Ethnicity as Myth:

The View from the Central Africa

René Lemarchand

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by

René Lemarchand

Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the University of Florida

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Ethnicity is never what it seems. What looks to the profane like ancestral atavism others identify as a typically modern phenomenon, anchored in the impact of colonial rule. Where neo-Marxists detect class interests parading in traditional garb, mainstream scholars unveil imagined communities. And what many see as the bane of the continent, others view as the basis of a moral social contract that carries the seeds of accountability and transparency.

So overwhelming is the evidence pointing to the daemonic face of ethnicity that is it tempting to forget its more seductive traits. Not everything about ethnicity translates into bloodshed and genocide, into frenzied genocidaires and ethnic cleansers. Ethnic communities are also known to generate responsible, civic-minded leaders, anxious to speak on behalf of their constituents and protect them against the abuses of the state. The sense of belonging to an ethnic community need not be synonymous with conflict and competition. John Lonsdale's argument about the significance of "moral ethnicity" readily comes to mind: unlike "political tribalism", i.e. "the use of ethnic identities in political competition with other groups", moral ethnicity "creates communities from within through domestic controversy over civic virtue", (Lonsdale 1992, cited in Chabal and Daloz 1999, 59). It brings into view "the common human instinct to create out of the daily habits of social intercourse and material labor a system of moral meaning and ethical reputation within a more or less imagined community", (Lonsdale 1994, 132).

If ethnicity does not necessarily mean conflict, neither is conflict everywhere traceable to politicized ethnicity. Somalia, one of the most conflict-ridden states anywhere in the continent, is a case in point; so are the class-based intra-Zulu confrontations that have punctuated the recent history of Natal; nor is the present mess in the Congo solely reducible to ethnic polarities.

Even where mass murder is clearly aimed at a specific ethnic community -- as in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide -- questions arise as to the meaning of ethnicity where the groups in conflict share the same language, the same national territory, the same customs and have for centuries lived more or less peacefully side by side.

What, then, accounts for the transformation of moral ethnicity into political tribalism, and tribalism into genocide? What are the mechanisms through which peaceful ethnic cohabitation gives way to death and destruction? Lonsdale gives us a clue: "Tribalism", he writes, "remains the reserve currency in our markets of power, ethnicity our most critical community of thought", (quoted in Chabal and Daloz 1994, 59). In the market place of electoral competition tribalism is the bad currency that drives out the good one, in a kind of Gresharn's law of ethnic politics. Moral ethnicity is the first casualty of the inflationary spiral of ethnic claims and counterclaims.

Nonetheless, to invoke political tribalism to explain genocide leaves out a crucial dimension of ethnicity: its capacity to be manipulated for the pursuit of pre-eminently immoral goals, its capacity to profoundly alter collective perceptions of the "other" by recourse to an imagery designed to draw a rigid boundary between good and evil, civic virtue and moral depravity, freedom and oppression, foreigners and autochtons. Myth-making is what transforms social conflict into irreconcilable moral standoffs.

The history in whose name hundreds of thousands of innocent Tutsi men, women and children were slaughtered is, in large part, myth. So is the view of the past that lies behind Rwanda's claims to huge chunks of North and South Kivu. And so, also, is the reading of

history implicit in the construction of new identities in eastern Congo, the so-called Banyamulenge.

Ethnicity: Invented, Imagined or Mythologized?

In order for ethnic entrepreneurs to make capital out of tribalism, a tribe must exist. The term, however, as has been emphasized time and again, is hardly appropriate to describe communities whose pedigree is traceable to the accidents of colonial rule, to misnomers born of European ignorance, and whose existence was given formal recognition in statistical records or in the writings of early European admnistrators, explorers and missionaries. That we are here dealing, in most instances, with invented or imagined communities is well established.

Examples abound of ethnic entities whose birth certificate bears traces of an "invented tradition", to use Ranger's phrase. The classic example is the case of the Bangala of northern Congo. First "discovered" by Stanley who called them "unquestionably a very superior tribe", the Bangala, as Crawford Young reminds us, "were accorded official anthropological recognition when an entire volume was devoted to them in 1907 in the first ethnographic survey of the Zaire peoples", (Anderson, von der Meliden and Young 1967, 32). The Dinka of the Sudan, likewise, derive their ethnonym and thus part of their collective identity from a similar misreading of the facts by a European explorer who took the name of a local chief to designate a whole congeries of separate communities, (Finnegan 1999, 60). The Acholi of northern Uganda are another example. According to Atkinson the term "Acholi" was invented by Arab traders (Kutoria) from the Sudan to refer to a variety of Luo-speaking lineages and chiefdoms, (Atkinson 1989, 21). Even as late as the 1930s, "the Acholi were referred to as "Gangli or Shuli" and they had no fixed territorial boundaries",(Rood and Vlassenroot 1999, 5). Each of these "invented" communities, along with many others, would not have been out of place in the volume edited by Ranger and Hobsbawm on <u>The Invention of Tradition</u>, (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983).

