (RSCC) was established to monitor the sanctions' effects and humanitarian impact (ReliefWeb 1996).

The international community supported the regional initiative. In line with preceding international endorsements of regional attempts to address the crisis in Burundi, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution on 30 August 1996 that expressed support for the regional peace endeavors but did not refer explicitly to the imposition of sanctions (UN Security Council 1996). The United States refused to recognize the new government and suspended bilateral assistance (Lomasney and Halperin 1998), and the EU likewise froze its financial support (Hufbauer et al. 2007).

3 Responding to a Costly Embargo: Political and Economic Strategies

Burundi's geographic location, its close economic ties with those who implemented the embargo, and its dependency on bi- and multilateral aid magnified the sanctions' economic impact. Being landlocked, Burundi exported and imported most goods through the port of the Tanzanian capital Dar es Salaam and, to a lesser extent, through the Kenyan port of Mombasa. Furthermore, Burundi depended heavily on official development assistance, which accounted for almost 30 percent of its gross national income in the three years preceding the sanctions (World Development Indicators 1996). Dwindling revenues from the blocked export of Burundi's major cash crops, coffee and tea, additionally limited the government's financial room for maneuver (Banque de la République du Burundi 1996; Economist Intelligence Unit 1996). According to a survey carried out in the capital Bujumbura, the cost of living rose "alarmingly [...] due to the economic blockade"⁵ (Banque de la République du Burundi 1996: 31). The sanctions, as well as the ongoing civil war, led to a 36 percent increase in the general price index during the first year after their imposition (Kamungi et al. 2005). The restricted access to foreign currency and formerly imported materials particularly hit the commercial and industrial sectors of the economy, where unemployment rates skyrocketed (Banque de la République du Burundi 1996: 26; Hoskins et al. 1997; Mthembu-Salter 1999).

Sanction scholars have hypothesized that a targeted society only acquiesces to such severe harm caused by economic sanctions up to a certain threshold, above which it reacts with protest (Kerr and Gaisford 1994). Accordingly, they have identified the economic pain inflicted upon the target as a key predictor of the effectiveness of sanctions (Hufbauer et al. 2007; Morgan et al. 2009). However, the sanctions' economic impact did not trigger large-

5 The interviews were conducted in French. All quotes are translations by the author.

scale protest against the Burundian government, as anticipated by the sanction senders and the domestic opposition (Interview, Joseph Ndayisaba).⁶ Instead, the government embarked on a two-track strategy to secure its rule, denouncing the embargo as illegal and too painful for the population while simultaneously working on reducing the financial costs.

3.1 Campaign against Sanctions

The regime launched a campaign against the embargo that targeted both domestic constituencies and the international community; this campaign has been characterized as highly dynamic, aggressive, and fairly effective (Bunting et al. 1999). The Committee for the Defense of Economic and Social Interests (CODIES – Comité Pour la Défense des Intérêts Économiques et Sociaux), which comprised crucial economic actors including the Chamber of Commerce, the Belgian-Burundian and Franco-Burundian chambers of trade, various unions, and the Association of Burundian Banks, initiated and coordinated a number of activities. A press agency was created to inform the national and international public “about the situation in Burundi before the 25 of July [the day of Buyoya’s coup d’état] and the new government’s objectives” as well as the disastrous effects of the embargo (Comité Pour la Défense des Intérêts Économiques et Sociaux 1996). The CODIES also discussed filing a case before the International Court of Justice and presenting official complaints at the UN Security Council and the World Trade Organization. To support these efforts, it was planned that the staff at the permanent missions in Geneva, New York, and Brussels was to be expanded and provided with argumentative guidelines (Chambre de Commerce d’Industrie, d’Agriculture et d’Artisanat du Burundi 1996). Domestically, the new government denounced the sanctions as an unjust punishment and appealed to the Burundians’ national solidarity and pride. For example, it defiantly nicknamed a new boulevard constructed in the capital during this period “Avenue de l’embargo” (Interview, Pierre Buyoya).

