Chapter 5

Ethnic Identification in the Great Lakes Region

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Introduction

Of all the major geographical areas of Africa, the Great Lakes region has paid the highest price in both human lives and material destruction as a result of ethnic conflict. In addition to the genocide of 1994 in Rwanda, the region has witnessed several episodes of inter-ethnic massacres since 1959. No other area of the continent has suffered as much through ethnic identity construction and mobilisation. This chapter attempts to offer a critical assessment of the role of ethnic identity construction and mobilisation as a source of conflict in the Great Lakes region. The history of ethnic identity politics in Rwanda and Burundi since the emergence of party politics in the struggle for independence provides the factual basis for the analysis.[1] The lessons of the Hutu-Tutsi confrontation for identity-based conflicts in Africa will be drawn in the conclusion.

The construction of ethnic identity in Rwanda and Burundi

Rwanda and Burundi are two of the major pre-colonial kingdoms to have survived European conquest and occupation as more or less viable political entities in Africa. From 1898 until Germany's defeat in World War I, the two territories formed part of German East Africa, which also included the mainland portion of present-day Tanzania. Having occupied Rwanda and Burundi in 1916, Belgium in 1921 formally took over their administration as a mandatory power under the League of Nations mandates system, and remained as the administrative authority under the United Nations trusteeship system from 1945 to 1962.

Although Belgium had to submit annual reports on its administration of the trust territory to the United Nations, and also had to deal with periodic inspections from the UN Trusteeship Council, the territory was already administratively annexed to the Belgian Congo in 1925. Thus, from then on until Congolese independence in 1960, Belgium governed the three territorial units as a single colonial entity known as "*Le Congo Belge et le Ruanda-Urundi"*, with a single army, the "*Force Publique*", a single governor-general in Kinshasa, and two lieutenant governors-general—one in Lubumbashi, capital of the settler-dominated Katanga province, and the other in Bujumbura, the capital of Ruanda-Urundi.

Belgian colonialism was characterised by a close working alliance between the state, the Roman Catholic Church and large business enterprises, particularly the mining companies. Born out of the brutal legacy of primitive accumulation by the Leopoldian state and con-cessionary companies,[2] the colonial trinity sought to impose its hegemony through paternalism, white supremacy and administratively enforced ethnic divisions among Africans. The Hutu-Tutsi conflict is in large part a result of the grafting of the colonial ideology of racism and paternalism on the pre-colonial social system of both Rwanda and Burundi.

Unlike the typical ethnic map in Africa, this system was unique in that three social groups identifiable in part by differences in physical characteristics and interrelated through clientship ties, shared the same homeland, language and culture. Although the distinctions in status and occupation tended to go hand in hand with differences in physical characteristics, the social cleavages thus created were never rigid, since they were not based on differences of race, caste or religion. As the whole social order revolved around the institutions of kingdom and the patron-client relations associated with them, proximity and/or service to the royal court and its representatives in the provinces were an overriding factor in an individual's rank, whether the latter was Hutu, Tutsi or Twa.

The Twa are a pygmoid people, who also have important settlements west of the Great Lakes in the equatorial forest of Central Africa, including the nearby Ituri Forest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). As hunter-gatherers, and undoubtedly the first occupants of the

territory before its settlement by the Bantu, they were renowned for their martial skills and musical talents. This explains the important roles they played as soldiers in the king's regiments and as entertaine rs at the royal court. Thus, in spite of the low status and social discrimination that were the lot of the Twa as a group, male individuals could gain titles of nobility and wives of royal blood. In the traditional system, these ennobled Twa became "Tutsi". Today, the Twa are said to represent about 1% of the population in each country, as against 14% for the Tutsi and 85% for the Hutu.[3]

The Hutu occupied an intermediate position on the social pyramid — as agriculturalists and clients of Tutsi chiefs and nobles. They were also recruited into the army and in other areas of public service. Owing perhaps to the fact that they had settled in both countries before their Tutsi compatriots, there were many among t hem who held the position of land chief, one of the many subordinate chiefly roles in the traditional system. Like the Twa, ennobled Hutu men took daughters of Tutsi aristocrats for wives. Intermarriage between Hutu and Tutsi as part of patron -client ties and, more generally, social climbing for the Hutu, has progressively led to the decreasing importance of physical characteristics as a reliable guide for distinguishing between Hutu and Tutsi today.

