

# Orientalism in Rwanda



Marco van der Heijden  
Bachelor Thesis Human Geography  
Faculteit der Managementwetenschappen  
Radboud University Nijmegen  
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*'For there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away'*

Edward Said, Orientalism

*Colophon*

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Faculteit der Managementwetenschappen

*Author*

Marco van der Heijden  
Student number 4004515  
[c.w.vanderheijden@student.ru.nl](mailto:c.w.vanderheijden@student.ru.nl)

*Supervisor*

Dr. Olivier Kramersch  
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## Summary

In this thesis research is conducted regarding the colonial history of Rwanda. The purpose is to get more insight into the legacy of European colonial rule and to determine whether it is possible to connect it with post-colonial violence. Specifically: the 1994 genocide. With the help of Edward Said's elaborate theory of Orientalism the ideology that underpinned colonial rule in Rwanda is uncovered and its content analyzed.

Together these so-called 'imaginary geographies' represent the then-dominant ideas, theories and views people in Europe had of Rwanda and its inhabitants. This thesis will look into what these views were and how they were subsequently put into practice through successive colonial policies. Finally, these views and policies are related to the outbreak of post-colonial violence and genocide in order to determine the level of causality between them.

The order of this thesis is as follows. First, a brief overview will be given of Rwanda's colonial history, as well as the pre-colonial and post-colonial period. Chapter four covers the imaginary geographies of European colonialism, analyzing its creation, content and implementation. Following this, the results from chapter four will be related to post-colonialism and violence. Finally, chapter six offers a conclusion of this thesis and its research questions.



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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In recent years the name Rwanda has become synonymous with ethnic violence, genocide and the collective failure of the international community. However, for most of its modern history the tiny African nation, often dubbed as the 'Land of a Thousand Hills', has been practically unknown to the outside world. After being colonized by Europeans during the so-called 'Scramble for Africa' during the age of High Imperialism (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century) Rwanda became a remote and insignificant outpost attached to much larger European colonial possessions, respectively: German East-Africa (1894-1916), and Belgian Congo (1925-1962). In fact, most literature dealing with the colonial history of Sub-Saharan Africa does not even mention Rwanda.

It was not until the outbreak of ethnic violence in the decades following independence that Rwanda came into the picture. Since the 1994 genocide its national history has come under increasing scrutiny. Many historians have attributed the genocide to the legacy of European colonialism. Especially the Belgian policy of favouring the Tutsi minority over the Hutu majority (and vice versa later on) leading to resentment among the latter group, is generally seen to have contributed to the violence.

However, exactly how big the imprint was that colonialism left behind and to what extent ethnic distinctions were imposed by the Belgians or already existed in pre-colonial times, remains the topic of debate. It is widely acknowledged that many other important factors contributed to the genocide, not in the least place: overpopulation, the economic turmoil following the worldwide decline of coffee prices, ethnic violence between Hutus and Tutsis in neighbouring Burundi, and the ongoing civil war with the (mostly Tutsi) army of exiled Rwandans invading from Uganda.

What makes this particular case so interesting? Rwanda was not invented as a political entity, unlike most of the European colonies in Africa and elsewhere in the world. It already existed as a monarchy in pre-colonial times with more or less the same national borders as it holds today. Also, both the German and Belgian colonial administrations preferred a system of (more or less) indirect rule over direct rule in Rwanda – again in contrast to most of the colonial world – leaving the existing political structure largely intact.

Yet, of all the former European colonial possessions it was in this 'model colony' that post-colonial violence was the most devastating. In a time span of roughly three

months more than 800.000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu were murdered in a planned extermination campaign designed to wipe out all the remaining Tutsi in Rwanda.

The intensity and scale of the 1994 killings remain almost unprecedented in modern times. Unlike the Holocaust and other major genocides of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the mass murder of civilians in Rwanda did not take place in remote terrains or enclosed sites far removed from the general public. Instead, they were carried out in the open: on the streets of ordinary towns and villages, and in houses, schools and churches. Neither were they instigated and carried out entirely by soldiers and government officials. The general public in Rwanda was not only aware of the killings, but actively participated in them. Among the perpetrators were ordinary citizens, like neighbours, teachers and even priests. Their weapon of choice was often even more personal: the machete.

## **1.2 Research objective**

In his landmark book *Orientalism* Edward Said asks whether it is possible to survive the consequences of making distinctions between people based on culture, tradition and race, without leading to hostility (Said, 1978, p.45). Obviously, the question posed by Said is a rhetorical one, but one that can be applied to the case of Rwanda. It seemingly touches upon the essence of the matter at hand: that a connection can be made between the process of dividing people and the eruption of violence between them.