Evocative though it is, the term "invention" does not do justice to the diversity of voices seeking to articulate "tradition". To speak of an invented tradition does little to illuminate its ideological orientation or normative underpinnings. Nor does it bring out the different constructions placed upon it by different categories of social actors at different moments of history. These limitations are explicitly recognized by Ranger. Drawing from the insights of Feierman and Landsdale, he writes: "I have been changing my mind away from the notion of "invention" and towards the notion of "imaginations" I like the word "imagining" because it lays stress upon ideas and images and symbols", (Ranger 1994, 25). Explaining why he came to prefer "Benedict Anderson's word for his Imagined Communities", he notes the multiplicity of imaginations[1] at work in the exegesis of any given tradition: (ibid., 24).

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[1]Outside the African continent India offers a striking parallel to the situation described by Ranger. Speaking of the tendency of Westerners to neglect the "deep-seated heterogeneity of Indian traditions", Amartya Sen notes that "the self-images (or 'internal identities') of Indians have been extremely affected by colonialism over the past centuries and are much influenced - both collaterally and dialectically - by the impact of outside imagery (what we may call "extemal identity", (Sen 1997, 2). Replace "Indians" by "Rwandans" and almost every word of this statement could be applied to Rwanda.

These multiple imaginations were in tension with each other and in constant contestation to define the meaning of what had been imagined -- to imagine it further. Traditions imagined by whites were reimagined by blacks; traditions imagined by particular interest groups, were reimagined by others. The history of modern tradition has been much more complex than we have supposed.

Which brings us to the heart of this discussion: how, in the context of the Great Lakes region of Africa, the Hamitic tradition imagined by Europeans was appropriated by Africans, and how this same tradition was again reimagined by Hutu intellectuals to forge the ideological weapons that killed hundreds of thousands of human beings.

To speak of invented communities to describe Hutu and Tutsi is hardly appropriate: both existed long before the advent of colonial rule (even though the term Tutsi is a precolonial invention); to see them as "imagined" identities does point to the changing perceptions of one group by another, as well as to the processes involved in the emergence of a new "tribe" in eastern Congo, the Banyamulenge. Yet there is surely more than political imagination at work in the continuing carnage in the Great Lakes. What gives ethnic conflict in the region its peculiarly savage edge are the myths that have grown around Hutu and Tutsi. Behind the twisted memories, distorted histories and demonized ethnicities that have contributed to the bloodshed lies the summoning of mythologies designed to legitimize the butchery.

What makes the phenomenon all the more striking in the case of Rwanda is that its myth of origins -- the normative charter holding society together in a unified trinity of Tutsi, Hutu and Twa -- in time should have provided the quarry for the construction of ideologies designed to destroy it.

In the context of this discussion "myth" is used in its conventional and metaphorical senses. It refers to "legend" (as in myths of origins) as well as to its extended meanings (as in a "racist myth"). In the latter sense myth-making is intended to deliberately deny or distort historical evidence in a situation of crisis and conflict. The aim here is not to encourage societal cohesion (as with a myth of origins) but to inspire division, not to legitimize inter-ethnic unity but to inflame ethnic passions.

Rwanda's Myths of Origins: The Normative Charter of Tutsi Supremacy

"The function of myth", says M.I. Finley, "is to make the past intelligible and meaningful by selection, by focusing on a few bits of the past which thereby acquired permanence, relevance universal significance", (Finley 1980, 13). Rwanda's myths of origins did more than make the past intelligible; not the least important of their functions was to make the present legitimate in the eyes of both Hutu and Tutsi.

In his account of "myths and ideologies in ancient and contemporary Rwanda" Marcel d'Hertefelt identifies five themes that formed the basis of the traditional social system: (a) the celestial origins of the Tutsi, (b) the fundamental and "natural" differences among Tutsi, Hutu and Twa, (c) the superior civilization that the Tutsi brought to Rwanda, (d) the threat of divine sanctions against those brazen enough to revolt against the monarchy, (e) the notion of divine kingship, (D'Hertefelt 1964). The first of these themes finds expression in the story of Kigwe, the founding hero of the royal clan, who descended from Heaven,

accompanied by his bother Mututsi and his sister Nyamparu. The second is the subject of numerous folktales and dynastic poems. A typical story is that of the stratagem used by God to determine who should rule over whom. So as to test their dependability God decided to entrust Gahutu, Gatutsi and Gatwa each with a pot of milk to watch over during the night. When dawn came gluttonous Gatwa had drunk the milk; Gahutu had gone to sleep and spilt his milk; only the watchful Gatutsi had stayed up through the night to keep guard over his milk. The theme of Tutsi civilization as inherently superior is nowhere more tersely summed up than in the opening statement of a folktale of central Rwanda: "Dead are the dogs and the rats, giving way to the cows and the Drum". Rwanda has no official history before the arrival of the Tutsi; as in the dark ages of pre-Islamic civilization (jahiliya), until then there was little worth remembering, much less recording, (Lemarchand 1970, 24).