The 1994 genocide and its aftermath have revived interest in the debate concerning Tutsi origins. Impressed by the social, political and military organisation of ancient Rwanda and Burundi, 19th century European adventurers and missionaries invented "theories" that re sulted in the construction of a cultural mythology about the Tutsi. Among the origins attributed to them by their Western admirers were the following: (1) descendants of ancient Egyptians; (2) black Caucasians of "Hamitic" or "Semitic" origin; (3) survivors from the lost continent of Atlantis; (4) immigrants from Melanesia, Tibet, India or Asia Minor; and (5) according to one highly imaginative Catholic priest, people who came out of the Garden of Eden. Of all these labels, it was the *Hamitic* myth that stood out, partly because of its importance in colonial anthropology, and partly because of its systematisation and popularisation by a Rwandan Catholic priest, Alexis Kagame.[4]

Generally, the Tutsi were cattle owners, many of whom were associated with the royal court and the territorial expansion of its power throughout the land. Obviously, all the Tutsi were not of noble rank — there were poor and ordinary Tutsi as well—and all cattle owners were not Tutsi. In her study of Kinyaga, a peripheral region in southwestern Rwanda, Catharine Newbury points out that cattle owners who would have been considered Tutsi in central Rwanda, had arrived in Kinyaga during the 18th century. For the people of Kinyaga, however, being "Tutsi" was "associated with central government power and institutions, and particularly with the exactions of chiefs backed by central government." With the intensification of oppression under colonialism, ethnic categories came to be even more rigidly defined, while the disadvantages of being Hutu and the advantages of being Tutsi increased significantly. Passing from one ethnic category to the other was not impossible, but over time it became exceedingly difficult and, consequently, very rare.

According to René Lemarchand, "ethnic identities are not pure invention" and the social categories *Hutu* and *Tutsi* "are not figments of the colonial imagination." This is to say that although these identities have been invested with a normative load which they did not have before colonialism, the potential for ethnic mobilisation and conflict was inherent in the historically grounded relations of inequality within the precolonial social order. What the colonial system did was to take advantage of these relations by making them more rigid, and then to help intensify the antagonism between the privileged Tutsi and the disadvantaged Hutu. The Belgian colonialists effectively *ended the internal dynamic of social equilibrium* by which individuals could pass from one social category to the other, including the mechanism of ennoblement—through administrative acts and practices such as the issuance of identity cards with ethnic labels and preferential treatment for the Tutsi with respect to education, and through white-collar jobs and chiefly positions in local colonial administration.

Having served as faithful auxiliaries of the colonial order for more than 30 years, the Tutsi *elite* became expendable when its members began to advocate self-determination and independence in the 1950s. The

missionaries, colonial anthropologists and other Belgian ideologues who had created the myth of Tutsi superiority, suddenly found it expedient to portray the Tutsi as an aristocracy of alien origins that should relinquish power to the oppressed Hutu indigenous majority. Although there is no evidence of systematic violence between Tutsi and Hutu during the pre-colonial period, this ideological reconstruction of their history sought to depict them as antagonistic groups with centuries-old enmities. Unfortunately, just as the old myth of Tutsi superiority had fallen on receptive ears among the Tutsi *elíte*, the new myth of Hutu as "slaves in need of emancipation" was warmly embraced by the rising Hutu counter-*elite* in its quest for the social advantages to which Hutu intellectuals felt entitled.

The process of ethnic identity construction and mobilisation thus gave rise to a dichotomous vision of society that had not existed in pre-colonial Rwanda and Burundi. If the Tutsi, like the Twa, have non-Bantu origins, the same cannot be said of the political and cultural institutions within which relations between all three groups were articulated. It is so that the monarchy that governed them, the cultural matrix in which they lived, and the language they spoke well, were all of Bantu creation and indigenous to the Great Lakes region. It is for this reason that contemporary scholarship maintains that whatever their past origins might be, the Tutsi are a Bantu people by virtue of the fact that they share a common Bantu culture with the Hutu, with whom they speak a common Bantu language, *Kinyarwanda* or *Kirundi*, depending on the country.

However, this commonality of language and culture has failed to stem the rise of an ethnic consciousness nurtured in the competition for power and privilege between Hutu and Tutsi *elites*, and to put an end to a catastrophic process of ethnic mobilisation involving "*final solution*" scenarios of genocide in both Rwanda and Burundi. It is to that history of ethnic identity politics as a source of conflict in each of these countries that we now turn.