For my research I want to use the theoretical approach of post-colonialism. Extensive research has already been done on the impact of colonialism on post-colonial Rwanda and the waves of violence that have erupted there following independence. A field that remains somewhat uncovered is that of ideology. Therefore, the scientific problem my research will focus on in this Bachelor thesis is the lack of knowledge concerning the ideological foundation of European imperial rule and the impact it had in Rwanda. Specifically, I am interested in the way that identities were constructed and how this advanced inter-ethnic violence.

According to Derek Gregory horrific events like the genocides in Cambodia, Bosnia and Rwanda “were understood in different ways and produced different responses in different places” (Gregory, 2004, p.27). In order to understand the impact that colonialism had on Rwanda it is crucial to analyse the ‘imaginative geographies’ which were imposed on it through decades of European rule. I will attempt to do this by deconstructing them. What were the main narratives according to which colonial space was restructured? What mental and geographical divisions were made and how did this produce or reinforce feelings of hostility between ethnic groups?

This has led me to formulate the following objective:

*The purpose of this research is to get more insight in the relation between the workings of European colonialism and the eruption of post-colonial violence in Rwanda. This insight will be acquired by deconstructing the imagined geographies of colonialism that shaped and reshaped Rwanda.*

This research is theory-oriented and will be carried out through literature study. In order to achieve the research objective, I want to use Edward Said's theory of 'Orientalism', of which the so-called 'imaginative geographies' mentioned above are an integral and crucial part. I want to expand on this theory by translating it to the Rwandan context, using literature on its colonial history to connect it with. Although Sub-Saharan Africa was never part of the traditional Orient, practices of Orientalism could be found almost everywhere during colonial times. According to Said every continent was affected by it, above all the African and Asian continents (Said, 1978, p.41).

Furthermore, Said's 'Orientalism' mainly deals with the asymmetrical power relations running between metropolis and colony. I want to expand on this by also looking at the internal dimension, which remains a blank spot in his theory. I am especially interested in the way that these asymmetrical power relations were extended into the geographical borders of Rwanda to produce internal differentiation and hierarchy. My theoretical framework will however be explained more extensively in the next chapter.

### **1.3 Relevance**

When conducting research there are three types of relevance that can be distinguished to determine its relevance. These are: the scientific relevance, the social relevance and the personal relevance. Starting with the last one, the personal relevance is usually self-evident as it includes the personal interests of the researcher. This applies to this thesis, for which I have selected a topic of my own choosing.

The scientific relevance indicates the scientific contribution that research can make. Post-colonialism is a theoretical approach that already is well-developed. Nevertheless, with this thesis I will attempt to make a tiny contribution to this ever expanding field of study by offering new insights in the relation between colonialism and post-colonial violence in terms of internal differentiation and construction of identities. These insights will above all concern Rwanda, as my research is limited to that country. However, parts of it might be of value in post-colonial settings elsewhere in the world where violence has erupted in the past or new conflicts are about to emerge.



Finally, the social relevance deals with the contribution that particular research can make to society. My research is socially relevant for contemporary Rwandan society, which remains separated along ethnic lines. Although ethnic differentiation has officially been abolished and banned from public life by the new government, a lot of hostility remains between the Hutu and Tutsi population. The process of reconciliation has proven to be slow and difficult, with survivors of the genocide often knowing the killers of their friends and relatives.

If the minds of the Rwandan people were colonized, is it also possible to decolonize them? Analysis of the construction of these hostile and mutually exclusive identities could offer valuable insights for the reconciliation process, possibly benefitting the stability of not only Rwanda but the entire Great Lake Region in East-Africa.

#### **1.4 Research question**

I have already described the background of my topic and explained the objective and the relevance of my research. All of this has resulted in the following research question:

*To what extent was Rwanda orientalised by European colonialism, and in what way has this advanced post-colonial violence and genocide?*

This central question can be divided into several sub-questions:

- What did the colonial history of Rwanda look like?
- What were the important 'imaginary geographies' of European colonialism?
- In what way did the identities of Hutu and Tutsi change during colonial rule?
- Was there a clear connection between colonialism and post-colonial violence?

Although I have already given an outline of the background of this conflict in chapter one, I believe it to be sensible – for both reader and researcher – to cover the colonial history of Rwanda sufficiently. Hence my first sub-question.

## Chapter 2: Theory

In this chapter I will outline my theoretical framework by expanding on the concepts and theories that have been mentioned briefly in the preceding paragraphs. Since the theory of Said is the basis of my research, I will begin here by explaining his ideas and describing his concepts of 'Orientalism' and 'imaginary geographies'. This is crucial in order to understand the angle of my research. Consequently, I will build on Said using Derek Gregory's book 'The colonial present' (1994) to uncover the role of colonial thinking in contemporary (post-colonial) violence.

