The Role of Ethnicity in the Decolonization and Nation-building Politics
of Rwanda and Burundi

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HIST 285H
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Fall 2013
Introduction

There are two extreme positions which have been applied to understanding ethnic conflict in post-colonial Africa. One is that Africans are passive victims of imperialism, and that discriminatory colonial policies created ethnic tension and violence. The other is that contemporary conflicts are simply extensions of long-standing ‘tribal’ conflicts that reveal the continent’s ‘heart of darkness’. In most cases, neither of these approaches is correct, with the reality being much more complex. In many pre-colonial African societies, ethnic stratification and antagonism did exist, but colonialism exacerbated ethnic differences, intensified competition, and paved the path for post-colonial ethnic conflict. One of colonialism’s most harmful legacies was that ethnicity was turned into a political tool in the era of nationhood.

The nations of Rwanda and Burundi form an interesting decolonization case study. Unlike many modern African states, Rwanda and Burundi were already discrete political entities before colonization, in the form of two separate but very similar kingdoms. They were joined together into one Ruanda-Urundi colony under the rule of Germany and then Belgium, but diverged again after gaining independence to become two distinct but contiguous states characterized by transnational ethnic ties and inter-ethnic conflict.

Although the populations of Rwanda and Burundi consist of the same ethnic groups in the same proportions, and in both countries the decolonization and early independence period was characterized by a struggle between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority, the end result of decolonization in each country was very different. Rwanda became a republic under a majority-led, Hutu government, while Burundi became a constitutional monarchy under minority Tutsi control. However, in both Rwanda and Burundi, massive long-term post-colonial violence has occurred along ethnic divisions.
These circumstances suggest several key questions: What were ethnic relations in the two kingdoms before the colonial period? How were ethnic differences exacerbated by colonialism? What role did ethnicity play in the decolonization and nation-building process? To answer these questions, this paper focuses on the ways in which ethnicity was both redefined and manipulated by colonial authorities in Rwanda and Burundi, and on the role of ethnicity in independence movements and early nation-building politics. More specifically, it asks: how did the Hutu majority dislodge the dominant Tutsi in Rwanda through the process of decolonization? And how did the Tutsi minority in Burundi remain in power during and after decolonization? After achieving independence, how did these two nations, with such uncommonly strong foundations for nationalism (common language, religion, etc.), see some of the worst internal conflict and violence to be recorded in independent Africa?

Map of refugee sites in Rwanda and Burundi, 1996.

Source: Report on the Nutrition Situation of Refugee and Displaced Populations, UN.
Pre-colonial history

Both Rwanda and Burundi were defined political and geographical entities in the pre-colonial period, and each contained a population with a common socio-cultural and linguistic heritage. Thus, unlike the majority of modern African nations, they possessed some of the basic elements of national unity before colonization.

Although they developed into two separate kingdoms by the nineteenth century, Rwanda and Burundi have long shared the same ethnic composition of approximately 85-90 percent Hutu, 10-14 percent Tutsi, and 1 percent Twa. The two kingdoms were also nearly identical in their predominantly agrarian economies, climate, topography, population density, language, and religion.¹

The exact chronology is uncertain, but a group of agricultural immigrants who were the ancestors of the modern-day Hutu arrived sometime between the fifth and eleventh centuries, while the pastoralist Tutsi likely arrived during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Twa, who were the earliest inhabitants of the region, lived as hunter-gatherers in the forested areas, and largely remained isolated.

Sociopolitical structure

The Tutsi established dominancy over the region due to their skills at organized combat as well as their cattle wealth. A feudal system developed in which a patron or lord (usually Tutsi) would bestow a client (usually Hutu) the use of a certain number of cattle, in exchange for labor and agricultural products. This system was hierarchical and based on an unequal distribution of wealth and land, but it also contained innate checks and balances, as a lord was obliged to protect and treat well those clients who cultivated his land if he did not want them to migrate to another

¹ Uvin, “Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda.”
lord.2 Furthermore, some mobility across social boundaries was possible. This was more true in Burundi than in Rwanda, but even in Rwanda, there was a process called kwihutura in which “the rare Hutu who was able to accumulate cattle and rise through the socio-economic hierarchy” could “shed Hutuness and achieve the political status of a Tutsi.”3 Thus, even the stratified feudal system allowed for a degree of social mobility.

In both kingdoms, there was a similar political hierarchy with the mwami or king at the top, followed by the Tutsi as “the reservoir from which members of the ruling oligarchy were drawn,” the Hutu, and the Twa at the bottom.4 However, there was more fluidity in the more complex hierarchy of Burundi, while in Rwanda it tended to be simpler and more rigid.5 In Burundi, there was a group below the king but above the Tutsi known as the Baganwa, who administered the provinces and were considered a royal class of princes.6 In Burundian politics, pre-colonial conflicts were usually not between the Tutsi and Hutu, but among the Baganwa.7 In addition, there were different levels of rank in Burundi society based on lineage, kinship, or duty, even within the same ethnic group. For example, there were at least three sub-categories within the Tutsi conveying precise social distinctions relating to wealth or region: the Tutsi-Banyaruguru (those of the royal court), the Tutsi-Hima (ordinary pastoralists), and the Tutsi-Banyabururi (of the southern region). There were distinctions among the Hutu in Burundi as well: there was a special status for those responsible for royal and religious rituals and for elders who served as intermediaries to the local authorities.8 Thus while both Rwandan and Burundian

3 Mamdani, When Victims Become Killers, 70.
5 Uvin, “Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda,” 255.
8 Ibid., 274–5.
society contained the same major ethnic groups in roughly the same proportions, they differed in social organization and in the role ethnicity played in each society.

*Ethnicity and identity*

During pre-colonial times, it was often regional, not kingdom-wide, identities that were supreme in the minds of the population. Many of the sub-regions within the kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi had cultural and familial ties to areas outside the kingdoms. In Rwanda, a number of these sub-regions were not fully incorporated into the Rwandan state structures until colonial rule, while in Burundi, most sub-regions were not incorporated into the kingdom until the early nineteenth century. Over the course of Rwanda and Burundi history, successive authorities (monarchic, colonial, and national) have all tried to create a common identity from these regional units, but David Newbury has argued that “...the process of forging a common identity occurred in an uneven fashion; ‘national’ cultural identity coexisted, sometimes rather uneasily, with the legacy of regional awareness, an awareness that often remained relevant even within highly centralized state structures.”