In time legend became reality. Such myths must be seen not so much as a fictitious stories as "a statement of a bigger reality", as Malinowski would put it, "still partially alive through its precedents, its law, its moral", (ibid., 33). As such they provided powerful moral justification for the all-encompassing "premise of inequality", (Maquet 1961).

As with other myths the significance of Rwanda's myths of origins is function of history. With the emergence of Western-educated Hutu elites in the early fifties, their symbolic meaning changed drastically. While remaining the central frame of reference for conservative Tutsi elites, for the emerging generations of Hutu politicians their continuing grip on society meant continued oppression. Hence the need to change everything radically.

The Hamitic Hypothesis: Europeans as Myth-Makers

By then, however, another myth had taken hold, imported from 19th century Europe, which placed yet another construction on the history of Tutsi hegemony. Like its precolonial counterparts, the "Hamitic myth" underwent fundamental changes of substance and meaning as it came to be seen and interpreted in very different ways by Hutu and Tutsi. It is indeed an ironic commentary on the malleability of myths that the same "Hamitic hypothesis", (Sanders 1960), should have provided European administrators and missionaries with a powerful argument in support of Tutsi domination, and subsequent generations of Hutu politicians with the most devastating ideological ammunition against it.

For the early Christian missionaries the Tutsi stood as the finest example of the Hamitic race, described by Seligman as "pastoral "Europeans", arriving wave after wave, better armed as well as quicker witted than the dark agricultural Negroes",(Seligman 1922, 141). They clearly belonged to a higher order of humanity than the Hutu, and for this reason they were ideally equipped to act as the privileged intermediaries between the European colonizer and the "dark agricultural" masses. Proof of Tutsi superiority was inscribed in their tall, arresting physique, their extraordinary capacity for self-control, their ability to exercize authority. On more "scientific" grounds the authority of Diedrich Westerman, among others, could be enlisted for identifying the Tutsi as an exceptionally gifted and attractive race: "The Hamites are light skinned, with a straight nose, thin lips, narrow face, soft, often wavy or even straight hair, without prognathism... Owing to their racial superiority they have gained leading positions and have become the founders of many of

the larger states in Africa", (Westerman 1931, 25-6). Further adding to their attractiveness was the presumption of their Ethiopian origins, which meant that at some point in the distant past they must have been exposed to biblical influences, thus explaining their disposition to embrace Christianity. As Ian Linden puts it, "it seemed to the missionaries that Hamitic history had involved the progressive dilution of some religious essence preordained to flower into the fullness of Christianity", (Linden 1977, 165).

All of this was entirely consistent with the prejudices and preconceptions of nineteenth century European ethnology. But it was also perfectly compatible with the view that some Tutsi had of themselves. Hamitic theories showed an uncanny fit with the mythologies of traditional Rwanda; once incorporated into the work of historiographers it became increasingly difficult to tell them apart.

Through much of the 1920s and 1930s Rwanda historiography was cross-fertilized by the confluence of two complementary stream of mythologies: one specific to Rwanda society, the other borrowed from 19th century European race theories. For Christian missionaries court traditions offered a striking illustration of the Hamites as "born rulers, superior in every respect to the "dark agricultural" masses; for Tutsi historiographers like Kagame, the Hamitic frame of reference gave scientific respectability to their own work[2]; European administrators, meanwhile, found in the coincidence of views between European and Tutsi historians a rationale for the most extreme and extensive application of indirect rule.

This said, it would be highly misleading to view the "invention" of Rwanda traditions as a straightforward, linear transfer of the Hamitic myth to historiographers and ultimately to African ideologues. If one can speak of "invention by tradition", it is important to consider the twists and turns that have accompanied the reinterpretation of traditions. The work of Alexis Kagame is a perfect example. Kagame was a historian of considerable reputation as well as a social actor with strong political commitments.

In this latter capacity his endorsement of the Hamitic frame of reference is not nearly as significant as his attempt to put a modern, Euro-centric construction of Rwandan traditions by casting them in a juridical mold. His Code des institutions politiques du Rwanda pre-colonial, published in 1952, is a case in point, (Kagame 1952). Precolonial Rwanda was not just a "royaume Hamite", to use the title of a celebrated work by Father A. Pages, (Pages 1933); it was a traditional state system regulated by codes of laws, juridical norms and all kinds of unwritten rules. Just as the rituals of kingship were described as the "Code esoterique de la monarchie", (Kagame 1947), Rwanda's precolonial institutions were carefully regulated by customary laws, much in the same way that in pre-revolutionary France the "fundamental laws of the realm" imposed specific restrictions on the king's authority. What made traditional Rwanda eminently modern, and susceptible to constitutional transformations, was not the plasticity of its traditions, but the fact that they were so carefully codified.