### 2.1 Theoretical framework

Post-colonialism is a theoretical approach that scrutinizes European colonial history and its continuing influence in the contemporary world, either through forms of neo-colonial power relations between metropolis and former colony or by the lasting marks on non-European lands and peoples in terms of names, divisions and identities. In other words: the end of European colonial rule did not always warrant the end of colonial power relations (Aitken & Valentine (eds), 2006).

Edward Said's book 'Orientalism' (1978) is seen as an important milestone in the academic field of post-colonialism. In his book he exposes the hidden relationship of power and domination between the Orient (East) and Occident (Europe). A key feature of Orientalism is the so-called 'imaginative geographies'. Said introduced this concept to explain how space can be claimed by dividing it and attributing meaning to it. Mentally produced borders set apart 'us' from 'them' and our 'familiar space' from the 'unfamiliar space' held by the barbarians. This process of claiming space and constructing boundaries around it can be entirely arbitrary and is reinforced by fictions and presuppositions (Said, 1978, p.54).

European colonialism relied heavily on these imaginative geographies. They were inscribed into the colonial space to justify the domination and exploitation of distant lands and peoples. It denied the colonized the right to define and represent themselves culturally and politically, as they were seen as unfit to rule themselves. According to Said, Orientalism depended on the notion of 'positional superiority'. It placed the European and European culture above all non-European peoples and cultures and their Oriental backwardness (Said, 1987, p.7).

Not only did Orientalism make it acceptable for decent Westerners to accept imperialism,

it succeeded in making ordinary citizens believe in its civilizing mission. It was almost seen as an 'obligation' for their countries to subject less-advanced peoples to their imperial rule and to elevate them (Said, 1994). This notion underlines the role played by identity in Orientalism.

Identities are socially constructed in relation to others by attributing meaning to difference. For Europeans this process of 'othering' meant an imaginary line was drawn – the course of which changed as the boundaries and meaning of Europe changed – between the Occident and the Orient, that separated the Orientals from the Westerners, or the barbarians from the civilized. The Orient was seen in Europe as being mysterious, weak and dangerous and this only reinforced the perceived identity of the Occident as being its exact opposite: natural, strong and rational.

These presuppositions drew on a stock of knowledge of the outside world that existed in Europe prior to colonialism. For centuries ideas, myths and experiences concerning the Orient were gathered by explorers and scientists. This stored knowledge or discourse formed a reservoir from which the imaginary geographies of European imperialism were eventually constructed (Aitken & Valentine (eds), 2006). For example, representations of Africans would be extracted from a "huge library of *Africanism*" (Said, 1994, p.79).

Gregory (1994) presents colonial modernity as a double-headed coin, with one side showing the face of modernity: standardized, disciplined and hierarchical. The backside of the coin depicts modernity's other: primitive, irregular and mysterious. Although part of the same coin, both sides do not have the same value. Modernity produces itself in relation to non-modernity and positioning itself above the other.

The same binary divisions were used by European colonialism to differentiate between groups of people and classifying them into 'us' and 'them', or black/white, strong/weak and civilized/uncivilized for that matter. Such categorization reinforces identities by intensifying distance, polarizing difference, and by limiting both human interaction and the exchange of different cultures and ideas. As a result, Orientals become more Oriental and Europeans more European (Said, 1978).

Mentally produced borders can be very real in their consequences. They determine how actors perceive the world around them and how they position themselves in relation to others. People are deemed as either similar or different to them, close by or far away, or even friendly or hostile. In his book 'The colonial present', Derek Gregory connects the imaginary geographies of colonial modernity to modern-day conflicts. He attributes the

thinking in 'us' and 'them' to the American response after 9/11, which created support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Gregory, 2004).

This way of thinking also gives Israel the space it needs to continue its occupation of Palestine, as one side is deemed to be culturally closer and more similar to the West than the other side. Wars and conflicts are seldom the outcome of rational calculations, but have their origins in the way that people "see, perceive, picture, imagine and speak of others" (Gregory, 2004, p.20). Furthermore, this way of thinking creates the conditions in which atrocious acts like genocides can be committed. As examples of the past have shown, the distinction made between 'us' and 'them' has the power to override other distinctions, namely that of 'just' and 'unjust' (Gregory, 2004, p.27).