The campaign against the sanctions addressed two major issues: First, the process of deciding and implementing the embargo was condemned as illegal according to international law because “only the United Nations can impose sanctions” (Interview, Cyprien Mbonimpa). Using this reasoning, the Buyoya regime stressed that many Western countries did not really support the embargo. France in particular was depicted as being “openly hostile” towards the measures (Buyoya 2011: 146; Manirakiza 2007: 61–76). According to this reading, the sanctions constituted an exclusively Tanzanian initiative, which allegedly pursued a secret agenda of weakening “the proud and ancient nation of Burundi” (Nyamoya 1997). Nyerere’s disproportionate engagement for the FRODEBU and the perception that he was using the sanctions to bring Buyoya back not to the negotiations in general but specifically to his regional negotiation table in Arusha attracted major criticism (Daley 2007; Peterson 2006). Consequently,

6 In addition, Burundi has a weak tradition of associations (Vervisch and Titeca 2010), which could have catalyzed such protest.

the Buyoya government refused to accept Nyerere as the mediator (Mthembu-Salter 2002).⁷ By shifting the blame for the imposition of sanctions to Tanzania and to Nyerere's desire to punish the post-coup government for interrupting his mediation efforts, Buyoya made sure that his core constituencies – namely, the army and the urban Tutsi elite – blamed them rather than his own coup for the sanctions (Economist Intelligence Unit 1997).

In response, the regional initiative sought the Western governments' support to demonstrate the broad international approval of the embargo (ReliefWeb 1996; Second Regional Summit on the Burundi Conflict 1996). Likewise, FRODEBU activists and other proponents of the embargo stressed its genuinely regional nature (Interview, Jean-Marie Ngendahayo; Interview, Frédéric Bamvuginyumvira; Interview, Benoit Ndorimana) and the fact that "the region could not have taken the decision [to impose sanctions] without the support of the United Nations" (Interview, Albert Mbonerane).

Second, the regime stressed the humanitarian impact of the sanctions. According to the government, the sanctions disproportionately hit the poor, leading to a "shortage of essential elements for the survival of the population, especially food and medicine" (Interview, Grégoire Banyiyezako). The campaign also emphasized the embargo's impact on the broader population, stressing that "FRODEBU claimed to represent 80 percent, but these 80 percent were suffering from sanctions" (Interview, Sébastien Ntahuga). In line with this strategy, a state-controlled NGO, the Association for the Preservation of Peace in Burundi, filed a case before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights denouncing the sanctions' lack of proportionality (Olinga 2005). In addition, sanctions were made responsible for all economic and social difficulties in an attempt to divert attention away from the regime's own mismanagement (Hoskins et al. 1997); the disastrous effects of the civil war and a military budget that absorbed about half of the government's revenues were ignored (Economist Intelligence Unit 1998).

The government campaign regarding the humanitarian impact of sanctions was echoed by NGOs and UN agencies. Despite exemptions for the import of humanitarian goods, the embargo complicated their work (Bruderlein 1998) and turned them into key players in the anti-sanctions campaign (Khadiagala 2003: 230). In response to the growing concern about the humanitarian impact of sanctions, the RSCC created a list of humanitarian exemptions on 24 October 1996 that included food, bean seeds, water purification agents, blankets, plastic sheeting, jerry cans and buckets, cooking utensils, sanitary facilities, and mats "to cater for the 250,000 displaced persons in Burundi" (Regional Sanctions Coordination Committee 1996). On 16 April 1997, schooling materials, seeds, and medicine were added to the list (Hoskins et al. 1997). Moreover, multilateral assistance continued to a certain extent. The World Bank channeled its funds through domestic NGOs such as Twitezimbere (Interview,

7 Therefore, Nyerere offered to stand down as mediator and had to be persuaded by the regional initiative that his involvement continued to be of key importance if a negotiated settlement was to be reached (Bunting et al. 1999: 6–7).