Kagame's intellectual demarche speaks volumes for his political goals. Both are excellently analyzed by Claudine Vidal. "If there is only one word to describe Kagame's

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[2] While never calling into question the propriety of the term "Hamite", Kagame took pains, nevertheless, to distance himself from the notion set forth by Father Schumacher and others that the origins of the Tutsi could be traced back to the Galla of Ethiopia. "Although the two share the characteristics of the Hamitic race", wrote Kagame, "there is no trace of a Galla presence in interlacustrine Africa", (Kagame 1959, 103).

philosophy of history" she writes, "it is le juridisme. Through a systematic analogizing with European institutions (thus personal power is assimilated to administrative functions, relations of subordination to contracts, royal decisions to fundamental laws)... Kagame identifies precolonial Rwanda with a European nation that has gone beyond the stage of feudalism: an absolute monarchy tempered by a military code and safeguards intended to secure social justice... Had he been mandated by the Court he would not have acted any differently", (Vidal 1991, 52). Kagame had no interest in exalting the merits of an arbitrary, omnipotent kingship. His overriding concern was to show that the institution of kingship, by virtue of its rich array of customary codes, was remarkably well equipped to evolve into a constitutional monarchy. All that was needed was for Europeans to see the Rwanda traditions for what they really are, neither arbitrary nor decadent, but just the opposite, containing within their folds the promise of a democratic renewal. From his painstaking reinterpretation of traditional Rwanda emerged a projet de societe consciously designed to influence the basic constitutional choices facing the Belgian trust authorities in the decade preceding independence.

As a politically committed intellectual, determined to save the monarchy from itself, Kagame showed unusual foresight and imagination; as a historian, however, he showed little inclination to depart from the basic tenets of the Hamitic tradition. Pre-Tutsi traditions went virtually unnoticed.

Not until 1962, with the publication of Jan Vansina's path-breaking work, L'evolution du royaume rwanda des origines a 1900, did the flaws in Kagame's writings, and much of the historical literature on Rwanda, come to the attention of Rwanda historians[3], (Vansina 1962). The history of Rwanda as the story of exceptional men performing exceptional feats just did not stand up to the historical record. What was left out was the rich history of pre-conquest Hutu states[4], some of which survived right up until the 1920's, and whose customs, rituals and conceptions of authority were assimilated by Tutsi clans, and this long before the term "Tutsi" gained currency in the area, (C. Newbury 1988, 1998). Rather than a superior civilization imposing its rule on an inferior one, the evidence revealed a far more complex story. Ironically, much of what made the Hamites so captivating in European eyes turned out to be the result of selective cultural borrowing from the supposedly inferior agricultural societies.

Here, then, was a view of history which not only came as close as any to reflecting Ranke's ideal of "how things really were", but, more importantly, could provide a

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[3]In a surprisingly unfair polemic about the merits of Vansina's critique of Kagame's works Claudine Vidal calls it "singularly harsh", and goes on to take him to task for refuting Kagame's arguments while leaning heavily on his findings, so that in the end his "historical reconstruction adheres, overtly or implicitly, to many of Kagame's theses", (Vidal 1991, 55, 57). One would think that it would be to Vansina's credit that his critique of Kagame does not translate into a global rejection of everything he has written.

[4]One of the most impressive efforts to reconstruct the history of pre-Tutsi states is by Ferdinand Nahimana, (Nahimana 1993). No other Rwandan historian has done a better job of drawing attention to what Kagame had so conspicuously left out. It is also a commentary on the role of Hutu intellectuals during the genocide that Nahimana, currently in detention in Arusha, played a major role in encouraging anti-Tutsi violence while heading the Office Rwandais de l'Information (ORINFOR).

meaningful rationale for cooperation and mutual respect between Hutu and Tutsi. This was not to be, however. As independence loomed on the horizon, confronting Hutu and Tutsi (and Europeans) with basic tactical decisions, the Hamitic view of history reasserted itself with a vengeance -- but not without undergoing some extraordinary changes in meaning and substance.

The Politics of Memory in the Historical Present

Commenting on the distinction between myth and ideology, Ben Halpern makes the argument that "the study of myth is a study of the origins of beliefs out of historic experience", whereas "the study of ideology is the study of moulding of beliefs by social situations",(Halpern 1961, 137). Though analytically distinct, the two are intimately linked to each other.

It was in Rwanda, during the 1959-62 social revolution, that the recollective efforts of both Tutsi and Hutu entered into their political agendas, with unusual bluntness, and profoundly divisive consequences. For the conservative Tutsi associated with the court, history ruled out reconciliation: "Since our kings have conquered the land of the Hutu by killing their kinglets, (bahinza) and turning them into serfs, how can they now pretend to be our brothers?", (Nkundabagenzi 1962, 34). For the Hutu, however, it was precisely this kind of outlook that made revolutionary change imperative.

In the remainder of this paper we shall turn our attention to four examples of myth-making where memory operates selectively, and in so doing creates not just "imagined" communities, but communities of fear and hatred. One refers to the *resurrection of the Hamitic myth* in the political discourse of Hutu elites in Rwanda and Burundi. Another focuses on the *denial of genocide* by both Hutu and Tutsi (the first in Rwanda, the second in Burundi). A third calls attention to what might be called the *Rwanda irredenta* phenomenon, i.e. to the efforts of post-genocide Rwanda to legitimize its claims to eastern Congo by rewriting the precolonial history of the region. A fourth concerns *the emergence of a new "tribe"* in eastern Congo, the so-called Banyamulenge.