## **2.2 Methodology**

My thesis will not focus on contemporary Rwanda, but on its colonial history. Although it is not a plain historical analysis, the events I research have all taken place in the past. Taking my research objective into account it is logical that the nature of my research will be more width than in depth: I am not focussing on one specific element but on a number of matters, by connecting and interpreting them. Also, the historical framing of my topic makes it impossible for me to conduct a case study.

In order to answer my research question(s) properly theory will be applied and interpreted in this particular context. Knowledge will be extracted from a number of written sources. For this I will use primary and secondary sources on Rwanda's colonial past and literature on post-colonial theory and Orientalism in the form of books and magazine publications. With radio being the most important medium in Rwanda and most written sources before and during the genocide being written in the Kinyarwanda language, I am limited to academic sources.

There are three important actors in my area of study. They can be defined as: the German government, the Belgian government and the White Fathers. These three actors were responsible for colonial rule in Rwanda between 1894 and 1962. Although my research scrutinizes their policies and views, they cannot be completely detached from each other, as colonial rule in Rwanda was always a joint effort or a continuation of previous policies. Only where relevant and possible, I have differentiated between the three.

Finally, my own observations and experiences from a research trip to Rwanda dating back two years will be used here. Not directly as an integral part of my thesis – as my research

covered a completely different field of study – but as a frame of reference to help guide me and interpret information.

## Chapter 3: History of Rwanda

### 3.1 Introduction

The causes of the 1994 genocide are deeply rooted in Rwanda's complicated past. In order to comprehend the genocide and the events leading up to it, it is crucial to first take note of this history. In this chapter I will give a brief outline of the important historical events that shaped Rwanda. Important here is the shift of power throughout the years and its tremendous impact on social relations and positions in Rwandan society.

Rwanda's history can be neatly divided into three consecutive time periods. I will begin by describing Rwanda during the Nyiginya kingdom, before the arrival of European colonists. The second paragraph will focus on the colonial period, when Rwanda was under European imperial rule. Introducing the most important actors and describing the significant changes that took place during that time. The final paragraph of this chapter will cover the history of Rwanda following the great turmoil of independence until the outbreak of genocide. Since this thesis centres on the workings of colonialism and the 1994 genocide, and not on contemporary Rwanda, my timeline only runs until 1994.

### 3.2 Nyiginya kingdom

Little is known about the early history of Rwanda. Historians date back the foundation of the Nyiginya kingdom to the seventeenth century. It was headed by a *Mwami* (king), who ruled over life and death and had divine powers under *Imana* (God). During the next centuries a successive reign of Mwami's expanded the kingdom from its humble beginnings in Central Rwanda into a large kingdom in the Great Lake Region.

Although sharing the same language and traditions, its population could be broken apart into three groups: Hutu (80-85%), Tutsi (10-15%) and Twa (1%). The pygmy Twa represented the oldest inhabitants of the region, arriving before 3,000 B.C. (Cordwener, 2004). They were small in size and lived as outcastes in forests and marches, as both Hutus and Tutsis were hostile to them. "Not only did Twa and others never intermarry, but they did not even drink from the same beer pot for fear of social pollution" (Vansina, 2004, p.36).

Around 700 A.D. groups of Bantu settled in Rwanda. They were primarily farmers and had migrated from Central Africa as part of a greater migration movement. Centuries later the Bantu were followed by pastoralists. Their origins remain a mystery, but they are seen as having migrated from North-eastern Africa, arriving in Rwanda somewhere between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century (Verlinden, 1995). The pastoralists assimilated –

adapting the language and Bantu traditions – but climbed up to the dominating position in society by using the wealth of their cattle.

The agricultural Bantu peoples would later be called Hutu, while the pastoralists would come to be known as Tutsi. Whether these labels referred to ethnicity, social status or a combination of the two remains disputed. According to Vansina (2004) the name 'Tutsi' initially may have referred only to the elite class of farmers, but eventually transformed into a common name for all farmers. The label 'Hutu' may have been a demeaning designation used by the political elite.

In pre-colonial times Hutu, and even Twa, could be promoted in rank by the Mwami, who was always a Tutsi himself. A Hutu man possessing enough cattle could marry a Tutsi woman to improve his status (Des Forges, 1966). Similarly, a Tutsi with few wealth and status was seen as being a Hutu. Besides these labels not being fixed, there were great regional differences. Hutus from the North had a higher social status than the Tutsis from the South (Corduwener, 2004).

Under Mwami Rwabugiri centralisation of the Nyiginya kingdom increased, as well as the polarization between Hutu and Tutsi. In addition to the *Ubuhake* clientship that bound farmers to a patron, Rwabugiri introduced *Uburetwa*. This required men to perform coercive, manual labour for a local chief, in return for occupation of the land. These labour duties were imposed only on Hutu men; Tutsis were exempted (Mamdani, 2001).