Thus the ethnic identities of Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa existed in pre-colonial times, but they were not the sole source of identity or the sole determinant of social relations or wealth, nor were they always clearly defined. Regional ties and local ecologies were often as impactful on culture and society as ethnicity, and the distinction between cattle-raisers and agriculturalists was not as dichotomous as is commonly portrayed. In some areas, Tutsi and Hutu lifestyles were nearly identical, with members of both groups keeping cattle and cultivating fields. Furthermore, clan,

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9 Ibid., 266.
10 Newbury, “Precolonial Burundi and Rwanda: Local Loyalties, Regional Royalties.”
lineage, and family ties were as important if not more important than whether one was a ‘Hutu’ or a ‘Tutsi’. Newbury argues:

...it was context, not content, that generated this ethnic identity. For example, a century ago in some areas of western Rwanda, people identified by local kin-group and residence. In other areas there were political identities reaching beyond the kin group, but there was no broad social category uniting all as ‘Hutu’; in fact, the very term ‘Hutu’ was meaningless. Only with the slow infiltration of state power, and in a complex process of mutual agency, did people come to see themselves as part of a collective ‘Hutu’ identity that transcended lineage and hill.\(^\text{12}\)

Ethnicity in the pre-colonial era was more of a social categorization than a biological race, particularly since inter-marriages occurred between ethnic groups.\(^\text{13}\) Thus, ethnic identity in Rwanda and Burundi should not be viewed as a static, well-defined racial categorization that has existed through history, but more as a contextual and nuanced attribute of society:

> Ethnic identities were not primordial, they were contextually created; they altered over time, and they evolved differently in different places and contexts. Thus ethnic groups cannot be seen as internally homogenous, externally distinct, and constantly in confrontation with other such groups. Like many other social categories, ethnicity was not an institution but an identity, and hence ethnic categories were contextually defined.\(^\text{14}\)

The Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa did have different origins and ancestors, so there is a valid historical basis for these ethnicities. However, in the pre-colonial kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi, there were a number of equally or more important sources of identity, including the region, clan, and specific locale.

**Colonization**

By the end of the nineteenth century, European exploration was encroaching on the kingdom. At an 1890 conference of the European colonial powers in Brussels, both kingdoms

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid., 272–3.
\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., 271.
were given to Germany, who relied on a policy of indirect rule and treated the territories as a protectorate. The Germans ruled until after World War I, when a 1922 League of Nations mandate called for Belgium to take over the territory as the colony of Ruanda-Urundi. In 1946, a United Nations mandate converted the relationship to a trusteeship which lasted until independence was achieved in 1962. This is the broad summary of the colonial period, but it to understand its consequences, it is necessary to consider the details of colonization, because it is in the details that we find serious implications for the role of ethnicity in politics.

In Burundi, the reign of Mwezi Gisabo, king of Burundi at the time of initial German occupation, was plagued by secessionist movements and by conflict among the Baganwa, but it was not enough to unseat the king. German occupation of Burundi actually legitimized and increased the power of the royal court. With the might of their armed forces behind them, the Germans forced an agreement on the king that he would recognize German authority and they in turn would support his sovereignty. Once he agreed, German forces assisted Mwezi to consolidate authority over areas of the kingdom that had seen the most rebellion. However, they also reconfigured the political structure of Burundi toward a more distributed form of power. The Germans undermined particular traditions of royalty such as the umuganuro (First Fruit) ritual, and also increased the political power of the ‘second tier’ of local chiefs/administrative elites. This second tier “became strong advocates of the mystique of a dynastic power that extended far back into the past, in a colonial context where longevity was equated with legitimacy.”

In Rwanda, Kigeri Rwabugiri, the first Rwandan monarch to meet with Europeans, had a strategy of keeping outsiders close but not too close. He desired to establish trading ties to the East Coast of Africa, and cautiously cultivated relations with nearby kingdoms and European travelers. However, he was fearful of becoming too deeply involved. Shortly after his death, the

15 Ibid., 288.
defeat of Rwanda’s elite troops in a battle with Congo was the harbinger of a change in political strategy, as “the manifest superiority of the firepower of the intruders convinced the central court that a policy of outright confrontation was doomed.” As a result, the central court of Rwanda became amenable to collaboration with the colonial forces. The succession war after the king’s death led to a coup in which a young teenager, Musinga (or Yuhi V), was put on the throne under the control of his family. In 1897, an agreement (overseen by Musinga’s mother, Kanjogera) was made between Musinga and the German colonial administrator for Rwanda to become a protectorate of Germany. Kanjogera saw the protectorate relationship as an alliance that would enable the mwami to assert authority over the troublesome northern territories. She was correct about this: as they had done in Burundi, German forces helped the Rwandan monarch to assert control over outlying territories. However, they also reduced his power to some degree, by requiring cooperation with German authorities for joint administration of the protectorate.

The relatively peaceful transition for both kingdoms to colonial rule can be attributed to several factors. At the end of the nineteenth century, both kingdoms faced several major challenges: drought, smallpox, the loss of vast numbers of cattle to disease, and attacks from other African forces which were often indirectly caused by European interference. This meant resistance against the colonial powers was unlikely to succeed; neither dynasty wanted to fight a battle they would probably lose. Both kingdoms also were in a period of internal conflict, and the ruling elites welcomed European involvement as a means to reinforce their own power. In both kingdoms, the area of the kingdom was significantly increased by colonization and the state

16 Ibid., 311.
17 Viret, “Rwanda - A Chronology (1867-1994).”
18 Newbury, “Precolonial Burundi and Rwanda: Local Loyalties, Regional Royalties,” 312.
obtained more power to impose policy and extract resources. Administrative chiefs delegated from the court replaced local authorities.\(^{19}\)

The Germans continued to control Rwanda and Burundi until Belgium invaded the territories in 1916 in the context of World War I. The colony was administered by the Belgian Army for several years, until the League of Nations officially put the region under control of the Belgian government with a mandate issued in 1922.\(^{20}\) The oversimplified European view that Rwanda and Burundi were ‘twin’ kingdoms because of their similar centralized power structures, ethnic composition, and mixed pastoral-agricultural economies served as justification to establish a unified administration in the form of a Ruanda-Urundi colony.\(^{21}\) In the League of Nations Mandate of 1922, the “Mandatory” (the king of Belgium) was held “responsible for the peace, order and good government of the territory” and was called to “promote to the utmost the material and moral well-being and the social progress of its inhabitants.”\(^{22}\) The Mandate called for the Mandatory to respect the rights of the “native population” in relation to the holding or transfer of land, but it lists a far more extensive protection of rights for foreign citizens of the member states of the League of Nations, including rights of entry, residence, property, and profession or trade.\(^{23}\)

The United Nations Trusteeship Agreement of 1946 placed Ruanda-Urundi under international trusteeship with administration by the Belgian government. It called for Belgium to give the “inhabitants” of Ruanda-Urundi “an increasing share in the administration and services...of the Territory” and to “further such participation of the inhabitants in the

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 312–3.
\(^{20}\) Viret, “Rwanda - A Chronology (1867-1994).”
\(^{21}\) Newbury, “Precolonial Burundi and Rwanda: Local Loyalties, Regional Royalties,” 280.
\(^{22}\) League of Nations, Mandate for the Administration of Part of the Former Colony of German East Africa Conferred upon His Majesty the King of the Belgians, Confirmed and Defined by the Council of the League of Nations.
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
representative organs of the population” for the “political advancement of the population of Ruanda-Urundi.” It also mandates the development of elementary education to reduce illiteracy and to provide manual skills training for the general population, with “qualified students” being able to go on to higher education and professional training. Similarly to the 1922 mandate, the rights of United Nations members are more protected than the rights of the ‘natives’, although the native inhabitants are granted freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, and of petition.