Jean Joseph Nyandwi), and many programs officially shifted their focus towards emergency assistance in order to continue their work (Interview, Louis Nduwimana). Furthermore, Western governments voiced doubts about the embargo's ability to positively affect the situation in Burundi (Daley 2007; Wolpe 2011). France soon supported Buyoya in demanding that regional actors lift the embargo (Cornwell and de Beer 1999; Lemarchand 2001: 92). By mid-1998, the UN, the EU, and the United States had all intensified their demands that the sanctions be reconsidered (Mthembu-Salter 1999).

3.2 *Decreasing Economic Effect*

In addition to officially granted exemptions, the increase in sanction-busting activity played a major role in reducing the economic impact of the sanctions. Air corridors were established between Bujumbura and other African countries, as well as Belgium,⁸ with the help of the government, which endowed Air Burundi with the exclusive right to explore the possibilities for the nonregular transport of commodities and passengers (Bulletin Officiel du Burundi 1997a). These air corridors were supplemented by a significant amount of cross-border smuggling with neighboring countries (Hoskins et al. 1997; Mthembu-Salter 1999). Additionally, Burundi continued its trade with non-COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) states, so that virtually all goods were available in Burundi by 1997 (IRIN 1997). Due to insufficient capacity, as well as a lack of political will, the RSCC did not efficiently monitor let alone enforce the sanctions regime (International Crisis Group 1998). The sanctions were never particularly well implemented by Kenya and Zaire or, later, by the re-named Democratic Republic of Congo (Boulden 2003: 230; Christian Science Monitor 1996). Commercial activity between Nairobi and Bujumbura was resumed in July 1997 following the granting of permission by the Kenyan government (ReliefWeb 1997), and Eritrea restarted trade with Burundi in the same year (Bentley and Southall 2005; Khadiagala 2007). The readiness to enforce the remaining sanctions further decreased when a decision by the regional foreign ministers to end the sanctions was overruled at a meeting of the regional heads of state in Kampala, Uganda, on 21 February 1998 in an opaque process. According to the rumors, the decision was only taken when those heads of state critical of the embargo had already left (Wohlgemuth 2005: 135).

The Burundian government also used the scarcity of goods and the opaqueness of trade under sanctions to its own advantage. The disruption of the economy and the widespread smuggling resulting from sanctions facilitated the restoration of clientelist networks among

8 While Belgium officially endorsed the regional initiative, some high-ranking officials were highly critical regarding sanctions. However, the country as a whole reaffirmed its support for the Nyerere-led initiative when it became clear that its ambiguity was sending mixed signals to the putschist regime (Wolpe 2011: 16–17). In contrast to other European countries, Belgium's approach to Burundi was generally characterized by "positive instruments" and incentives rather than conditionality (Gomes and Ferreira 2001).

“urban businessmen [who] were more affected than the general population” (Interview, Donatien Bihute). Like the leaders of the two preceding military regimes, Buyoya had made use of extensive patronage networks during his rule from 1987 to 1993 (Uvin 1999). After 1996, many of the private firms that belonged to (former) high-ranking civil servants (Ngaruko and Nkurunziza 2000) benefited from sanction-busting activities. Speculative importers included senior members of the military and the civil service, and some evidence also points to the involvement of cabinet ministers (Economist Intelligence Unit 1997). Local businessmen, who were generally supportive of the Buyoya government, also profited from the clandestine import and export of goods (Calmeyn et al. 2000: 89; Daley 2007).

Lastly, the regime managed to adapt to the economic constraints set by the embargo. The “café-carburant” (coffee for fuel) initiative was launched to secure the supply of petrol and the export of Burundi’s most important source of foreign revenues. Moreover, a “solidarity fund” was created to generate alternative revenues for the regime’s war efforts in the face of foreign exchange shortages (Buyoya 2011: 147). The Central Bank also created a list of prioritized items to be pursued with the limited amount of foreign exchange available (Banque de la République du Burundi 1996: 60). This list was later amended to include selected enterprises of national interest such as the fuel-trading Société Interpetrol (Bulletin Officiel du Burundi 1997b). Private banks were obligated to transfer all remaining foreign exchange to the Central Bank (Banque de la République du Burundi 1996: 60). Finally, the serving of external debt was suspended in response to the growing budget deficit (Interview, Astère Girukwigomba).