### **3.3 Colonial period**

The European 'Scramble for Africa' was relatively late to reach the kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi. This was largely due to their geographical location, being landlocked and tucked in between mountain ranges and swamps on the edge of Central Africa (Louis, 1963). It had allowed them to remain isolated and made them two of the last few patches of unexplored and unclaimed territories on the African continent.

Their strategic location however made them very attractive as new colonial assets for the three main imperial powers in the region: Britain, Germany and Belgium. For Britain their importance lay in their geographical position, forming the missing link between the yet to be constructed Cape to Cairo railway running from North to South. German imperial ambitions stretched from East to West of the continent, envisioning a Pan-African empire linking up their colonies in East and South-West Africa (Louis, 1963). Belgium bordered Rwanda and Burundi with Belgian Congo and saw the two as mere "pawns in negotiations" for more prestigious territories (Lemarchand, 1970, p.63).

### 3.3.1 Germany

During the Conference of Berlin (1884-1885) the African map was further divided. The kingdom of Rwanda was successfully claimed by Imperial Germany, although no white man had ever set foot on its soil (Gourevitch, 1998). It would take until 1894 before the German duke Gustav-Adolf von Götzen arrived to establish effective control. When the Mwami unexpectedly died a year later, Von Götzen interfered in the throne succession and forced the young new Mwami to accept the status of protectorate. Together with Burundi it became attached to German East-Africa, present-day Tanzania (Corduwener, 2004).

Colonial government was characterized by indirect rule, leaving the Mwami and his chiefs in control under German supervision. In 1914 there were only five civil administrators in all of Rwanda, a territory almost the size of Belgium (Louis, 1963). They protected the authority of the king and removed his internal rivals. This was most visible in the punitive expeditions conducted by German military officers. Rebels were punished by burning their villages and confiscating their cattle. The most brutal of them all - the Ntungutze expedition in 1911 – ended with the leading rebels being hanged (Louis, 1963).

With German military support the Mwami successfully expanded Rwanda's borders to the North, incorporating tiny Hutu kingdoms. Simultaneously, Germany negotiated in Europe with Britain and Belgium on a revision of their colonial borders. An agreement was made without consulting the Mwami and transferred historic parts of Rwanda over to Uganda and Congo (Verlinden, 1995).

The colonial administration introduced a tax collection. It also planned a railroad to connect Rwanda to the world economy in order to promote trade and prosperity. Its high altitude, large population size and moderate climate made Rwanda an attractive colony. Dr. Richard Kandt, the first German Resident in Rwanda described it as a “malaria-free and fertile area that was suitable for white settlement” (Kabagema, 1993, p.27; author's translation).

Having in fact the highest population density in all of Africa, Rwanda (and Burundi) was seen as a reservoir of human labour. According to the Rwandan historian Alexis Kagame the Germans had conceived of a plan to relocate the Hutu populations of Rwanda and Burundi to present-day Tanzania, to work there on plantations along the Indian Ocean. The Tutsi would stay behind with their cattle. (Alexis (Kagame, in Verlinden, 1995, p. 31)



Before Rwanda could be turned into an economically viable colony, the First World War had broken out in Europe and spread to the African continent. Tiny Rwanda found itself in the frontline, bordering hostile empires. The small German army contingent stationed in Rwanda conscripted able men for defence of the colony, raised taxes and confiscated food, causing famine (Verlinden, 1995). The defenders were able to hold out until spring 1916, before surrendering to Belgian forces.

### **3.3.2 Belgium**

After the war Belgium was given a mandate over Rwanda and Burundi by the League of Nations. Although they were not de facto colonies, in practice this did not really constitute a difference for the colonial administration (Corduwener, 2004). The mandate was accepted in 1924 by the Belgian parliament, after which both entities became administratively attached to Belgian Congo.

The Belgians found the native administrative system complicated. Traditionally every district in Rwanda was governed by two chiefs, one presiding over the agriculturalists and one over the herders, and a regional army leader. The colonial administration sought reform after European model. The three functions were merged into one. Small territorial entities were dissolved. The combined number of chiefs and sub-chiefs was cut in half in a matter of three years (Reyntjens, 1984).

Similarly, they conducted an incorporation policy in the 1920's and 1930's to bring semi-autonomous Hutu regions under central government control. Although historically they had never been part of Rwanda, the colonial administration justified this policy by presenting it as a "restoration of the sovereignty of the Mwami" (Reyntjens, 1984, p.330).