In neither the 1922 nor 1946 mandates are the ethnicities of Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa mentioned. According to these documents, all ‘natives’ are equal; there is no call for preferential treatment nor discrimination based on ethnic categories. However, unofficial colonial policy was very much based on ethnic differentiation.

*European perception of race*

After making initial contact with the region, Europeans were quick to observe the different ethnicities of the people of Rwanda and Burundi. In the European interpretation, there were three distinct groups with formulaic physical and cultural characteristics. The ‘Tutsi’ were tall, thin, lighter-skinned cattle owners who had the most economic and political power; the ‘Hutu’ were shorter, stockier, and darker-skinned, subsisted on agriculture, and were subservient to the Tutsi; the ‘Twa’ were pygmyoid hunters or potters who lived in the forests on the margins of society, both figuratively and literally. This was a more rigid characterization than had ever previously existed in the region. In reality, local variations in ecology, social structure, and

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25 Ibid.
human physical characteristics precluded any precise demarcation of these three groups. Physical features or ways of life were not infallible indicators of being Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa.\textsuperscript{26}

The Belgians adopted a rigid understanding of ethnicity from the early explorers. They believed in the ‘Hamitic hypothesis’ which proposed that the Tutsi were descendants of Ham, son of Noah, and thus were neither Bantu nor African in origin. This was used to explain the belief that the Tutsi had more ‘European’ features than the Hutu or the Twa, as well as to justify a belief in their innate superiority.\textsuperscript{27} The European colonizers interpreted the feudal system as a ‘traditional’ power structure in which Tutsi ‘aristocrats’ ruled over Hutu ‘peasants’. Thus they interpreted the Tutsis as the ‘natural rulers’ of the native people.\textsuperscript{28} Therefore, in both Rwanda and Burundi, administrative jobs were given almost exclusively to the Tutsi, who were perceived by the Belgians to be a more intelligent and civilized race. Meanwhile, the Hutu masses were subject to what could be called a dual colonialism, in which “Hutus were schooled and politicised in such a way as to see the Tutsi, and not the colonial state, as their oppressors.”\textsuperscript{29}

\textit{Exacerbation of ethnic tensions under colonial rule}

Although hierarchies had previously existed, colonization profoundly altered political structures. Political, social, and even economic relations became more rigid, unequal, and biased against the Hutu, while the power of many people of Tutsi origin greatly increased.\textsuperscript{30} Under colonial rule, as part of a series of reforms passed between 1926 and 1936 in Ruanda-Urundi, the Belgian colonial authorities sought to hardline ethnic divisions as well as restructure the political organization of the colony. The Belgian authorities required ethnic identity cards to be carried by

\textsuperscript{26} Newbury, “Precolonial Burundi and Rwanda: Local Loyalties, Regional Royalties,” 258.
\textsuperscript{27} Daley, “Ethnicity and Political Violence in Africa,” 665.
\textsuperscript{28} Newbury, “Ethnicity and the Politics of History in Rwanda,” 11.
\textsuperscript{29} Daley, “Ethnicity and Political Violence in Africa,” 667.
\textsuperscript{30} Uvin, “Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda,” 255.
all Africans to identify themselves as Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa. The actual process of classification, which was also used in the 1933-34 census, was based on three major sources of information: “oral information provided by the church, physical measurements, and ownership of large herds of cows.”31 This classification system served to rationalize and standardize the social order of the colony: once all of the inhabitants of the colony were classified, it was easier for the limited colonial resources to be allocated on a discriminatory basis. Tutsis were allocated the most opportunities for education and administrative positions, while Hutu were treated as second-class citizens, and the Twa were barely allowed anything.32

In addition, the powers of the mwami (king) were curtailed by the loss of juridical supremacy and the right to appoint chiefs. The organization of chiefs was also simplified; traditionally, local governments had a trinity of chiefs including the chief of the pastures (and cattle) who would be a Tutsi, the chief of the land who would often be a Hutu, and the chief of the men (or military) who was typically a Tutsi. The Belgian authorities abolished this trinity and combined their powers into a single chief, who would inevitably be a Tutsi. Thus, the Hutu were deprived of even their limited local power over land.33 With their increased authority as a result of Belgian support, some of the Tutsi chiefs became more despotic in their secure positions of power, so that Hutu anger was focused largely on the Tutsi elites rather than the colonial power.

Therefore, colonial rule made the categories of Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa more racial and less social than they had ever been, and they made them more rigid as well as more polarizing. The Belgian authorities did not invent the terms of Tutsi and Hutu, but they did manage to “take an existing sociopolitical distinction and racialize it.”34 They did not create inequality between the

34 Ibid., 99.
Tutsis and Hutus, for that already existed in the feudal system, but they did “significantly alter the reach of the state, the forms of domination, and the nature of political competition.”

**Independence**

Rwanda and Burundi achieved independence at the same time but with very different outcomes. As we will see, Rwanda underwent a ‘social revolution’ that reversed ethnic domination during the formation of a new republic. In Burundi, popular support for a constitutional monarchy turned sour after the failure of a biethnic anti-colonial movement, leading to instability and requiring a coup to keep the ethnic minority in power.

**Rwanda**

In Rwanda, the period of ethnic violence and political upheaval from 1959 to 1961 which has been called a ‘Social Revolution’, or *muyaga* (‘wind of destruction’) in Kinyarwanda, happened in response to pressures from both high and low. The Belgian colonial authorities had traditionally supported the Rwandan monarchy and favored the Tutsi elites, but in the last few years before independence, the Belgians suddenly switched their favor to the Hutus due to their concern over the leftist anti-colonial sentiments that were coming primarily from the Tutsi elite.