4 Argumentative Self-Entrapment

When the sanctions against Burundi were initially implemented, the expectation was that, given Burundi’s economic and geopolitical vulnerability, the weight of the embargo would force the government to resume the type of unconditional negotiations envisaged by the regional mediators (Khadiagala 2007: 126–127). Instead, Buyoya initially managed to consolidate his grip on power. Sanction-busting activities, austerity measures, and exemptions as well as the partial resumption of international (humanitarian) assistance reduced the economic pain caused by the sanctions, so that the economy slowly recovered. After the nation’s GDP decreased sharply in 1996, something which was attributed to the civil war and the sanctions, it remained stagnant in 1997 and grew by 7.4 percent in the following year (Hoskins et al. 1997; Kamungi et al. 2005). In a nutshell, economic development “improved notably as regards internal production and public finances. In particular, the secondary and tertiary sectors were characterized by a recovery and ... inflation decreased remarkably thanks to the regular provision of goods of primary necessity” (Banque de la République du Burundi 1998: X).

Nevertheless, the government eventually responded to the sanction senders’ key demand: that it engage in unconditional, inclusive peace talks under the auspices of the regional

mediator. Most scholars agree that sanctions ultimately played a major role in pressuring the Buyoya government into the Arusha negotiations, attributing much of the sanctions' success to "mounting domestic frustration with deteriorating economic conditions" (Lemarchand 2001: 92; Ndikumana 2000: 435). But why did the regime in Burundi accept inclusive negotiations when the sanctions' costs had already subsided?⁹ Galtung (1967) highlighted the fact that sanctions are prone to being used as symbols in the discursive struggle for legitimacy. This signaling impact of sanctions has recently received revived attention (Crawford and Klotz 1999; Grebe 2010; Pedersen 2008). In the case of Burundi, the sanctions not only affected the regime economically but also signaled disapproval of the coup and thereby denied the new government legitimacy (Khadiagala 2007: 124; Lomasney and Halperin 1998). The regional initiative referred to the new government as the "Buyoya regime" rather than talking about the Burundian "government" (Second Regional Summit on the Burundi Conflict 1996; Sixth Regional Summit on the Burundi Conflict 1998). Moreover, Nyerere characterized the sanctions as a signal of "support [for] a democratically elected government" (Le Soir 1996). Responding to this twin challenge of economic and political pressure, the Buyoya government initiated its diplomatic campaign, during which it became increasingly entrapped in its own strategy of denouncing the sanctions as undermining the regime's efforts to negotiate.

4.1 Theoretical Argument

Such an "argumentative self-entrapment" (Risse 1999: 531) may occur when states that are facing international criticism and demands to act in line with certain norms begin "talking the talk," meaning that they discursively comply with an internationally backed and promoted discourse of democratic governance. Governments confronted with international pressure as a result of norm-violating behavior initially tend to increase domestic repression and deny the validity of international claims while stressing national sovereignty regarding the issue to discourage international interference. When the pressure mounts, national governments adjust strategically to (re)gain access to foreign aid and secure their rule vis-à-vis domestic opposition movements – for example, by making limited concessions to those advocating better protection of human rights and democratic governance (Risse and Sikking 1999: 10). Tactical commitments to human rights and democracy initially appear to be a low-cost strategy for responding to criticism, especially "for repressive states that come under close scrutiny" (Hafner-Burton et al. 2008: 117). Accordingly, many states exhibit a certain degree of norm-conforming behavior. For example, they may join human rights regimes or,

9 There can be no doubt that the remaining trade restrictions still limited the economy's room to maneuver. The joint impact of the embargo and the civil war had significantly reduced the country's foreign exchange reserves and distorted the balance of payment (Banque de la République du Burundi 1998). Nevertheless, the fact that the major donors increasingly indicated that they were willing to resume aid to Burundi whether sanctions were lifted or not (Brandstetter 2004: B374) suggests that the regime's willingness to negotiate cannot be attributed only to the sanctions' economic pressure.

in the case of sanctions, they may respond to certain demands made by the senders – all in order to silence demands for real change (Hathaway 2002).