Like the Germans the Belgian colonial government supported the ruling Tutsi elite over the Hutu masses. After experiencing resistance from Tutsi chiefs, it tried working with Hutu chiefs briefly, but found them unqualified. The colonial government then tried to replace all Hutus by Tutsis (Reyntjens, 1984). Of the 45 chiefs present in Rwanda in 1959, none was Hutu. Of the 559 sub-chiefs only ten were Hutu (Des Forges, 1966).

The colonial administration saw the coffee plant as an ideal export product to make the colony profitable. Every peasant family in Rwanda became obliged to start growing at least six coffee plants (Corduwener, 2004). The Belgians came up with others ways of exploitation. They found the local system of mandatory labour convenient and used it to get work done without having to pay someone. The chiefs followed their example and soon the land tax increased from one day of mandatory labour in every five, to two or even three in every six (Pottier, 2002).

After the Second World War the Belgian mandate areas became trusteeship territories under supervision of the United Nations. Under UN pressure the colonial administration begins to increase career opportunities for Hutu, angering conservative Tutsis in the process. Several Hutus are appointed in the administration, while more of them are accepted into secondary schools (Des Forges, 1999). In 1954 Ubuhake clientship is abolished. In 1956 elections are held behind closed doors. Hutus are included into the councils, but the Tutsis manage to stay in power (Verlinden, 1995).

With the prospect of Rwanda gaining independence from Belgium in the near future, a Hutu counter-elite started to demand political and social reform. In 1957 a Hutu Manifesto was issued by a group of nine Hutu activists, including the future president Grégoire Kayibanda. The manifest spoke out against the Tutsi monopoly on power, and demanded democratic elections, abolishment of coercive labour, and equal opportunities in terms of education, jobs and social services for all Rwandans (Newbury, 1998) (Verlinden, 1995). The demands were rejected by the Mwami and his court.

In November 1959 a Hutu activist and sub-chief – one of only ten in Rwanda – was assaulted by a group of Tutsi activists. Although only wounded, rumours of his death quickly spread. In retaliation Tutsi-owned houses were burned and sporadic murder of Tutsis took place. This event is seen as the first systematic political violence in Rwanda and sparked the Social Revolution (Gourevitch, 1998). In rural parts of the country uprisings broke out. Groups of angry Hutus roamed around the countryside, driving out Tutsis and burning their houses (Newbury, 1998).

Faced with the growing violence and unrest, the Belgians for the first time publicly sided with the Hutu political leaders (Des Forges, 1966). When the Mwami tried to intervene with his army, he was told that maintaining public order was “an exclusively Belgian affair” (Verlinden, 1995, p.67; author’s translation). The Social Revolution caused the first of many large exoduses of Rwandans to neighbouring countries.

The biggest Hutu party, PARMEHUTU of Grégoire Kayibanda, saw itself as the legitimate executioner of the Hutu Manifesto, while the conservative Tutsis united in UNAR firmly opposed change. In the mean time the Belgian colonial government had spoken out in favour of democratisation. Colonel Guy Logiest was flown in from Congo to restore order. He implemented the new Belgian strategy by supporting the revolutionary Hutus against the monarchy and Tutsi parties. Under Logiest, land reform took place and Tutsi chiefs and sub-chiefs were replaced by Hutus (Verlinden, 1995). Some were killed, others were arrested or fled. Before the revolution, all but ten chiefs had been Tutsis. After the

intervention of Logiest half of the chiefs and more than half of the sub-chiefs were Hutus (Straus, 2006).

Municipal elections held in 1960 were won by the two biggest Hutu parties with a landslide victory. Throughout Rwanda Hutu mayors were installed. On the national level a preliminary government of Hutus was appointed under Belgian guidance (Verlinden, 1995). The following year Belgium supported a final power takeover of the Hutus, after which the monarchy was abolished and the First Republic established (Lemarchand, 1970). Grégoire Kayibanda was elected as the new president. In 1962 Rwanda gained its independence from Belgium.

### **3.3.3 White Fathers**

The White Fathers were the first missionaries to reach the Great Lake Region from 1900 onwards (Verlinden, 1995). After working in Uganda they established missions in Rwanda and Burundi. The missionaries – French Catholics – struggled with the Protestant Germans of the colonial administration, as both sides were suspicious of each other. Their influence grew after 1916, when the Germans were replaced by French-speaking Catholic Belgians. The new colonial administration relied heavily on the missionaries for knowledge about the natives and support for their imperial rule.