Furthermore, grievances over land tenure, poverty, and political suppression led to the rise of a Hutu movement calling for the end of discrimination and inequality. In the 1950s, there were more literate Hutus than ever before because a new class of Catholic missionaries after World War II believed in education for all of the colonized people. In addition, because the Belgians had switched their favor to the Hutu for administrative service, there were more Hutu in

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36 Newbury, “Ethnicity and the Politics of History in Rwanda."
political positions. These changes fostered a new political consciousness among an educated Hutu elite. In 1957, Hutu leaders issued a declaration called the “Bahutu Manifesto,” which called for equality and an end to the political monopoly of the Tutsi, referring to the Tutsi as foreigners. This manifesto, as well as a Kinyarwanda language newspaper, Kimanyateka (edited by Grégoire Kayibanda, who would go on to become the first elected president), raised consciousness of Hutu oppression particularly among the literate Hutu population.38

In late 1959, acts of anti-Tutsi violence broke out after an assault on a Hutu sub-chief by youth members of the Rwandan National Union, which was the party of the Tutsi elite. In retaliation, Hutu bands of young men killed several hundred Tutsis and burned their homes.39 Unlike later violence that would occur in the following decades, the violence at this time was primarily directed at the powerful and wealthy Tutsi elite, not Tutsi commoners.40

In 1960, as a result of international pressure for greater self-determination and representative rule on the African continent, Belgium agreed to hold democratic municipal elections in Ruanda-Urundi, which resulted in massive victories by Hutu parties. Many Tutsis fled, and small guerrilla attacks were launched from outside the borders, which led to retaliatory killings of thousands of Tutsis.

At this time, the Belgian colonial administration was locked in a fight with the United Nations over the proper way to handle the decolonization of Ruanda-Urundi. Due to the increasing violence in the colony, as well as the Cold War threat of communist influence and the fact that Belgium wanted to prevent another chaotic ‘Congo Crisis’ from happening in Rwanda, Belgium had come to accept the idea that transitioning the colony to a democratically representative independent nation was the most logical way to prevent further bloodshed and

39 Prunier, The Rwanda Crisis, 48.
avoid a communist revolution. However, the UN argued that reconciliation among the different factions in Rwanda and a stable environment should be prerequisites to independence.\footnote{Clark, “Rwanda: Tragic Land of Dual Nationalisms,” 87.}

Hutu leaders did not want to wait. In January 1961, a meeting of all the burgomasters and local council members took place in Gitarama with the tacit support of the Belgian colonial authorities (to the extent that the meeting place was even guarded by a detachment of Belgian paratroopers). At this meeting, which was dominated by representatives from the radically anti-Tutsi PARMEHUTU party (Parti du Mouvement de l’Emancipation du Peuple Hutu), the group voted to abolish the monarchy, proclaim a new republic, and set up a provisional government.\footnote{Ibid.} A referendum later in the year upheld the results of the ‘Gitarama Coup’, and on June 20, 1962, the UN General Assembly voted to accept the partition of Ruanda-Urundi into two separate states. On July 1, 1962, Rwanda and Burundi officially received independence.

Thus, by the date it gained independence, July 1, 1962, Rwanda had undergone a complete reversal of ethnic power relations, with the majority Hutu now in control.

\textit{Burundi}

In Burundi’s pre-colonial era, power had been shared between the \textit{mwami} (king) and the \textit{Baganwa} (noble families), who were divided into two main clans, the \textit{Bezi} and the \textit{Batare}. These two clans resurfaced in the decolonization period as political parties: a royalist and biethnic party called UPRONA (\textit{Union pour le Progrès National}), led by Prince Louis Rwagasore of the \textit{Bezi} clan who was married to a Hutu, and the PDC (\textit{Parti Démocrate Chrétien}) which was controlled by the \textit{Batare}. Thus, initially at least, political competition in the decolonization period was aligned with traditional \textit{Bagwana} rivalries, although UPRONA identified itself as an inclusive
party which welcomed both Tutsi and Hutu. In an unprecedented move, Prince Rwagasore was attempting to unify Burundi’s ethnic groups under an anti-colonial agenda. Initially (before it had accepted the idea of decolonization), the Belgian colonial government supported the PDC, which was not in favor of immediate self-rule and thus was seen as the lesser of two evils.\textsuperscript{43}

The legislative elections of 1961 (the same elections which had been carried by PARMEHUTU in Rwanda) were a massive success for UPRONA in Burundi due to its opposition to colonial rule, inclusion of both Hutus and Tutsis, and alignment with the monarchy, which was still widely supported by many Burundians. Its triumph was to be short-lived, however. In October of 1961, Rwagasore was killed by his opponents, allegedly on the orders of leaders of the PDC with tacit approval of the Belgians.

Meanwhile, events in the neighboring country were not going unnoticed. The establishment of a majority-led Hutu republic in Rwanda reminded the Burundi Hutu that they, too, could be a democratic majority. At the same time, Tutsi refugees from Rwanda entered Burundi with a vengeful mindset.\textsuperscript{44} Thus, politics in Burundi became more ethnically polarized, with both Tutsi and Hutu factions competing for power. Rwagasore’s death was followed by a three year period of instability in Burundi, “with the Crown seeking to play a balancing role between pro-Hutu factions working to use democratic mechanisms to win a larger share of power, and a divided Tutsi community.”\textsuperscript{45} During this time, UPRONA was divided between a younger radical elite with some communist leanings and an older generation of royalists who wanted to retain traditional power structures.

Burundi was granted independence at the same time as Rwanda on July 1, 1962. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Burundi (1962) followed a similar format to the constitution of

\textsuperscript{43} Daley, “Ethnicity and Political Violence in Africa,” 666.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 667.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
the constitutional monarchy of Belgium; some provisions are even identically worded.46 This is not surprising given that Burundi retained its dynastic rule and became a constitutional monarchy after independence. The 1962 constitution provided for a constitutional monarchy with a sharing of power between the king and the parliamentary system, consisting of the prime minister, national assembly, and senate. However, the monarchy would make one last grasp at supremacy. In June of 1963, the Burundi mwami, Mwambutsa IV Bangiricenge, attempted to restore stability by strengthening the role of the Court, declaring it to have full control over the army, the provincial governors, and several of the major ministries of government. The mwami also let it be known that the Court no longer needed the formal investiture of the parliament. By taking these measures, the Crown “contradicted both the traditional norms and the newly established constitutional order,” aggravating both the Baganwa and the new generation of both Tutsi and Hutu politicians.47 The Crown came to be seen by both Tutsi and Hutu as an obstacle to their plans.

After the elections of 1965, the Tutsis were still in control of the National Assembly and the Senate, but after several years of turmoil UPRONA was on shaky ground. In 1966, the Tutsi-Hima, who controlled the army, seized power in a coup d’état which replaced the mwami which his youngest son and formed a new government commanded by Captain Michel Micombero, who declared himself Prime Minister of the new government. The new mwami was only 19 years old, had been educated in Switzerland, and had lived half his life abroad; it was felt that he would be more inclined to have a progressive outlook and would be cooperative with the new

However, his reign was short-lived. After four months, Micombero abolished the monarchy, proclaimed Burundi to be a republic, and declared himself president.\textsuperscript{49}

Paths from decolonization to mass violence

Both Rwanda’s and Burundi’s original constitutions declare the equality of man before the law regardless of origin, race, or religion. However, the post-independence governance of both nations was heavily dictated by ethnic struggles for power, and both countries have suffered through long-term widespread violence.

