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Trends. Does Ethnic Cleansing Have Pros and Cons? An Example from Burundi

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Ethnic cleansing--the forced removal of a racial/ethnic group from a geographical area--has been roundly condemned throughout the world as an egregious human rights violation. This condemnation is largely based on matters of deontology and consequence. Deontology refers to the intrinsic aspects of ethnic cleansing--that it is wrong in and of itself to force a people to leave a geographical area. Consequence refers to the effects of ethnic cleansing--loss of much that a people holds dear, gaining much--physical, mental, and spiritual anguish (and, at times, life itself)--that a people would fervently avoid.

In an example from Burundi, authorities of a primarily Tutsi-led government have rounded up close to 800,000 people (primarily Hutus) from their homes and placed them in government-run camps. The conditions at these camps have been described by nongovernmental relief organizations as appalling. The government's rejoinder is that the camps provide physical security against rebel Hutus and the government's fight against the rebels.

As controversial as it might sound, one might possibly make a case for this ethnic cleansing. The case depends on the relative worth of physical security from war versus the appalling physical conditions and the loss of significant freedom and choice. (At times, this is an easy choice if the government's story about protecting life is but a story.) The case also depends on the relative worth of abstract Right versus concrete right and wrong. To categorically attack all variants of ethnic cleansing of whatever stripe might be one imperative that violates the very categorical imperative to act morally and ethically. (See Burundi begins sending home Hutu villagers as talks near. (February 10, 2000). *The New York Times*, p. A18; Emminghaus, W.B., et al. (1997). *Primal violence: Illuminating culture's dark side*. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 3, 167-192; Horster, D. (1984). (Individual psychology and the categorical imperative). *Zeit schrift fuer Individualpsychologie*, 9, 9-17; Novak, B. (1989). (The problem of the reasonableness of moral acts with Kant). *Antropos*, 20, 139-154; Simons, A. (1999). *Making sense of ethnic cleansing*. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 22, 1-20.) (Keywords: Burundi, Deontology, Ethnic Cleansing.)