The White Fathers noticed the abuse of Hutus by Tutsis, but gave their support to the Tutsis, who represented the dominating class in society and whom they deemed to be the natural rulers of Rwanda. The missionaries saw power primarily in terms of ethnicity and actively sought an alliance between the Church and ruling class, by trying to convert them (Longman, 2010). When the missionaries took control of the education system in the 1930's, they restricted access for Hutus, privileging the Tutsis (Mamdani, 2001).

This strategy was advocated by Bishop Léon Classe, who was a strong ideological supporter of the Tutsi cause. In 1930 Classe warned the Belgian Resident against replacing Tutsi chiefs by Hutus, citing:

“A revolution of that nature would lead the entire state directly into anarchy and to bitter anti-European Communism. Far from furthering progress, it would nullify the government's action by depriving it of auxiliaries who are, by birth, capable of understanding and following it [...] Generally speaking, we have no chiefs who are better qualified, more intelligent, more active, more capable of appreciating progress and more fully accepted by the people than the Tutsi.” (De Lacger, in Lemarchand, 1970, p.73)

The White Fathers supported the colonial administration in their attempts to increase central government control over semi-autonomous Hutu regions on the periphery. They preached submission in churches and chapels and assisted in territorial justice (Longman, 2010).

Chiefs who refused to convert to Christianity were labelled as “sorcerers, diviners and superstitious and were deposed” (Mamdani, 2001, p.92). The influence of the missionaries even extended to the Royal Court. In 1931 Bishop Classe forced the resisting Mwami to abdicate in favour of his son. After the new Mwami converted to Christianity the number of converts in Rwanda grew within the hundreds of thousands, eventually making Rwanda one of the most Catholic countries in Africa (Verlinden, 1995).

Only after the death of Léon Classe in 1945 the Catholic Church was able to rethink its policies. Following the end of the Second World new Flemish priests began to arrive, who identified more with the oppressed Hutu majority, as had been the case for centuries with the Flemish majority and the Walloon minority in Belgium (Gourevitch, 1998). The new Swiss bishop Perraudin publicly supported the Hutu call for political change. One of his disciples had been Grégoire Kayibanda (Corduwener, 2004).

### **3.4 Post-independence**

Tutsis were second-class citizens in the First Republic. Within the new Hutu political elite a division appeared between those wanting to exclude the Tutsis altogether, and those seeking to overcome the ethnic divide (Mamdani, 2001). Prior to becoming the president, Grégoire Kayibanda had proposed the creation of a federation in which the Hutus and Tutsis would be segregated, describing Rwandan society as:

“Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy, who are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts and feelings as if they were dwellers of different zones, or inhabitants of different planets.” (Mamdani, 2001, p.127)

Between 1961 and 1967 bands of guerillas, made up by exiled Tutsis, carried out ten armed raids in Rwanda from across the border. The attacks failed to overthrow the government, but they sparked resentment among the population. In retaliation Tutsis living in Rwanda were attacked. During this period 20,000 of them were killed and 300,000 more fled abroad (Des Forges, 1999). After an unsuccessful raid in 1964 the few Tutsi

members of government were executed. More reprisal attacks were carried out, leading to the murder on several thousand Tutsi civilians (Newbury, 1998).

The struggling economy of Rwanda affected ethnic relations, with unemployment leading to more competition and polarization between the old and new elite. As a result, an ethnic quota was introduced in the early 1970's. In the future only ten percent of the students and civil servants were allowed to be Tutsis (Destexhe, 1995). The quota could be easily enforced with the identity cards introduced by the Belgians.

President Kayibanda was re-elected twice, in 1965 and 1969. Under his rule a regional dispute had developed. The northern Hutus felt increasingly dissatisfied, believing Kayibanda had privileged the Hutus of central and southern regions. During the 1973 presidential elections general Juvénal Habyarimana from the northern faction seized power in a coup d'état. The Second Republic was born (Corduwener, 2004).

Under Habyarimana the PARMEHUTU party was banned and replaced with the new Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND). It became the only legal political party and membership was mandatory for all Rwandans (Corduwener, 2004). In contrast to his predecessor, Habyarimana choose for a policy of ethnic reconciliation between Hutus and Tutsis. The restrictions for Tutsis put in place by the Kayibanda regime were loosened (Mamdani, 2001).

The Rwanda economy had outperformed those of surrounding countries for years (Destexhe, 1995). Following the decline of coffee prices on the international market – coffee accounting for 75 percent of Rwanda's export revenue – the economy began to deteriorate quickly in the late 1980's. In addition to the economic decline drought caused food shortages in large parts of the country (Des Forges, 1999).

The number of Rwandans living in exile had risen to approximately 600,000 by the end of the 1980's. Most of them were concentrated in the neighbouring countries, like Uganda, where they lived as second-class citizens. Only in Tanzania were they encouraged by authorities to integrate in the local population. The right to return of refugees was blocked by the Rwandan government, claiming overpopulation (Des Forges, 1999).