Rwanda

In the process of gaining independence, Rwanda instituted new norms and processes that seemed to indicate movement toward a more representative and accountable government, including an electoral system, the creation of a National Assembly, and new standards for civil service. However, Rwanda was controlled by only two regimes between independence and the 1994 genocide: Kayibanda (1962-73), who killed or chased out most Tutsi and opposition Hutu politicians, and Habyarimana (1973-94), who ran a military dictatorship. These regimes sought to legitimize themselves by arguing that the true inhabitants of Rwanda, the Hutu, had been subjugated by the “foreign” Tutsis, and that the Hutu government was now a true democratic representation of the majority of the population. Tutsis faced heavy discrimination in such areas as government jobs, education, and the military, as a quota system greatly limited their access.\textsuperscript{50}

In Rwanda, there was a regional aspect to post-independence discontent, as most government positions were held by Hutus from Habyarimana’s district in the north and most

\textsuperscript{49} Prunier, “Burundi: Descent Into Chaos or a Manageable Crisis?”.
\textsuperscript{50} Uvin, “Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda,” 258.
public investments were made there. The 1962 constitution describes a pluralist system in which multiple political parties will participate in elections.\textsuperscript{51} However, the 1978 constitution established a single party system which allowed only the existence of the National Revolutionary Movement for Development, a party dominated by Hutus from Habyarimana’s home region in the north.\textsuperscript{52} The exclusion of the south and center of the country, as well as dissatisfaction with corruption and slow development, generated increasing discontent with Habyarimana’s regime. In 1990, a guerrilla army called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded from Uganda and gained control of some territory in the Northeast, leading to large scale displacement of residents of the area. Meanwhile, international leaders were pressuring the regime to democratize. In 1991, political parties were again permitted, and a coalition government was formed in 1992, but far from improving the situation, these reforms caused radical factions to resort to ethnic prejudice in an attempt to stop change. Extremist groups and political parties carried out violent attacks and mass killings that were directed by politicians, local authorities, and even the police, with the support of the presidency and military. In April of 1994, when Habyarimana was killed in a plane crash, a genocide was sparked which killed around 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus, decimating the population. The RPF resumed fighting and conquered Kigali by July to end the genocide.\textsuperscript{53} A new coalition government was organized by the RPF, and political organizing was banned until 2003, when the first post-war presidential and legislative elections were held.

Rwanda has remained relatively stable since then. Democratic elections were held in 2003, 2008, and 2010. The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda of 2003 provided for multiple political parties and set up a National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. It also reflects the massive refugee exodus that resulted from the genocide, as it allows for dual

\textsuperscript{51} Republic of Rwanda, \textit{Constitution de La Republique Rwandaise} (1962).
\textsuperscript{52} Republic of Rwanda, \textit{Constitution de la Republique Rwandaise} (1978).
\textsuperscript{53} Uvin, “Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda,” 259–61.
nationality and asserts that exiles are automatically given Rwandan nationality if they return to settle in Rwanda.\footnote{Republic of Rwanda, \textit{The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda} (2003).} This applies to both the victim and the \textit{genocidaire} refugees.

\textit{Burundi}

Although Micombero called it a republic, in practice Burundi became more of a military dictatorship. From 1966 to 1993, power was monopolized by three consecutive Tutsi-Hima regimes (Micombero, 1966-82, Bagaza, 1982-87, and Buyoya, 1987-93). All three presidents were from the same village, and changes in leadership seemed to reflect intra-Tutsi rivalries.\footnote{Daley, “Ethnicity and Political Violence in Africa,” 667.} The Tutsi minority held all important government positions, and the UPRONA party “became an instrument of the power elite seeking to use the symbols of the royal past to legitimize itself.” In 1974, Micombero introduced a new constitution which made Burundi a one-party state.\footnote{Republic of Burundi, \textit{Constitution de La Republique Du Burundi}, 1974.} Due to their fear of uprising, the Burundi regimes were much more violently repressive than those in Rwanda. In 1972, in response to Hutu rebellion in the south, the Tutsi-controlled army killed 100,000 to 150,000 Hutus, creating a “climate of permanent mutual fear.”\footnote{Uvin, “Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda,” 258.} This pattern of attack and retaliation was repeated through the 1980s and early 90s.

In Burundi in the late eighties, President Pierre Buyoya began a program of democratization based on national ethnic unity and equality. This was largely in response to the 1988 massacre in which the Tutsi-dominated army, in retaliation for random acts of rural violence, killed tens of thousands of Hutus. Faced with international criticism and a need for external donor aid, Buyoya was compelled to form a ‘government of national unity’ with twelve Hutu and twelve Tutsi ministers, although the departments of justice, foreign affairs, and the interior as well as the police and the army remained under Tutsi control. Buyoya oversaw the
Charter of National Unity of 1991 which called for reconciliation between the Tutsi and the Hutu and mandated a new constitution.\textsuperscript{58} The following year, the 1992 constitution reestablished a multiparty system and forbade ethnically based parties.\textsuperscript{59} Elections were held in 1993 and a Hutu from the Burundian Democratic Front, Melchior Ndayaye, was elected, but he was killed a few months later by army soldiers. This led to a massacre of Tutsis – possibly “a reflection of the anger of the peasant masses at the loss of their first democratically elected Hutu leader” – and when the army moved in to restore order, thousands of Hutus were killed as well.\textsuperscript{60} In all, between 50,000 – 100,000 people were killed and many more were displaced or fled the country. After a long period of negotiations, a convention in late 1994 split ministerial positions between the UPRONA and the Burundian Democratic Front, but it was overthrown in 1996 by a coup led by Buyoya. Both Hutu and Tutsi continued to live in fear of violent reprisals.

Since then, the Burundi government has switched to a strategy of ethnic quotas to attempt to reach fair and equitable representation in government. In an attempt to avoid what had happened in Rwanda in 1994 and to establish a partnership between the Tutsi-led government and the Hutu-led National Assembly, Buyoya oversaw the development of the Transitional National Constitution of 1998 which he deemed an ‘anti-genocide constitution’. Political parties were allowed although heavily restricted, and Tutsi and Hutu factions were each allowed a certain proportion of seats in the National Assembly.\textsuperscript{61} The Constitution of the Republic of Burundi of 2005 continued the ethnically-focused strategy of the 1998 constitution, stipulating a ratio of 60 percent Hutu and 40 percent Tutsi for the National Assembly, with the Senate evenly divided (50-50) between Tutsi and Hutu. Obviously this is not an accurate reflection of the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{60} Uvin, “Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda,” 262.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Republic of Burundi, \textit{Transitional National Constitution (Burundi)}, 1998.
\end{itemize}
demographics of Burundi, but rather an attempt to ensure representation for both sides and to keep the peace.⁶²