However, limited concessions have been found to trigger developments that ultimately induce the governments to offer changes in behavior from which they then find it hard to extricate themselves (Risse and Sikkink 1999). A state that “faces (actual or potential) sanctions and suffers a process of ‘shaming’ in which norm-violating states are portrayed as ‘pariah states’” (Muñoz 2009: 43) is increasingly forced to justify its behavior in front of international and domestic audiences. When norm-violating governments accept the norms rhetorically in order to decrease the international and domestic pressure on them, they embark upon a process in which they are measured against their rhetorical concessions at later stages of an ongoing dialogue. Instrumental commitments then backfire because domestic or international actors are able to hold them accountable, especially when the governments no longer deny the validity of the international demands per se, but rather claim that international actors misinterpret the domestic situation and hence engage in a public debate regarding the latter’s critiques. Superficial commitments may translate into profound concessions over time when initial reforms spark further demands for change (Goodman and Jinks 2008), especially if such reforms are interpreted as a partial success by opposition groups, which strengthens them and motivates additional demands (McAdam 2010).

4.2 The Case of Burundi

In the case of Burundi, the regime’s argumentative self-entrapment occurred in three phases. In a first phase, the regime denied that its seizure of power could be characterized as a coup and hence argued that the sanctions lacked any well-founded reason. The toughness of the sanctions took Buyoya and his supporters, who had relied on Buyoya’s international reputation for having paved the way to multiparty democracy, by surprise (Uvin 1999). To justify the takeover of power, Buyoya’s supporters argued that the fact that the previous president – whose government was described as paralyzed by infighting and dysfunctional (Lemarchand 2007) – had fled to the US embassy had created a power vacuum, which left the stumbling nation without political leadership in a deepening security crisis (Interview, Emile Mworoha). In such a situation, Buyoya assumed his responsibility as an experienced statesman in a “political change dictated by the events” (Interview, Pierre Buyoya) and was guided by “humanitarian motives” (Interview, Léonidas Nijimbere) while simultaneously averting a takeover by Bagaza and the more extremist elements in the Tutsi community. In short, during this “denial phase” the regime disputed that the takeover of power could be characterized as a coup d’état, which would have potentially justified a strong regional and international response (Risse 1999: 545).

In contrast, FRODEBU stressed that the coup had overthrown a democratically elected government (Interview, Louis Nduwimana; Interview, Alois Misago). According to the party’s

leading politicians and diplomats, the region's heads of state, who had applauded the democratic 1993 elections, could not accept military interference in Burundi once again (Interview, Albert Mbonerane; Interview, Sylvestre Ntibantunganya). The regional peace initiative indeed denounced the events as an unconstitutional change of government (ReliefWeb 1996). Despite certain sympathies for the "authoritarian democrat" Buyoya (New York Times 1996b), Western governments likewise condemned the coup d'état. U.S. Department of State spokesman Nicholas Burns stressed that his government would "work to isolate any government that emerges in Bujumbura by extra-constitutional means" (Inter Press Service 1996).

In a second phase, the Buyoya government then turned to criticizing the sanctions for undermining the true intentions behind the coup – namely, to reestablish democracy and revive the peace process (Longman 1998: 20). The regime responded to some of the senders' demands in order to be able to argue that the sanctions were no longer necessary. It reopened the National Assembly and lifted the ban on political parties before the first review of economic sanctions in Arusha in mid-October 1996 (Khadiagala 2007), conscious of the senders' pressure (Mthembu-Salter 1999). Nonetheless, the political significance of these reinstated institutions remained extremely limited. Political parties were only allowed under the vague requirement that they "positively contribute to Burundi's development" (Economist Intelligence Unit 1997), which gave Buyoya the freedom to outlaw them as he pleased. Moreover, the *Assemblée Nationale* lacked clearly defined legislative powers in the absence of the constitution, which had been suspended after the coup (Hoskins et al. 1997).