Ethnic conflict and genocide in Rwanda

The rise of Hutu ethnic consciousness as a political force in Rwanda resulted from the emergence of a Hutu counter-*elite* in the midst of a divorce between the colonialists and their erstwhile Tutsi allies in the 1950s. The Roman Catholic Church played a key role in this process, as the new sympathies of the white clergy for the Hutu made the Church shift its support from the Tutsi *elite* to the Hutu, whom it sought to help build a new middle class. In the context of the then ongoing struggle for decolonisation and independence, economic and social advancement for Africans ultimately implied the conquest of political power.

The flexing of Hutu political muscle began in earnest in 1957. On 24 March, in anticipation of an inspection visit by the UN Trusteeship Council, nine Hutu intellectuals published a "*Hutu manifesto*" in which they denounced a political, economic and social monopoly by the Tutsi, and rejected the ideal of abolishing ethnic labels on identity papers. "Their suppression", they argue, "runs the risk of *preventing the statistical law to account for the reality of the facts*". This is the intellectual origin of the idea of identifying democracy and majority rule with Hutu rule. Ethnically based political mobilisation for attaining this goal was launched in June and November of 1957, through the creation of two Hutu political parties—the *Mouvement social muhutu* (MSM, or Hutu Social Movement), led by a Catholic intellectual, Grégoire Kayibanda; and the *Association pour la promotion sociale de la masse* (APROSOMA, or Association for Mass Social Promotion), established by a businessman, Joseph Gitera.

Of the two men it was Kayibanda who succeeded in mobilising the masses for fulfilling the dream of a Hutu republic. Between 1952 and 1956, he served as secretary of the *Amitiés Belgo-Congolaises*, the discussion circles of Europeans and educated Africans known as the *évolués,* and as editor of a Catholic monthly, *L'Ami*. In 1956, he became editor of an influential Catholic weekly, *Kinyamateka*, and also served as private secretary to Monsignor André Perraudin, the Swiss vicar apostolic of Rwanda. With strong support from the Roman Catholic Church and Belgian colonial authorities, Kayibanda became a major opponent of Tutsi

royalists, who organised themselves in 1959 under the banner of a political party, the *Union nationale rwandaise* (UNAR, or Rwandan National Union). Furthermore in 1959 Kayibanda renamed the MSM as *Mouvement démocratique rwandais/Parti du mouvement de l'émancipation hutu* (MDR-PARMEHUTU, or Rwandan Democratic Movement/Party for the Emancipation of the Hutu).

Before these and other parties were created in August-September 1959, signs of the colonial order's complicity in anti-Tutsi activities were evident in the support that individuals like Kayibanda enjoyed in official and church circles. In February of that year, the Lenten pastoral of Monsignor Perraudin on charity, in which he pleaded for social justice, was widely interpreted as a clear political choice in favor of the Hutu. With the Belgian Congo moving towards independence and the future of Rwanda and Burundi being considered in Brussels and at the United Nations in New York, the crystallisation of ethnic tensions intensified unrelentingly. In this context, the death on 25 July 1959, under mysterious circumstances, of Mwami Mutara Rudahigwa,[5] and the controversial choice of Kigeri Ndahidurwa as his successor to the Rwandan throne by conservative Tutsi elements, acted as a catalyst in the Hutu-Tutsi conflict.

The explosion came in November 1959, with the Hutu uprising generally known as the "Rwandan Revolution". This was a peculiar "revolution" in that it took place under colonialism and yet left the basic colonial or white power structure intact. Moreover, it happened not only under the watch of colonial officials, but also with their tacit consent and support. For example, it is reported that "Belgian authorities were very partial in the favor of the Hutu, letting them burn Tutsi houses without intervening." Furthermore, the colonial authorities rewarded Hutu violence by installing mostly Hutu administrators in the communes, to replace the Tutsi chiefs and administrators who had either been killed or fled.

To the people of Rwanda the events of November 1959 were truly revolutionary, in the sense that they ultimately resulted in the overthrow of the monarchy and the transfer of political power from one ethnic group to the other. In Kinyarwanda, what happened is referred to as the "*muyaga*", a word normally used to describe a strong but variable wind, with

unpredictable and destructive gusts. Although independence came nearly three years later, on 1 July 1962, the basic framework of the Hutu republic was already being established in 1959. Another major consequence of the *muyaga* was the large number of refugees and internally displaced persons it generated. At the time of independence, the number of refugees in the neighbouring countries and abroad was estimated at about 120 000.