**The Legacy of 1959-1962 in Subsequent Conflict**

The role of ethnicity in the violence in each country can be traced through the events of decolonization to conflicts that occurred decades later. In the pre-colonial past, conflicts in the region tended to be among members of the same ethnic group – usually, different Tutsi lineages competing for control of governance. After the colonial era’s political interventions and policies of ethnic favoritism, the 1959 Rwandan Revolution and the political struggles in Burundi from 1959 to 1966 showed that conflict had transformed into political struggles *between* ethnic groups.⁶³

A lineage of prejudice can be traced directly from the decolonization process to later conflicts. The Hutu extremists of 1994 drew parallels between themselves and the Parmehutu party of the late 1950s. In a broadcast of *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLM), a radio station which incited hatred and violence against Tutsis, moderate Hutus, Belgians, and the UN mission UNAMIR, the extremist “Hutu Power” leader Frodouald Karamira said,

*The main common point between that war of UNAR’s members [the Tutsi party that lost the 1959 elections] and this *Inkotanyi* [the 1994 RPF] war is the telling of lies to the population. To lie that you control the town while you do not. To lie that you control the country while you do not. To lie that the armed forces should join you. This is like what they used to say, claiming that the ethnic triad of the masses was united and backed the UNAR while that was not so.*

*What we inherited from Parmehutu is the integrity, the truth, and those were the reasons for which the Revolution took place. The rejection of inequality, of the lie, of pretending to be superior or [inaudible], while the residents want the truth. It is the same thing now except that when the war broke out, most of us thought that it was in connection with the problem of the repatriation of refugees. Is it still the same situation? At the beginning of*  

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the war, the Inkotanyi said that they wanted Habyarimana. Now that they have killed him, what are they fighting for? They are fighting for the power they used to have before 1959 and which they think they can re-conquer.

...That means that the war as it was in 1959 ...Some people wanted to take all the power for themselves, and the masses took it from them. Now, they want to seize power by force as they used to detain it by force. They want to take it from the masses who acquired it according to the truth, to their number and to their fight against inequalities....

Furthermore, after the 1990 attacks, President Habyarimana accused the RPF of “seeking to overthrow the Hutu government and reestablish monarchical rule and Tutsi hegemony – in other words, he accused them of seeking to reverse the results of the 1959 Revolution.”

The actions of the colonial power also had direct correlation to later events. By legitimizing the Hutu revolution in Rwanda, Belgium had justified the use of violence against the Tutsis to gain and keep power. Thus, in the 1990s when the West was hesitant to respond to outbreaks of violence in Rwanda, the Hutu extremist leaders felt they could repeat the massacres of 1959 on a grander scale without foreign intervention.

Above all, it is clear that the extreme ethnic polarization and violence that occurred in Rwanda and Burundi after independence, particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s, was the outcome of tensions stoked during colonial rule, particularly during the decolonization period.

**Reciprocal Influence**

Throughout the post-independence period, events in one country have affected the other. Both Rwanda and Burundi have had massive refugee flows into each other; many Tutsi fled into Burundi to escape Hutu domination, particularly during the early independence years in Rwanda, while Hutu refugees crossed into Rwanda to escape persecution from the Tutsi-led government.

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64 Karamira, *R.T.L.M. Tape 0008*.
and military. These refugee communities frequently fueled ethnic animosity by instigating attacks across the border, or by supporting extremist factions in their new host country.\textsuperscript{66}

The two countries also influenced each other in more ideological ways. An analysis of the sequence of events reveals their reciprocal influence. When the Hutu gained control of the state of Rwanda during the decolonization process, the Tutsi in Burundi observed the loss of minority control and “acted swiftly to preclude a similar fate at home” with the assistance of Tutsi refugees who had migrated from Rwanda.\textsuperscript{67} In the decades following independence, the Tutsi-led government of Burundi has used the fear of a Hutu-led genocide similar to that of 1994, as well as the violence of 1959, to justify its monopolization of power and severe repression of Hutus in Burundi.\textsuperscript{68} Moreover, the widespread massacres of Hutus in Burundi by Tutsi army units, particularly in 1972 and 1988, led to counter-massacres of Tutsis in Rwanda and motivated the Hutu-dominated regime in Rwanda to expel Tutsis from government and schools. As Rene Lemarchand has argued, “for every outburst of anti-Tutsi violence in Rwanda, one can expect a similar explosion of anti-Hutu sentiment in Burundi, and vice versa.”\textsuperscript{69}

Also, other nearby countries in the region have affected, and been affected by, the events in Rwanda and Burundi. For example, in 1990 the Ugandan government mandated an ancestry requirement for Ugandan citizenship which put pressure on the refugee Tutsis living in Uganda to return to Rwanda, thereby indirectly motivating the RPF to invade the country.\textsuperscript{70} After the 1994 genocide, over a million refugees – mostly Hutus fearing retaliation after the RPF took control – flowed across the western border of Rwanda into Congo, settling in large refugee

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 250.
\textsuperscript{68} Daley, “Ethnicity and Political Violence in Africa,” 670.
\textsuperscript{69} Lemarchand, \textit{Burundi}, 1996, 175.
\textsuperscript{70} Mamdani, \textit{When Victims Become Killers}. 
camps that both created a humanitarian crisis and led Rwanda to become involved in the First and Second Congo Wars. Thus, the events in each country cannot be fully understood without looking at both countries as well as a regional analysis.

The form of postcolonial governance

Majority vs. minority rule

In Rwanda, the discourse of the ‘social revolution’ implied that the transfer of power from the traditionally dominant minority to the majority Hutu group was an expression of fairness and democracy. After independence, the notion that the Hutu government was the legitimate representative of the majority, and thus by definition democratic, was used to legitimize the ruling regime’s claim to power. The discrimination of the colonial period was now reversed, as Tutsis were largely excluded from the military, higher education, and state jobs. According to Peter Uvin, this discrimination “was part of the institutional structure of Hutu power – administrative reminders that the Tutsi were different from everyone else and the state was watching out for the interests of the majority Hutu.”

In Burundi, the minority-led Tutsi government downplayed ethnic categorization after independence to promote ‘national unity,’ while internally using the “Hutu majoritarian threat” to justify the exclusion of the Hutu population from roles of power. As the Tutsis have persistently dominated the government since decolonization, the “Hutu’s shared consciousness of being a martyred community gives them their sense of forming a group apart. Their concrete, everyday experience of subordination and oppression serves only to reinforce their awareness of

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71 Uvin, “Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda,” 258.
being the expiatory victims of Tutsi hegemony.”73 The Tutsi-dominated military (*Forces Armées Burundaises*) has essentially acted as a security force for the government.