In addition to responding to the senders' demands to restore constitutional rule, the regime stressed its willingness to engage in negotiations (Buyoya 2011: 142–143). According to this discourse, the prolonged sanctions had undermined the government's attempts to find an internal solution to the crisis and "handicapped the negotiations" (Interview, Astère Girukwigomba). The government engaged in secret talks with the rebel movement CNDD with the mediation of the Italian Catholic organization Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome at the end of 1996 (Dupont 1997; Wolpe 2011). To prove the regime's preparedness to advance a negotiated settlement of the conflict with the regional stakeholders, the government leaked information about these talks and circulated the agenda, which included the restoration of the constitutional order, a ceasefire, and the involvement of other political parties in the process (Nijimbere 2001; Interview, Pierre Buyoya). The talks subsequently collapsed due to pressure from the Tutsi elites on the regime after the information had been leaked.

Meanwhile, the former ruling party and the major opposition party after the coup in Burundi, FRODEBU, repeatedly made reference to the sanctions. This not only served as a constant reminder of the regime's illegal assumption of power (Interview, Frédéric Bamvuginyumvira) but also legitimized and empowered FRODEBU's claims vis-à-vis the government (for a similar theoretical argument, see Risse and Sikkink 1999). Hence, FRODEBU wanted to keep the sanctions in place because they added authority to its demands (Interview, Sylvestre Ntibantunganya). The Hutu-dominated diaspora in Eastern Africa and Eu-

rope enhanced these lobbying efforts by paying official delegation visits to the European Commission, the European Parliament, the United Nations, and Western governments and by lobbying the public (Interview, Jean-Marie Ngendahayo). In Germany, for instance, the so-called Burundi-Büro, financed by the German nonprofit-organization Aktion Courage,¹⁰ coordinated this work. Its Burundi news bulletin, issued weekly, criticized the irregular nature of Buyoya's rule and emphasized the need for sustained international pressure, including sanctions (Burundi Büro 1997). Major rebel groups such as the Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie (CNDD-FDD) also supported the sanctions as a means to constrain the regime economically and thus militarily (Interview, Jérôme Ndiho).

In a third phase, initial concessions spurred further demands for politically more meaningful steps. Following a meeting of the regional initiative in Kampala on 18 August 1997, Tanzanian foreign affairs minister Jakaya Kikwete announced that the sanctions would remain in place until they achieved their aim of fully restoring democratic rule in Burundi (Inter Press Service 1997). The Buyoya government initiated a "National Debate," reflecting Buyoya's preference for the domestic peace processes (Brachet and Wolpe 2005). Such an internal political solution was meant to ease the regional pressure, including the sanctions (Maundi 2003: 341). The National Debate consisted of 15 presidential meetings and round tables for representatives of the political parties, members of parliament, public officials, the army, the police, and civilian groups. The round tables were held in almost all provinces. At the beginning of 1998, the internal debate led to the conclusion of a partnership agreement that stipulated the enlargement of the National Assembly from 81 to 121 members under a new constitution and the reshuffling of the government, with FRODEBU's Frédéric Bamvuginyumvira to become prime minister (République du Burundi 1998). This was depicted as further evidence that the Buyoya government was really seeking to resolve the crisis through negotiations (Interview, Astère Girukwigomba). In exchange, the partnership agreement stated that the sanctions constituted an undeniable obstacle for the route towards peace and that the transitional institutions should launch initiatives for the resumption of bilateral and multilateral cooperation (République du Burundi 1998). While FRODEBU's internal wing thenceforth demanded the lifting of sanctions, the external wing accused it of having become "Buyoya's marginalized lapdog" (Interview, Alois Misago). The 1998 partnership hence manifested in the *de facto* split between the exiled faction of FRODEBU and those who had remained in Burundi after the coup (International Crisis Group 1999).