The number of refugees continued to grow, due to both natural increase and new outflows resulting from episodic outbursts of inter-ethnic violence and the politics of exclusion practised by both Kayibanda and his successor, Juvénal Habyarimana. A career army officer who had quit medical school at Lovanium University in Kinshasa to enrol in the newly created Rwandan army in 1960, Habyarimana overthrew President Kayibanda in 1973 and subsequently established a military and one-party dictatorship. In over 20 years of personal rule, he steadfastly refused to allow Tutsi refugees to return home. In August 1988, a world congress of the Tutsi diaspora was held in Washington, DC, with delegates adopting very strong resolutions on the "right of return". Meanwhile, the Tutsi diaspora in Uganda had gained positions of responsibility and influence in Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA), after having helped the latter come to power in Kampala in January 1986. Under the leadership of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), the group launched a military offensive in October 1990, to overthrow the Habyarimana regime. France, Belgium and Mobutu's Zaire came to the dictator's rescue and prevented an RPF victory.

Under the auspices of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and sub-regional actors, negotiations—over two years—between Habyarimana's government and the RPF—to end the civil war, led to the signing of the Arusha accords in 1993. These included the Arusha Peace Agreement of 4 August 1993, a cease-fire agreement, and six protocols on a variety of subjects, including the rule of law, power sharing, integration of the two armed forces, repatriation of refugees and resettlement of displaced persons. In spite of having signed these accords, President Habyarimana did his best to undermine them, and thus played into the hands of Hutu extremists bent on exterminating the Tutsi.

The shooting down of Habyariman's plane on 6 April 1994 gave these extremists the opportunity they needed to unleash their genocidal machine against the Tutsi and the Hutu moderates who were campaigning for democratisation and national reconciliation. Planned in advance by advocates of *Hutu Power,* which involved the President's wife and her brothers, the genocide was carried out with military precision over a three-month period, with some 800 000 to one million people killed. With the United Nations and the entire world looking on without doing anything to stop it, the holocaust ended only in the wake of the victory of the RPF over Habyarimana's army, the *Forces armées rwandaises* (FAR).

Once the RPF victory seemed certain, France obtained UN approval for a supposedly "humanitarian intervention" in Rwanda. If we must acknowledge the good deeds of its soldiers in caring for and burying cholera victims in Kivu, it is imperative to affirm that there was nothing humanitarian in France's intent, given its own role as an accessory to crime in Rwanda. As Jean-François Médard, a renowned French Africanist, told *Newsweek* magasine in 1994, French policy in Africa was "erratic and criminal", as Paris operated "not on principle, but on cynicism." The cynicism was evident in that having supported the Habyarimana regime and trained its genocidal machine, including the extremist Hutu *Interahamue* militia, the French were more anxious to erase the traces of their own involvement in Rwanda by rescuing their former allies, than in helping the victims of genocide inside the country. In April the French had evacuated regime dignitaries, including known organisers of the genocide, while even Tutsi employees of the French Embassy were left behind to be killed. Through the *Opération Turquoise* (June-August 1994), the French succeeded in helping the FAR and the *Interahamue* escape into the Congo with virtually all of the weapons at their disposal. This allowed these groups to regroup for purposes of reconquering Rwanda and finishing off their genocidal enterprise.

The genociders then used the refugee camps in Kivu to raid Rwanda on a regular basis, and to organise the slaughter of Tutsi citizens and residents of the Congo. For two and a half years, the Mobutu-Kengo regime and the international community watched and did nothing to stop

this, while the UN and the donor community continued to be more preoccupied with feeding the refugees than trying to remove the killers among them and finding a lasting solution to the whole crisis.

In October 1996 the RPF regime took the initiative to destroy the UNHCR refugee camps in Kivu and, consequently, the bases of the FAR and *Interahamue* in the Congo. The victorious march of Laurent-Désiré Kabila, and his *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo* (AFDL), could not have taken place without the RPF drive against the genociders. The alleged massacres of Hutu non-combatants (old men, women and children) during the seven-month war against the Mobutu regime remain a hotly debated subject, whose resolution should provide answers with respect to the prospects for peace and national reconciliation in Rwanda.