The different challenges of majority and minority rule are a possible explanation for the divergent outcomes in each country. The Hutu majority regime in Rwanda was plagued by internal strife; Prunier notes that in 1994, “the Rwandan political system was on the verge of collapse and any strong push from the outside world would complete the process.”74 It was likely a case of too many actors competing for a share of power, with challenges coming from both high and low ranks. As a result, the concentrated Tutsi refugee population in Uganda was able to unite under the banner of the RPF and form a formidable force to topple the Hutu government. On the other hand, the Tutsi regime in Burundi, aware of their status as the minority, kept an iron-fisted grip on their power, including the military.75 Due to their insecurity, they closed their ranks and acted quickly to suppress any rebellion. The Hutu refugees who had fled Burundi were geographically dispersed and politically fractured, and thus unable to put together a coherent challenge to the Tutsi government. This can help to explain why the Hutu majority in Rwanda lost power, while the Tutsi minority in Burundi was able to retain power.

*Republic vs. constitutional monarchy*

In order to compare two different strategies for post-colonial forms of governance, we can study the evolution of Rwanda and Burundi from two kingdoms with similar ethnic makeup and political organization into two very different political systems after gaining independence. While Rwanda’s decolonization is an example of social revolution “heavily impregnated with republican ideas and slogans borrowed from the arsenal of the French revolution,” Burundi

74 Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 90.
implemented a neo-traditional structure based on monarchic tradition.\textsuperscript{76} Why was the ‘Rwandan Revolution’ more of a social upheaval, while in Burundi the monarchy survived?

René Lemarchand has suggested that the answer lies in the connection of ethnicity to class. In the case of Rwanda, the clash between Hutu and Tutsi during decolonization was not just an ethnic conflict “but a class struggle as well, in which a traditionally subjugated peasantry revolted against the exactions and privileges of a ruling aristocracy.”\textsuperscript{77} In Rwanda, distinctions between the Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa were more rigid and there were more obstacles to social mobility than there were in Burundi, where the socio-political hierarchy had a higher degree of fluidity and diversity. In Burundi, the major hierarchical division was between the Bagamwa (princes) and the commoners (who were both Tutsi and Hutu), not between the Tutsi and the Hutu themselves. Thus, in Rwanda, there was more social distance between the Tutsi and Hutu while in Burundi there was more flexibility and commonality between the two groups.

Furthermore, the cultural traditions of Rwanda suggest a higher degree of class consciousness and condescension, as the ritual code of the monarchy (ubwiru), dynastic poems (ibisigo), and popular legends all center on a theme of innate Tutsi superiority, which is absent in the traditions of Burundi.\textsuperscript{78}

Colonialism also emphasized and augmented the sense of class difference in the colony. The colonial abolishment of the few avenues that the Hutu had for any social mobility or power, such as the ability to be land chiefs, exacerbated their oppression. Throughout most of the colonial period, the Hutu were treated as though they were subservient.

All of the above factors combined to form a stronger recipe for social upheaval by a more disgruntled Hutu group in Rwanda than in Burundi.

\textsuperscript{76} Lemarchand, “Political Instability in Africa,” 308.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 313.
The differing pre-colonial political structures of Rwanda and Burundi also played a role. The mwami of Rwanda ruled as more of an absolute monarch with a very centralized government, while the mwami of Burundi oversaw a cluster of semi-independent territorial units which were administered by the Baganwa. Thus, when the idea of democratization spread across the African continent, the people of Rwanda were more keen to overthrow their ruler who had a monopoly of power than the people of Burundi who enjoyed some degree of semi-autonomous, localized government. Furthermore, competition among the Baganwa, which peaked at the death of a king, created an atmosphere of instability in which the incumbent dynasty would predictably feel threatened by the possibility of a coup. Rival lineages competing for the throne of Burundi needed to seek the support of both Tutsi and Hutu in order to retain or seize power, which led to a more “conciliating attitude towards the ‘lower orders’” than they might have had otherwise. This contributed to fairly positive relations between the so-called ‘lower orders’ and the dynastic lineages. In Rwanda, on the other hand, there were no Baganwa; the royal succession was more assured and stable and the royal army was very powerful. Thus in Rwanda the ‘lower orders’ did not need to be courted; instead they were subjugated to a strong centralized power.

Lastly, the sequence of events plays a role in the type of government that each country developed. In Rwanda, the Hutu revolution began to gather momentum before independence, at a time when the UN trusteeship agreement was still in place. Rwandan Hutus, thanks largely to First World fears about the spread of communism, were supported by the West in pushing for a republic. However, in Burundi, the Hutu popular movement did not become organized or influential until after Burundi gained independence, so the incumbent monarchy was able to retain control and popular support during the decolonization period. As Lemarchand explains,

79 Ibid., 315.
In Burundi demands for greater popular participation occurred at a time when the basic constitutional order had already been defined and accepted, which means that until then the legitimacy of monarchic institutions had never been seriously called into question. It also means that in coping with these demands the political system was relatively free of the restraining influences of the colonial establishment... For these reasons the Crown was allowed to emerge as the central stabilizing element in the political system.  

Thus the monarchy in Burundi was able to survive the decolonization process without substantial interference from either the Hutu masses or the Western powers.

**Myth and ethnic policy**

A thorough look at ethnic policy in Rwanda and Burundi must consider the role of mythology in ethno-political discourse. During the colonial era, the Tutsi elite in both Rwanda and Burundi actively participated in creating the myth that the Tutsi were a noble race, superior in intelligence and political judgment. For example, missionaries and local Tutsi catechists in Burundi wrote a history of Burundi that endorsed the Tutsi as divine rulers.  

By upholding this myth, Tutsis could ensure that they would remain above the Hutu in the colonial power structure. However, it is only in Burundi that the Tutsi were able to retain power after independence from colonial rule. As a minority party in power, the Tutsi elite in Burundi used another myth to deflect attention away from ethnicity and from their minority status: they promulgated the view that in the precolonial era, the Tutsi lived in harmony with the Hutu and the Twa, and that European colonialism had introduced divisions and strife between the groups. Thus, they argued, ethnic categories should be denied and ethnic terminology should be forbidden.  

Successive Tutsi-led governments in Burundi have denied the existence of ethnic differences. The official policy was that there were only ‘Burundians’, and all were equal before the law. Armed conflicts

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80 Ibid., 326.
were attributed to the actions of ‘extremists’ of no specified ethnicity. Conveniently, the denial of ethnicity downplayed the fact that a majority group (the Hutu) were dominated by a minority group.