Having started negotiations and reinstated the political parties as well as the National Assembly, the government claimed in 1998 that it had fulfilled the region's conditions for lifting the sanctions (Interview, Cyprien Mbonimpa). After the summit in Kampala on

10 Aktion Courage is an association with charitable status, supported financially by the federal German government and the European Union, which was established in 1992 and promotes the active participation of foreign nationals in Germany (online: <www.aktioncourage.org/wir-ueber-uns/>; 18 August 2014).

21 February 1998, however, the regional initiative stated that “no significant progress” had been achieved towards negotiating a solution to the conflict. It requested inclusive and unconditional negotiations including all rebel movements and political parties under the mediation of Nyerere, and threatened to uphold the embargo otherwise (IRIN 1998). Having repeatedly stressed that negotiations to produce a satisfactory outcome for both Hutus and Tutsis were its key intention (Dagne 1998), the Buyoya administration had increasing difficulty justifying its reluctance to engage in the revitalization of the Arusha negotiations. By mid-1998 most parties to the conflict – namely, 17 political parties and rebel movements¹¹ – embarked on the Arusha process, with the first round of negotiations taking place from 15 to 21 June. The process strove to find a solution to the civil war and to lay the foundation for a transitional government that would incorporate representatives of all the principal factions (Lemarchand 2007). In January 1999 the remaining trade restrictions were finally lifted because the Burundi government had proved its irrevocable commitment to negotiations (Bentley and Southall 2005).

5 Conclusion

The regional embargo in combination with the Western countries’ decision to freeze development assistance initially hit the small, land-locked Burundi harshly. However, this financial pain only led to limited cooperation on the part of the sanctioned regime. It responded to the demands to reopen the National Assembly and relegalize political parties, but it only endowed these bodies with a very restricted mandate. In the meantime, the Buyoya government consolidated its grip on power. Economically, earnings from black market activities and the potential benefits of sanction-busting activities were used to cater to patronage networks. Politically, a successful campaign against the sanctions helped the regime to regain some recognition among core domestic supporters and the international community. However, this diplomatic campaign eventually backfired. The Buyoya government denounced the sanctions as undermining its negotiation efforts. As he became entrapped within this strategy of emphasizing the regime’s willingness to engage in peace talks, Buyoya faced increasing difficulty in justifying why he would not agree to the kind of universal negotiations that the regional peace initiative was aiming for. While the regime managed to address the economic constraints posed by the sanctions through adaptation, lobbying for (humanitarian) exemptions, and sanction-busting to a considerable extent, its campaign to fight off challenges to its legitimacy – amplified by the sanctions – and to reengage important donors ultimately failed. The embargo against Burundi hence sheds light not only on how targeted regimes manage to withstand pressure from sanctions in the short run, but also on how campaigns against sanctions – while initially helping the regime to sustain its power – can force targeted regimes to grant major political concessions if they start “talking the talk” of sanction senders.

11 The Arusha negotiations were seriously handicapped because they excluded the major armed adversaries of the regime, CNDD-FDD and PALIPEHUTU-FNL.

This should not suggest that the regime's argumentative self-entrapment in its campaign against sanctions is sufficient to explain the embargo's effectiveness. Clearly, the Arusha process also built upon preceding negotiations (Maundi 2003). Moreover, the conflict parties' war weariness and a mutually painful stalemate (Cunningham 2011: 178) contributed to the major political initiative that occurred in mid-1998, even though the fact that neither side was near victory had already been established in 1996 (Economist Intelligence Unit 1996) without prompting successful negotiations. In addition, internal divisions within both the Hutu and Tutsi camps had complicated the peace process. As Buyoya faced intraparty resistance to negotiating with FRODEBU from the military wing of UPRONA, he was only willing to further engage in the peace process once he had established himself domestically against this militant wing (Wolpe 2011). While negotiations might have occurred one way or the other, the sanctions forced the government to negotiate with more openness and according to the conditions set by the regional initiative (Interview, Donatien Bihute).