Ethnicity and genocidal violence in Burundi

As mentioned earlier, the roots of the Hutu-Tutsi confrontation in both Rwanda and Burundi are to be found in the ideological reconstruction of history by Christian missionaries and colonial anthropologists, as well as in its appropriation by Africans in the competition for power and privilege between Tutsi and Hutu *elites*. Rwandans and Burundians insist, and with reason, that theirs are two separate countries, with different social realities, and should therefore not be confused as one and the same entity. However, given the similarity in the ethnic make-up as well as in ethnic identity construction and mobilisation, it is hard to imagine that events in one country would not affect developments in the other. In fact, every major event, from the *muyaga* of 1959 to the genocide of 1994 in Rwanda, and from the inter-ethnic massacres of 1972 to those of 1993 in Burundi, has had a tremendous mutual impact across the border in the neighbouring country.

Unlike Rwanda, where the Tutsi-dominated monarchy was overthrown in 1959, Burundi achieved independence in 1962—as a constitutional monarchy—with Mwami Mwambutsa IV as head of state. At the same time, the impact of the Hutu revolution in Rwanda was greatly felt there. According to Lemarchand, "no other event did more to sharpen

the edges of ethnic hatreds in Burundi" at that time, since the respective positions of Hutu and Tutsi leaders were by and large shaped by what happened in Rwanda.

In the months following independence, a number of Hutu politicians began to feel the contagion of republican ideas. By identifying their political aims and aspirations with their Rwandan kinsmen, they imputed to the Tutsi of Burundi hegemonic motives that the Tutsi did not at first possess, but to which they eventually gave a substance of truth. Conversely, many Tutsi saw in the Rwanda upheaval an ominous prefiguration of their own destinies. A kind of self-fulfilling prophecy was thus set in motion: by giving the Burundi situation a false definition to begin with, Hutu and Tutsi politicians evoked a new set of attitudes among each other, which made their originally false imputations true.

Much of the history of Burundi in the last 36 years has consisted of a succession of events whose practical outcome seems to underscore this prophecy. However, such a trajectory was not inevitable, inasmuch as Burundi had a chance of avoiding ethnically based political polarisation à la Rwanda. Unlike Rwanda, political life there was not originally ordered along ethnic lines, when party politics began in the late 1950s. The most serious crisis to mark the country on the eve of independence, was the assassination on 13 October 1961 of Prince Louis Rwagasore. Eldest son of Mwami Mwambutsa, and one of the founding fathers of the major nationalist party, *Parti de l'union et du progrès national* (UPRONA, or Party of Unity and National Progress), Prince Rwagasore was equally popular among Hutu and Tutsi. As Prime Minister designate after his party had won the legislative elections of September 1961, he was assassinated in a conflict between two *Ganwa* princely families dating back to the 19th century.[6] If there is one leader who embodied national unity, and who had the credibility needed to steer Burundi away from the Rwanda model, it was Prince Rwagasore.[7]

The next four years were to witness the heightening of ethnic tensions in the context of continuing turmoil in Rwanda, the Congo crisis, and the geopolitical considerations of the cold war associated with it. The influx of Tutsi refugees from Rwanda kept alive the seduction of the Rwanda model

for some Hutu leaders, while solidifying opposition to it among the Tutsi *elite*. The turning point came in 1965, with the assassination in January of Prime Minister Pierre Ngendandumwe, a Hutu; the attempted *coup d'état* by Hutu officers, and its bitter aftermath.

Like Rwagasore, Ngendandumwe exemplified the political will among some Tutsi and Hutu intellectuals to work together for the good of the country. The first Hutu university graduate in Burundi, he was Rwagasore's right hand man in UPRONA and deputy prime minister. A year after Rwagasore's death, he succeeded the latter's brother-in-law, André Muhirwa, as prime minister. After two years in power, he was assassinated by a Rwandan Tutsi refugee employed in the accounting section of the US Embassy in Bujumbura. The assailant, who was obviously a hired gun, had no difficulty escaping, to live as a free person in Uganda. The assassination was perceived as an ethnically inspired political liquidation, and taken by most of the Hutu as conclusive proof that the Tutsi did not trust or want them in positions of power in Burundi.