Of these four themes, the first is evidently the most critical to an understanding of the other three. As is now becoming dramatically clear, it is the Hamitic myth which is now spreading like a cancer through much of the Congo and beyond, providing ideological justification for the wanton killings of Tutsi by Hutu, or better still of "Hamites" by "Bantus". In each case historical memory creates its own universe of death and destruction. "Men do not find truth", says Paul Veyne, "they create it, as they create their history", (Veyne 1988, xii). Applied to the Great Lakes region this statement carries devastating implications.

I. The Resurrection of the Hamitic Hypothesis

From a simple template for discriminating between lower and higher orders of humanity, the Hamitic myth was forged into a formidable ideological weapon during the 1959 revolution, only to reemerge, with extraordinary violence during the 1994 genocide.

Filtered through the lens of a rabidly anti-Tutsi, anti-monarchical ideology, the Hamitic hypothesis underwent a striking metamorphosis. What Europeans naively perceived as a superior brand of humanity was better seen as the embodiment of the worst in human nature: cruelty and cunning, conquest and oppression. Where missionaries invoked

Semitic origins, as a source of racial superiority, Hutu ideologues saw proof of foreignness; where anthropologists detected contractual exchange based on reciprocal benefits was now condemned as social domination enforced by ruse and coercion; what most Europeans perceived as feminine grace was now denounced as yet another ploy designed to subjugate the Hutu.

In retrospect, early references to the feodalo-Hamites by the Hutu fifty-niners seem relatively mild compared to the murderous frenzy of anti-Tutsi propaganda diffused by the Hutu-controlled media and the blatantly racist iconography of certain newspapers on the eve of the genocide, (Chretien 1995). The reason in part lies in the climate of extreme fear created by the invasion of the Tutsi dominated Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), on October 1, 1990, and in part in the legacy of the Burundi genocide. What most outside observers tend to forget is that twenty two years before the Rwanda holocaust an appalling carnage of Hutu by Tutsi occurred in Burundi in 1972, resulting in the deaths of anywhere from 100,000 to 200,000 Hutu, and which can only be described as genocide, (Lemarchand 1996, 1998). The impact of the Burundi bloodbath on subsequent developments in both Burundi and Rwanda cannot be overemphasized. It is among the Hutu of Burundi that one encounters for the first time the articulation of a stridently anti-Tutsi ideology explicitly grounded in a Hamitic frame of reference. Formalized by the founder of the, Parti pour la Liberation du Peuple Hutu (Palipehutu), Remi Gahutu, this ideology flourished among a small group of Hutu exiles in Rwanda in the years immediately following the Burundi slaughter. The main themes are depressingly familiar: Tutsi domination over the Hutu can only be explained by taking into account the moral depravity of the Hamites, and their consummate skill in the use of cunning and deceit; the poisoned gift of beautiful women and cows were key ingredients in the strategy employed by Hamites to reduce the Bantu into bondage; the unspeakable cruelties perpetrated during the 1972 genocide are irrefutabe proof of Hamitic perversity, (Lemarchand. 1996, 20-23).

From the narratives collected by Liisa Malkki in refugee camps in Tanzania, one gets an idea of the extent to which these ideas took hold of the Hutu survivors (Malkki 1995, cited in Lemarchand 1996, 20):

> In the past our proper name was Bantu. We are Bantu. "Hutu" is no tribe, no nothing! The Kihamite is the national language of the Tutsi. Muhutu is a Kihamite word which means "servant". Having been given cows as gifts by the Tutsi, the Hutu were used as a slave. It is indeed here that the Hutu were born... We are not Hutu we are abantu.

Much the same themes would reemerge in the pages of Kangura, the most stridently anti-Tutsi of the 40-odd newspapers published in Rwanda during the three years preceding the holocaust. Here are some examples, picked at random: "The Tutsi have created out of whole cloth a tribe which does not exist: the Banyarwanda. The Banyarwanda exists nowhere in Africa; it is only mentioned to create confusion"... "Public opinion must know that the only language of the Hutu is Kihutu, Just as the Nande speak Kinande, the Hunde Kihunde"... "Try to rediscover your ethnie, for the Tutsi have taught you to ignore it"...,(cited in Chretien 1995, pp. 110-111).

What made the ideological climate of pre-genocide Rwanda pregnant with intimations of disaster was the sheer force and frequency of racist propaganda diffused through the

media, the extensive use of a racist iconography[5], and the systematic elaboration of Hamitic mythologies into a coherent body of categorical imperatives. This is nowhere more chillingly evident than in the "Ten Commandments of the Hutu", first published by Kangura in December 1990, a veritable catechism of racist principles, (ibid. 141-2).