The Hutu also used mythology as an ideological tool. In both Rwanda and Burundi, the Hutu promoted themselves as the indigenous people of the region. However, only in Rwanda were in the Hutu successfully able to take control of the state. The Hutu ‘social revolution’ of 1959 in Rwanda did not reject the myth that Tutsis were a distinct race of noble conquerors from a foreign land. Instead, Hutu leaders inverted this myth to argue that the Tutsis were ‘foreign invaders’, and the Hutus were “the only legitimate inhabitants of the country;” therefore, “a Hutu-controlled government was now not only automatically legitimate but also ontologically democratic.” Thus, they argued ethnic categories should be maintained because they allowed for the measurement of progress in moving toward a more democratic and equal society. In addition, the nine Hutu authors of the Bahutu Manifesto of 1957 were adamant that ethnic labels remain on identity papers because they knew that if they were removed and government involvement was strictly based on merit, the Tutsi would continue to be advantaged and thus dominant due to the advantages (including education) that they had enjoyed for a long time. Therefore, in Rwanda, the system of ethnic identity papers that was first introduced in 1926 by the Belgians was maintained by the Rwandan government until 1994.

In Rwanda, Hutus were able to remain in power for decades by stoking the fear that Tutsis might at any time seek to reimpose their exploitative, feudalist rule over the Hutu masses.

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85 Prunier, The Rwanda Crisis, 80.
87 Clark, “Rwanda: Tragic Land of Dual Nationalisms,” 82.
88 Uvin, “Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda,” 258.
This ideology and its resulting paranoia has been cited as a cause for the widespread participation of Hutu peasants in the Rwandan genocide.

Policy Reversal

Ironically, both Rwanda and Burundi switched their stances on ethnicity after the extreme violence of the early 1990s. In Rwanda, the official policy of the current government led by President Paul Kagame is to never acknowledge or even speak of ethnicity. A document produced by the office of the president in 1999 to explain the history of the unity of Rwandans argues that:

_Banyarwanda [Rwandan people] must understand that maintaining themselves prisoners of their belonging to ethnic Hutu, Tutsi and Twa groups is one of the big obstacles standing in their way to development. In fact, to remain prisoner of one’s ethnic group without having anything positive in mind, is like locking oneself up in a cave so that one cannot look outside. What matters is to live together peacefully, work together for the development of their country, so that Banyarwanda can tackle and solve their common problems....*

However, some would argue that the Rwandan government, which was installed by a refugee Tutsi army (the RPF), is effectively still dominated by the Tutsis, and that sweeping ethnicity under the rug will not address the structural causes of the genocide. Resentment and tension may still be simmering under the surface in a state which is controlled by a leader who has been called “ruthless, repressive and intolerant of criticism.”

In stark contrast, Burundi explicitly recognizes ethnic identity as the only way to properly ensure minority rights, and it has institutionalized ethnicity throughout all branches of the government to ensure a balance between the Hutu and the Tutsi. The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of 2000 sought to achieve ethnic balance in government by

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89 Office of the President of The Republic of Rwanda, _The Unity of Rwandans - Before the Colonial Period and Under the Colonial Rule - Under the First Republic._

90 Grant, “Paul Kagame.”
establishing ethnic quotas for state governing bodies. These quotas were maintained in the 2005 Constitution. The intent is to ensure fairness and equity in the government, although the quotas for Tutsi representation (40 percent in the National Assembly and 50 percent in the Senate) are far above the actual percentage of Tutsi in the population (10 – 14 percent). This strategy may prevent one ethnic group from monopolizing the government, but it also ensures that ethnic classification remains at the forefront of national consciousness.

Conclusions

Long before the colonial era, the pre-colonial kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi were structured by socio-political and economic stratification based on ethnic categories. Social inequality and abuses of power were a reality; however, there were no major wars between ethnic groups for centuries. The kingdoms persisted through the colonial period to modern nationhood more or less intact. How did two nations with such unusually strong pre-colonial unity come to see some of the worst internal conflict in independent Africa? I suggest that colonialism had two lasting legacies that changed the perception of ethnicity in this region: one was the development of a corporate view of ethnicity and the other was a valuation placed on indigeneity.

By grouping the entire population of the colony into an oversimplified and rigid classification system, the colonial powers created a corporate view of ethnicity based on generalizations and ideal types. Thus ethnicity in the colonial era was transformed from a means of social differentiation into a tool for stereotyping and discrimination. Most significantly, this also led both Tutsi and Hutu leaders to manipulate ethnicity as a political tool in the movement toward nationhood. In the period of decolonization which was fraught with tension and violence,

91 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi.
one major strategy to mobilize a political following was to emphasize cohesive group identity and to blame any negative events on the members of the other group. Thus, colonial policies emphasizing corporate identity contributed directly to the polarization of ethnic groups in Rwanda and Burundi. In addition, Catharine Newbury has suggested that it is a corporate view of ethnicity that makes inter-ethnic violence so trenchant in these two nations. She has described the genocide in Rwanda as the time “when political action caught up with the rhetoric of corporate views of ethnicity.”

Extremists were able to mobilize mass violence against the opposite ethnic group by attributing the blame for violent attacks to that other ethnic group as a whole, as well as stoking the fear of further threats from that group in its entirety. Thus, ordinary citizens felt threatened by their own neighbors, as all Tutsi were seen as agents of the ‘evil’ RPF. The challenge facing peace and stability in Rwanda today is to prevent another corporate view of ethnicity that could be manifested in the blame of all Hutus for the genocide.

The second legacy of colonialism in the region was that it led to the ranking of which ethnic groups were more or less ‘indigenous’ in the territory. Early in the colonial era of Rwanda and Burundi, the great divide was between the Europeans who were the outsiders and the local populace who were the ‘natives’. By the time of decolonization, the insider/outsider line had been redrawn: the Hutus were positioning themselves as the indigenous population, and accusing the Tutsi of being foreign invaders. As Mahmood Mamdani has suggested, one explanation for the continued violence between Hutus and Tutsis is the “the failure of Rwandan nationalism to transcend the colonial construction of Hutu and Tutsi as native and alien.”

To understand the logic of genocide...it is necessary to think through the political world that colonialism set into motion. This was the world of the settler and the native, a world organized around a binary preoccupation that was as compelling as it was confining. It is in this context that Tutsi, a group with a privileged relationship to power before

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93 Mamdani, When Victims Become Killers, 34.
colonialism, got constructed as a privileged alien settler presence, first by the great nativist revolution of 1959, and then by Hutu Power propaganda after 1990.\textsuperscript{94}

In both Rwanda and Burundi, the masses’ perception of who was the ‘settler’ changed from the European colonizers to the Tutsi population. This was used to justify ethnic war.

Rwanda and Burundi are exceptional cases of African decolonization in that both modern nations were based on existing pre-colonial kingdoms, and in both nations ethnic violence was carried out to the extremes of massacre and genocide. However, Rwanda and Burundi also show that ethnic polarization in Africa existed before the colonial period but that it was exacerbated by colonialism to reach new heights. In the last decade since the adoption of their most recent constitutions, Rwanda and Burundi are now taking opposite strategies to uphold peace and stability. One country has chosen to deny ethnicity and one has chosen to institutionalize it. Time will tell if either approach can achieve the national unity which has so far eluded both countries.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 14.
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