This position was reinforced by the crises that followed. In the wake of Ngendandumwe's assassination, the legislative elections of May 1965 were a kind of ethnic plebiscite. Of the total of 33 seats in the National Assembly, Hutu politicians won 23 and expected therefore to lead the government. The Crown decided otherwise, with Mwami Mwambutsa appointing Léopold Biha, a long time protégé of the royal court, as prime minister. The resulting impasse put the whole parliamentary system on trial: for the Tutsi minority, the system excluded them from meaningful political participation, while for the Hutu majority, its manipulation by the Crown and the Tutsi elite, pointed to the latter's rejection of the legitimacy of the ballot box. A group of Hutu military officers then attempted a *coup d'état* on 19 October 1965. Its failure resulted not only in extensive purges in the army and the *gendarmerie*, but also in the physical elimination of nearly all prominent Hutu leaders, and the establishment of an exclusive monopoly of power by the Tutsi. All of the inter-ethnic massacres since then, were related to the determination of some Tutsi elements to maintain this monopoly at all costs, and that of Hutu politicians, to destroy it. For

some, maintaining or destroying this monopoly required the use of all means necessary, including genocide.

The genocidal character of inter-ethnic violence in Burundi was clearly evident in the momentous events of 1972. In April a Hutu rebellion broke out in the southern part of the country, with several thousand Tutsi men, women and children massacred. The repression by the Tutsi power structure was merciless. The army, backed up by the youth branch of the ruling single party, went after Hutu intellectuals and other middle class elements, including high school students, who were targeted on the assumption that they were likely to join the middle class in the future. Moderate Tutsi elements were also targeted, either as part of intra-Tutsi rivalries, or because they were seen as threatening the maintenance of Tutsi hegemony. Estimates of people killed—in what observers have called a "selective genocide"—range from 100 000 to 350 000, in a population of 3 to 4 million people. What happened in 1972 was repeated on a smaller scale in 1988 in the north, as the army's response to killings of Tutsi by Hutu peasants resulted in over 10 000 people killed.[8]

The 1988 inter-ethnic massacres occurred at a time when a new wind of change was beginning to sweep across the continent. In Burundi itself, Major Pierre Buyoya had staged a *coup d'état* against President Jean-Baptiste Bagaza in 1987. He designated a Hutu prime minister, in an effort to move towards power sharing and national reconciliation, and went forward with the plan to liberalise the political system. In spite of a new episode of inter-ethnic massacres in November 1991, resulting from a terrorist attack by an extremist Hutu exile group—the *Parti pour la libération du peuple hutu* (PALIPEHUTU, or Party for the Liberation of Hutu People)—the democratisation process went ahead until general elections in June 1993. The elections were won by a new political party, the *Front pour la démocratie au Burundi* (FRODEBU, or Front for Democracy in Burundi). Its Hutu leader, Melchior Ndadaye, became Burundi's first democratically elected president.

A national party open to all groups, FRODEBU was perceived as being essentially a Hutu political party. According to Christian Thibon, its social basis was made up mostly of the lower stratum of the Hutu middle

class, particularly school teachers, lower-level civil servants and the lowest ranks in the military (corporals and enlisted men). These are groups which had been frustrated by the lack of promotion and social advancement due to the Tutsi-imposed social closure. In the rural areas, these groups had a real constituency amongst the peasantry, particularly among younger elements. With so many Hutu professionals and intellectuals already eliminated in genocidal violence, many of Ndadaye's collaborators came from the lower middle class. Consequently, in spite of President Ndadaye's attempt to reassure everyone that he was committed to national reconciliation, a proportion of both the army and the Tutsi *elite* did not trust him, seeing his administration as representing a potential shift of political control from the Tutsi to the Hutu. Ndadaye and many of his associates were assassinated on 21 October 1993, 100 days after taking office.

A new wave of inter-ethnic massacres followed. Hutu wrath was directed not only at the Tutsi, but also at Hutu members of the UPRONA. As usual, the army's intervention to protect the Tutsi resulted in the extermination of thousands of people and the generation of over 500 000 refugees and 100 000 internally displaced persons. After nearly three years of a confused political situation—but one marked by an intensifying armed conflict between the Tutsi-controlled army and exiled Hutu movements like PALIPEHUTU and the *Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie* (CNDD, or National Council for the Defense of Democracy)—Major Buyoya staged another *coup d'état* in July 1996. Having lost the presidential election of 1993 to Ndadaye, he was then negotiating with FRODEBU and other parties to move the country forward on the path of power-sharing and national reconciliation.