At the heart of this ideology are a series of axiomatic truths:

(a) *The Tutsi are the embodiment of malice and wickedness:* "You know the trick they employed when they came to Rwanda: they pretended to have descended from Heaven; in fact they came from the north of Africa. In Rwanda they found the pastures they needed for their cows. The approached the Hutu kinglets (bahinza), and with their customary malice they offered them women and cattle, until they overthrew the Hutu, seized power and kept it until the 1959 revolution",(ibid., 159).

(b) *The Tutsi never change* -- a point put across in a Kangura article titled "A cockroach (inyenzi) cannot give birth to a butterfly". Thus, "history shows that the Tutsi have remained identical to themselves, they haven't changed; their malice and wickedness is what we have experienced throughout history"; typical of their deviousness is the fact that some "changed their identity in order to gain access to positions reserved for the Hutu", (ibid, 103), which is why they have gained a dominant position in "the administration, commerce and the health sectors", (ibid., 147).

(c) Their long-term strategy is the creation of a Hima empire in the heart of the continent. The Tutsi master plan, we are told, is a diabolical scheme "to restore the dictatorship of the more extremists of the Tutsi minority through genocide and the extermination of the Hutu; to institute in the bantu region of the Great Lakes (Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Tanzania and Uganda) a vast Hima-Tutsi empire, under the guidance of an ethnie that considers itself superior, like the Aryan race, and whose symbol is Hitler's swastika", (ibid., 165). The killing of President Melchior Ndadaye in Burundi, at the hands of an all-Tutsi army, is thus seen as unmistakable evidence of Hamitic imperial ambitions, along with the fact that the FPR fought its way into Rwanda with the help of "the Tutsi Museveni".

(d) *Given the mortal threat facing the Hutu majority, it is imperative to delineate tribe from nation and for the Hutu to rediscover their true identity as Bantu.* Again to quote from Kangura: "The nation is artificial, only ethnicity (ethnie) is natural", (ibid., 111). "You (the Hutu) are an important ethnie within the Bantu group", yet numbers alone may not suffice; what you must realize is that "a conceited (orgueilleuse) and bloodthirsty minority is working to create divisions among you, the better to dominate you and kill you... ", (Ibid., 111).

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[5] The significance of iconography as a means of mobilizing anti-Tutsi feelings, emerges with shocking clarity from the caricatures published in Kangura, Kangra-Magazine, Power, and La Medaille-Nyiramacibiri, (Chretien 1995, 362-374). A particularly chilling example is a drawing representing President Ndadaye of Burundi impaled on a pole; while his genitals are being severed, Paul Kagame looks on, standing near the royal drum (Kalinga). The drawing encapsulates three critical themes of anti-Tutsi propaganda: the presence of Paul Kagame on the scene is a clear reminder of the efforts of the Tutsi to create a Hima empire in Central Africa; the severing of the genitals, later to be hanged on the Kalinga, brings back memories of the fate suffered by the Hutu bahinza at the hands of a conquering Tutsi monarchy; and Ndadaye' s impalement is a commentary on the cruelty of the Tutsi. It would be difficult to think of a more powerful, and all-encompassing anti-Tutsi imagery.

(e) *In these conditions, vigilance is the key.* Watch out for the spies and the finks, and be particularly wary of Tutsikazi (Tutsi females). In the words of the first of the "Ten Commandments", "Every Hutu must know that any Tutsikazi, regardless of where she works, is in the pay of her Tutsi ethnie. Consequently, will be treated as a traitor any Hutu who marries a Tutsikazi, or makes her his concubine or his protegee". The second commandment stipulates that "every Hutu must know that our women (Hutukazi)are more dignified and more conscious of their roles as mothers and wives", while the third enjoins Hutu females "to remain vigilant and bring back (their) husbands, brothers and sons to reason", (ibid., 14 1).

Tutsi women play a disproportionate part in Hutu discourse (and iconography). As the foregoing shows, the first three of the Ten Commandments are concerned exclusively with the threats arising from the presence of Tutsikazi among the Hutu communities; Tutsi women, furthermore, were a favorite target of Hutu cartoonists in search of pornographic effect. Warning against the dangers of potential Mataharis among Tutsi females is evidently a major objective the Hutu-controlled press, yet the more outrageous caricatures gleaned from the pages of Power and Kangura-Magazine, (ibid., 366) suggest a deeper motivation. They seem to reflect the seething anger and frustrations of many Hutu who saw in the greater attractiveness to Europeans of the typical Tutsikazi body map a slur to their own "race".

What all this adds up to is a sustained and deliberate effort to recast the Hamitic frame of reference in such a way as to throw moral discredit on an entire ethnic community, as if every Tutsi in sight was by definition an ally of the FPR, and hence an enemy of the Hutu nation.

2. The Denial of Genocide

As an ideological construction designed to justify the annihilation of the Tutsi minority, the Hamitic myth must be seen as the central element behind the 1994 genocide; in the denial of genocide by some of its perpetrators lies another extraordinary form of myth-making.