Going beyond the case of Burundi, this paper shows how the signals sent by sanctions that delegitimize the targeted regime may become so deeply ingrained in domestic controversies that they profoundly affect political struggles. In such cases, whether sanctions enable domestic opposition to the sanctioned regime is a crucial question that merits further research (Wallensteen 2000). In Burundi, the former ruling party and main opposition party after the coup, FRODEBU, continuously referred to the sanctions, which served as a reminder of the coup regime's irregular nature, in order to uphold pressure on the regime. The embargo played such a key aspect in this strategy that FRODEBU launched a pro-sanctions campaign (Interview Jean-Marie Ngendahayo).

The predominant focus on the financial impact of sanctions (for example, see Hufbauer et al. 2007; Jing et al. 2003; Kaempfer and Lowenberg 1999; Kaempfer et al. 2004) has obscured the possibility that a state "may initiate sanctions not simply to compel action on the part of the target, but to communicate its preference, support allies, deter others from engaging in similar activity, and dissuade the target from expanding its objectionable activity" (Kirshner 1997: 34). Thus, sanctions not only coerce regimes into compliance or constrain them, but also send signals (Giumelli 2010, 2011) that profoundly affect domestic political struggles, particularly how the regime in power and its opponents position themselves vis-à-vis each other and the external coercion.

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Appendix 1: List of Interviewees

Bamvuginyumvira, Frédéric: First vice president of Burundi from 11 June 1998 to 1 November 2001	19 August 2013, Bujumbura
Banyiyezako, Grégoire: Governor of the Bank of the Republic of Burundi during the embargo	2 September 2013, Bujumbura
Baurumwete, Siméon: Lecturer for political science at the University of Burundi	25 August 2013, Bujumbura
Bihute, Donatien: President of the Chamber of Commerce from 1988 to 1997	2 September 2013, Bujumbura
Burundian businessman	21 August 2013, Bujumbura
Buyoya, Pierre: President of the Republic of Burundi from 1987 to 1993 and from 1996 to 2003	26 August 2013, Bujumbura
Former employee of the German embassy	11 August 2013, Bujumbura
Girukwigomba, Astère: Member of UPRONA's executive committee and finance minister from January 1998 to 1999	13 August 2013, Bujumbura
Hartmann, Helge: Pastor in Muramvya from November 1997 to January 1999	31 July 2013, Germany
Kavumbagu, Jean-Claude: Journalist and head of Net Press news agency	14 August 2013, Bujumbura
Mbonerane, Albert: Ambassador to Germany from 1993 to 1997; member of the Burundi-Büro from 1997 to 1999	10 August 2013, Bujumbura
Mbonimpa, Cyprien: Minister for foreign affairs from 1987 to 1992, advisor to the Ministry for the Peace Process and government spokesperson for peace and security questions during the Arusha negotiations from 1996 to 2001	30 August 2013, Bujumbura
Midende, Gilbert: Rector of the Université du Burundi from 1996 to 2001	20 August 2013, Bujumbura
Misago, Alois: Lecturer at the University of Burundi, editorial journalist at the Burundi Büro (Burundi Office) from 1996 to 1999	9 August 2013, Bujumbura
Mukuri, Melchior: Professor of political science at the Université du Burundi	14 August 2013, Bujumbura
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Mworoha, Emile: Deputy of the National Assembly from 1998 to 2005	19 August 2013, Bujumbura
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Nduwimana, Louis: Employee at UNDP during the embargo	22 August 2013, Bujumbura
Ngendahayo, Jean-Marie: Minister of communications and government spokesman 1993; worked for the FRODEBU in exile from 1995 to 1998	12 August 2013, Bujumbura
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Nikoyagize, Anshaire: President of the school club of Burundi's first human rights organization, ITEKA	22 August 2013, Bujumbura
Nintunze, Jean-Bosco: Priest and secretary-general of Caritas; worked as economist for the Bujumbura diocese during the embargo	12 August 2013, Bujumbura
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Nyandwi, Jean-Joseph: Burundian NGO Conseil pour l'Éducation et le Développement (COPED)	27 August 2013, Bujumbura
Nzajibwami, Augustin: Secretary-general of FRODEBU from 1995 to 1999	28 August 2013, Bujumbura

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