Conclusion

The Hutu-Tutsi conflict is an excellent example of how identities are constructed and manipulated in particular circumstances, with deadly results in the long run if the social divide is allowed to deepen and fester. As a particularly violent form of social polarisation and antagonism, it belongs to a type of conflict based on racial, regional, ethnic, religious or

communal ties. *Identity-based conflicts*, as they are commonly known, may involve the struggle for physical space as well as social well-being, and have to do with both the biological needs for food, shelter and clothing, and the socio-psychological needs for identity, security, recognition, participation and autonomy. Ignoring or suppressing such basic human needs is likely to give rise to violent conflicts.[9]

The question that readily comes to mind, is why violent conflicts should result from antagonism between groups based on differences in identity. What is it about communal, ethnic, racial, regional or religious differences that drives human beings to kill and maim each other? Contrary to the modernisation theory's thesis of primordial sentiments, identity-based conflicts are not necessarily a function of ancient enmities. Since identities are *historically constructed*, they may shift with changing circumstances. Moreover, there is a lot of social science evidence that identity ties and sentiments are situational, which is to say that their intensity varies according to circumstances. In situations of relative security, an individual or a group's identity is not a matter of particular concern. It is when a threat arises, or is perceived to be such—aimed against a group's identity or its very existence because of that identity—that loyalty to, and solidarity with fellow group members becomes paramount.

In Africa many of the identities behind present-day ethnic conflicts arose or acquired their specific saliency during the colonial period. Often, as in the case of Rwanda and Burundi, ethnic identity construction and mobilisation were tied to both the colonial strategy of "divide and rule", and intra-*elite* competition for status, wealth and power among educated Africans. In the postwar struggle for social advancement first, and decolonisation and independence later on, the ability of the *évolués to* score points against their colonial masters depended greatly on how well they could mobilise the masses behind their social and political demands. Getting the support of the urban masses for these demands required very little effort, as wage workers and the *lumpen-proletariat* did interact with their more educated kith and kin, through ethnically based mutual aid associations. The more difficult task was ethnic consciousness raising in

the countryside, which often required the dispatching of "ethnic missionaries" to spread the gospel of group solidarity and social upliftment in the rural homeland.

In Rwanda and Burundi, where the rival ethnic groups do not have separate homelands, consciousness raising occurs as armed propaganda, as individuals are challenged to prove their ethnic "worth" in deeds—by killing the enemy. By this token, the conflict goes beyond communal violence over economic and social space, which involves the destruction of crops, livestock and dwellings, to ethnic cleansing and, finally group extermination. The genocide ideology inherent in this process is the logical conclusion of the survival strategy born out of real or perceived threats to group identity and security. The logic here is a simple one: you either eliminate "the other"—or take the risk of being eliminated by them. The other is also demonised as the incarnation of all evil, and animalised by portraying them as "insects", "cockroaches" or other creatures. Once dehumanised in this way, the hated group can be exterminated without the risk of this odious act incurring any moral problems for its perpetrators.

The situational character of identity-based conflicts calls for greater attention to the economic and political crises that exacerbate them. For these conflicts are ultimately related to the nature and role of the state in post-colonial Africa, including the state's role in the economy, and the manner in which state power is exercised. In other words, their root causes are to be found in the economic sphere and in governance.

In the four decades of independence the economic and social structures that reproduce poverty have remained intact. The economic conditions deteriorated greatly during the 1980s, due to unfavourable terms of trade, increase in real interest rates on the external debt, reduced inflow of resources, and massive capital outflows. This led to declines in domestic investment and government consumption, resulting in a decrease in the productive capacity and growth potential of African economies, as well as the neglect of social and economic services such as roads, energy, health-care facilities, education, research, agricultural extension and credit programmes. The consequences of all this today include an unfavourable adjustment in the incomes of most social groups. The rural areas have

experienced declines in real incomes and serious deterioration in the availability of public services and consumer goods. In the urban sector, wage and salary workers have been hardest hit by both retrenchment and a more hostile work environment in which private employers and the state alike are taking advantage of massive unemployment to impose low wages and unsatisfactory working conditions.