Genocide has now become the most overused and arbitrary word in the political discourse of Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi. In both states it is among the perpetrators that one encounters the most vigorous denial of involvement in ethnic massacres. Although many of the killers now in custody in Kigali or Arusha have admitted such involvement, many more refuse to acknowledge their deeds. In flagrant contradiction with the facts, the argument one hears most often is that the killings were the result of a spontaneous outburst of collective anger, not the outcome of a planned annihilation. The real cause of the tragedy, according to this view, was the FPR invasion.

Much the same sort of role reversal can be seen in Burundi, with the perpetrators cast as victims. To this day the 1972 genocide of Hutu by Tutsi has been virtually obliterated from the consciousness of most Tutsi, (Lemarchand 1998). The only genocide officially recognized by radical Tutsi ideologues is the killing of thousands of innocent Tutsi civilians in October 1993, in the wake of Ndadaye's assassination. Never mind that the carnage might better be described as an explosion of collective fear and anger, set off by a murder that conjured up haunting memories of the 1972 killings. Planned annihilation is how many Tutsi see the massacre. Of the subsequent repression of the Hutu by the army, resulting in the death of thousands of Hutu, and the exodus of some 300,000 of their kinsmen to Rwanda, nothing is said. Although, historically, the group that has suffered most from

genocidal killings in Burundi are the Hutu, today it is the Rwanda genocide that impresses itself most forcefully on the mental retina of Tutsi politicians, bringing into focus a simple equation: majority rule equals Hutu rule, and Hutu rule means the threat of physical elimination.

Both Hutu and Tutsi have been victims of genocide -- most conspicuously and massively the Hutu in Burundi and the Tutsi (and not a few Hutu) in Rwanda. Yet, ironically, for many Tutsi only they, as victims, have a proprietary right to genocide -- not unlike the Serbs in former Yugoslavia who see themselves as the perennial victims of historic massacres. "Deployed in this way", writes Roger Cohen, "genocide was no longer a horror but a form of immunity. It was a passe-partout allowing the eternal Serbian victim to butcher with impunity", (Cohen 1998, 169). That there is more than a superficial parallel here with the situation in Rwanda has been made abundantly clear by the Kibeho massacre in 1995, and the killings of tens of thousands of Hutu refugees in eastern Congo in 1996 and 1997.

3. The Invention of Greater Rwanda

Besides putting historical imagination in the service of genocide, perceptions of the past have played a crucially important role in fixing (in both sense of the word) geographical boundaries -- and with equally destructive political consequences. A case in point are the efforts of the Rwanda government to summon the precolonial past on behalf of its territorial claims to North and South Kivu.

Shortly after the search and destroy operation mounted by the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) against the refugee camps in eastern Congo, President Pasteur Bizimungu held a press conference. Armed with maps of precolonial Rwanda, he informed his audience of the extent of the territorial conquest of Mwami Rwabugiri (1853-1895) north and west of Rwanda's present borders. Stretching from lakes Rweru and Cyohoha across the Virunga volcanoes all the way to Lake Albert and beyond, precolonial Rwanda, according to Bizimumgu, incorporated within its national boundaries much of eastern Congo, (Murangira 1997). The message, clearly intended to give legitimacy to the presence of RPA troops in North Kivu, could not have been clearer: much of the area included in eastern Congo were part and parcel of the precolonial kingdom.

By all accounts, however, his claims simply do not stand up to the historical record. This is not to deny the reality of the raids conducted by Rwabugiri in North Kivu; that such raids were instrumental in cementing the political control of the monarchy is what is patently at odds with the facts. Even where tributary relationship were temporarily established with local authorities, the writ of the Rwanda monarchy was precarious at best, (Vansina 1962, Nahimana 1993). Nor did the presence of Kinyarwanda speakers in eastern Congo -- Hutu and Tutsi -- mean that they were under the effective control of the monarchy; in many instances it meant precisely the opposite. The point is convincingly argued by David Newbury: "they (Kinyarwanda-speakers) were refugees, fleeing the expansion of the Nyiginya dynastic state at a time of intense competition among diverse political units in Rwanda. Thus, rather than being subjects of the royal court, these migrants were its opponents; their presence in Itombwe (South Kivu), in fact, represented the lack of state power in that region, not its presence",(Newbury 1997, 216).

Precolonial boundaries were anything but fixed. Even within Rwanda, relations between the Rwanda court and the Hutu communities in the north and the west were remarkably fluid. Many such communities remained virtually independent until brought into the fold of

the monarchy by colonial troops. So far from restricting the scope of authority of the ruling dynasty, colonial rule had the opposite effect within Rwanda. David Newbury hits the nail on the head: "The effect of European boundary agreements was to expand, not contract, the reach of the Rwanda state; in fact, with the help of European power, Nyiginya dynastic structures were extended to many areas that formerly had successfully resisted Rwandan expansion", (ibid., 217).