In the political sphere the state operates mostly as the "property" of those who hold political power and their entourage, rather than as an impartial system of institutions serving the general interest. This "privatisation" of the state, together with the resulting failure to fulfil the people's aspirations for democracy and economic development, has led to the erosion of its legitimacy and a reduced capacity for good governance. The crisis of the state thus creates an environment in which violent conflicts are likely to thrive. Whereas the breakdown of state authority creates a power vacuum that different political forces may use to advance their own agendas, the erosion of state legitimacy often compels authoritarian rulers to unleash a violent backlash against the forces advocating democratic change. When the power holders themselves are defined primarily as regionally or ethnically based groups, political exclusion becomes a major ground for fighting the system. This was the case for the Tutsi minority in Rwanda until 1994, and for the Hutu majority in Burundi since independence, except for the 100 days of the Ndadaye presidency.

Thus, the very nature of the state as a regionally, or, in this case, an ethnically defined monopoly of power, is a major factor in such identity based conflict. Since the state is still the primary avenue of wealth accumulation and the principal employer of wage labour in most African countries, maintaining access to the state and the resources it controls is a major goal for individuals and social groups. As John Markakis has pointed out in his study of conflict in the Horn of Africa, access to the state and state-controlled resources is the bone of contention in class and ethnic conflicts in Africa. With the state as a "prise", the parties to the conflict engage in a deadly zero-sum game, and resort to violence as the most effective means for winning and keeping the prise.

However, the use of violence leads to the destruction of existing capacity and to the further erosion of state legitimacy among the losers, who are likely to be excluded from power and state-controlled resources. Violent conflicts have unleashed untold suffering on millions of innocent men, women and children, and entailed heavy costs for the countries involved as well as their neighbours, who must cope with the problem of refugees. The destruction of the natural environment, the physical infrastructure and invaluable social services, has further reduced the capacity of the state and the economy to meet the most basic human needs. A major "cause" of conflict, poverty is also its inevitable result.

For Africa, the major lesson of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict in particular, and identity-based conflicts in general, is to avoid the politics of exclusion. Given the relatively low level of economic and social development in the continent, finding innovative methods of power sharing and ensuring access to the state and state-controlled resources for all relevant social forces, are categorical imperatives for peace and security in the foreseeable future. Patriotic and Pan-African forces should do their utmost to promote national reconciliation and to help prevent or resolve violent conflicts. Containing identity-based conflicts within the arena of non-violent political competition is a necessary condition for building multi-ethnic political coalitions and strengthening the institutional foundations of economic recovery and good governance.

Notes

[1] For a brief analysis of the repercussions of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the related issues of the *Banyarwanda* and *Banyamulenge* in North and South Kivu, see Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1996. "Africa Focus: Conflict in Eastern Zaire", *Africa Insight*, Vol. 26, No. 43, pp. 392-394.

[2] Between 1885 and 1908, the Congo was theoretically an independent country, the Congo Free State, under the rule of King Léopold II of the Belgians. The only freedom that existed then was for Léopold and his agents to plunder the

country as they saw fit, while committing, in the process, atrocities that were denounced internationally as crimes against humanity.

[3] Widely accepted as such, th ese population estimates are suspect, because of their fixed and unchanging nature.

[4] On Alexis Kagame and his influence as a historian of ancient Rwanda , see Catharine Newbury. 1988. *The Cohesion of Oppression: Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda, 1860-1960*. New York: Columbia University Press. Note 13, pp. 247-248; Prunier, 1977, pp. 52-53.

[5] *Mwami* or *umwami* is the commonly used word for king in most of the traditional political systems of the Great Lakes region.

[6] See Christian Thibon, "Les origines historiques de la violence politique au Burundi," in André Guichaoua (Ed.) 1995. *Les crises politiques au Burundi et au Rwanda (1993-1994)*. Lille: Université de Lille 1, p. 56. According to Lemarchand (*Burundi*, p. 10), the *ganwa* or ruling princely oligarchy originally formed "a separate ethnic entity different from both Hutu and Tutsi". Under the colonial system, however, the group became identified with the Tutsi.

[7] There seems to be universal agreement on this point among Burundian intellectuals and foreign experts. See Lemarchand, *Burundi*, p. 26; Sebudandi and Richard, *Le drame burundais*, p. 173; Thibon, "Les origines historiques", p. 56.

[8] Estimates range from 5 000 to 15 000 people killed. For a detailed analysis of the differences between 1972 and 1988, see Lemarchand, *Burundi,* pp. 118-130.

[9] On the socio-psychological dimension of identity -based conflicts, see Okwudiba Nnoli, 1989. *Ethnic Politics in Africa.* Apapa, Lagos: AAPS Books, pp. 17-20.

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