The historical evidence, in short, lends little credibility to Bizimungu's claims. They are entirely consistent, however, with the Rwanda government's definition of its security interests in eastern Congo. Subversive through they are of historical facts, Bizimungu's phantasms have a clear political objective. It is not enough to maintain a military presence in eastern Congo toward off the threats of cross-border raids; equally important is to show that this presence is legitimized by history. Only by restoring the territorial integrity of precolonial Rwanda can the sovereignty of the new Rwanda be fully established.

4. The Banyamulenge: Ethnogenesis as Myth-making

The Banyamulenge are not pure invention. Initially, the term referred to "the people of Mulenge", a small group of predominantly Tutsi pastoralists whose traditional habitat is in Mulenge, a locality situated on the high-lying Itombwe plateau, south of Uvira (South Kivu),(Willame 1997). Their ancestors were renegades from Rwanda. Having fallen foul of the ruling Niginya dynasty, they moved to the Itombwe area in the late 19th century. Others followed, in search of greener pastures, some from Rwanda, others from Burundi.

Although they formed a culturally and linguistically distinct community, their name never appears in colonial records. Their political significance became apparent in the years following the independence of the Congo, when they found themselves embroiled in the so-called Muleliste rebellion of 1964-5: unlike many Tutsi who had fled the Rwanda during the revolution, the Banyamulenge refused to cast their lot with the Mulelistes, and instead joined the ranks of the National Congolese Army (NCA), a fact which further contributed to mark them off as a separate community.

Today, however, the Banyamulenge label applies to all people of Tutsi origins residing in North and South Kivu, and not a few in Shaba. From a small, highly localized community, numbering no more than 30,000 people, the term has come designate perhaps as many as 300,000 ethnic Tutsi, irrespective of their place of residence or historical roots. Lumped together under the same ethnic rubric are those Tutsi who lived in North and South Kivu long before the advent of colonial rule, those who migrated to the area during the colonial period, and the tens of thousands of refugees who crossed into eastern Congo in the early 1960s during and immediately after the Rwanda revolution. There are no parallels in the continent for such an instant and extensive ethnogenesis.

The roots of the phenomenon are in Rwanda; its raison d'etre is in the Congo. The birth of the Banyamulenge, in its more recent version, is traceable to the destruction of the refugee camps in North and South Kivu, in November 1996, an operation conducted with extreme brutality by units of the RPA assisted by hundreds if not thousands of ethnic Tutsi from eastern Congo, those very elements who to-day call themselves Banyamulenge. Most of them have since settled in North and South Kivu. The label validates their claims to being authentically Congolese, and refutes accusations that they might have acted as Rwanda's "fifth column" in the Congo.

By the same token, the term settles once and for all the nationality question -- an issue which during the Mobutu years lay at the heart of Tutsi grievances against Kinshasa. No longer is citizenship conditioned by length of residence. All Tutsi are now Banyamulenge, and hence authentic Congolese citizens.

Is this a case of political tribalism, as Lonsdale would put it, "flowing down from high-political intrigue"? Or is it an example of "moral ethnicity creating communities from within through domestic controversy over civic virtue"? Possibly both. For the time being, however, there can be no question that the birth of the Banyamulenge signals the emergence of yet another myth, and thus of another source of contestation. In the Kivus as elsewhere in the region history's myths are in violent conflict with history's realities. Adjusting one to the other is what much of the violence in the Great Lakes is all about.

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Reflecting on the fortunes of the "Hamitic hypothesis", Edith Sanders noted thirty years ago: "The word (Hamitic) still exists, endowed with a mystical meaning; it endures through time and history, and like a chameleon changes its color to reflect the changing light. As the word became flesh it engendered many problems of scholarship", (Sanders 1969, 531). How one wishes that the problems had remained confined the field of scholarship!

Amid all the bloodshed caused by the extension of civil war to the whole of the Congo the myth has proven remarkably resilient. Bantu and Hamitic identities have now crystallized on a wider scale than before, through a language clearly inspired by racist stereotypes. Hundreds, possibly thousands of ethnic Tutsi, or Tutsi-looking Africans are reported to have been massacred in Kinshasa and other localities in the name of a threatened Bantu identity. The enemy can be easily identified by its physical markers, warned the national radio: "Watch the nose, it's thin and narrow, and the height: Tutsi are tall!" As one observer noted, "there was nothing subliminal about Kabila's messages. Like the infamous radio broadcasts that primed Rwanda's Hutu for the massacre of more than 500,000 Tutsi in 1994, the invitation was to kill", (Santoro 1998). Never before has l'imagination constituante generated a more deadly potential for regional instability. The myth is indeed growing like a tumor.

The final word must be left to Leszlek Kolakowski:

> A myth may grow like a tumor; it may seek to replace positivistic knowledge and laws, it may attempt forcibly to take over all areas of culture, and may become encrusted in despotism, terror and mendacity. It may also threaten to relieve its participants of responsibility for their own situation, drain away the desire for freedom, and bring the value of freedom as such under suspicion, (Kolakowski 1972, 104).

Such is the bitter lesson we have learned from the endless bloodshed in the Great Lakes, where the Hamitic myth is indeed growing like a tumor, with few signs of remission.

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