In Uganda a group of mostly Tutsi refugees had organised themselves in 1979 in a movement called the Rwandan Refugee Welfare Foundation. In 1987 it was reformed into the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) (Corduwener, 2004). Many of its members had military experience, either serving or having served in the Ugandan army. On October 1 1990 the RPF invaded Rwanda, aiming for the forceful return of refugees and the removal of power of the government (Des Forges, 1999).

Earlier that year Habyarimana had ended his party's monopoly on power and established a multi-party democracy, under pressure of French president Mitterrand and international aid donors. The political landscape quickly fragmented with the advent of the Mouvement Démocrate Republicain (MRD) – a reincarnation of the banned PARMEHUTU – and several new, often radical parties. Between July 1990 and March 1994 Rwanda had seven different coalition governments, with Habyarimana trying to find the right mix of ethnic groups and regional factions (Corduwener, 2004).

Three days after the start of the RPF invasion in 1990 president Habyarimana staged an attack on his capital city, Kigali, and blamed it on RPF infiltrators. The authorities used the attack as a pretext for arresting thousands of people throughout the country, including many Tutsis and political Hutu opponents. Many of them were tortured or died while being in custody (Des Forges, 1999) (Gourevitch, 1998).

Belgium and France were quick to dispatch troops to aid Habyarimana. With their help the Rwandan army was able to fend off the initial RPF attack. The Belgians left a month after their arrival, while the French soldiers would stay to support the regime. A cease-fire between the RPF and Rwandan army was reached in 1992 (Des Forges, 1999).

By that time many of the parties in Rwanda had a youth wing, which defended their party's interests. Habyarimana transformed the youth wing of his party into a well-organised militia that gave its members military training, as part of a civilian self-defence program. It was called Interahamwe, meaning 'those who stand together' or 'those who attack together' in the Kinyawanda language. They conducted violent attacks against Tutsi civilians and political opponents and were armed with machetes (Des Forges, 1999).

In August 1993 a power sharing agreement was signed between Habyarimana and RPF-leader Kage in Arusha, Tanzania. Under heavy international pressure of aid donors the president of Rwanda agreed to include the RPF in a new coalition government. A battalion of RPF soldiers was allowed to be stationed in the capital to protect the RPF members of government and parliament (Corduwener, 2004).

The new transition government that included the RPF was never installed. Instead the political stalemate in Rwanda continued as well as the political violence and assassinations. In neighbouring Burundi the newly-elected and first ever Hutu president Melchior Ndadaye was murdered by the all-Tutsi army (Corduwener, 2004). In the aftermath of his death the Burundian army killed between 100,000 – 200,000 Hutus (Lemarchand, 1999). The violence in Burundi further increased the tensions already

present in Rwanda and added to the mistrust of Tutsis (Corduwener, 2004). Thousands of Hutus fled Burundi and sought their refuge in Rwanda.

In the evening of April 6 1994 a plane was shot down over the Rwandan capital Kigali. On board were president Juvénal Habyarimana of Rwanda and the new president of Burundi, both returning from peace talks in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. The attack was blamed on the RPF and formed the starting point of the genocide. The next morning Interahamwe militias and the Presidential Guard took the streets and started what would become one of the biggest massacres in history.

## **Chapter 4: 'Orientalisation' of Rwanda**

### **4.1 Introduction**

With the history of Rwanda outlined, the next step is to focus on the ideology that underlay European imperial rule. This chapter will answer the question how the 'Orientalisation' of Rwanda took place.

This will be attempted by applying Said's theory of Orientalism to the specific context of colonial Rwanda. The imaginary geographies that were relevant there will be researched in two consecutive steps. First I will analyse their meaning in terms of content and creation. The second paragraph discusses the way the imaginary geographies were subsequently put into to practice.

### **4.2 Imaginary geographies**

For centuries the geographical area of Rwanda has mystified its foreign visitors, who came to regard it as "the Switzerland of Africa" (Lemarchand, 1970, p.13) or "the El Dorado of central Africa" (Louis, 1963, p.256). The Duke of Mecklenburg, concluded after a visit in the early 1900's that:

"Ruanda is certainly the most interesting country in the German East Africa Protectorate – in fact, in all central Africa – chiefly on account of its ethnographical and geographical position" (Duke of Mecklenburg, in Louis, 1963, p.107).

Key in the theory of Orientalism is the notion that colonial knowledge took form long before colonial rule was established (Aitken & Valentine (eds), 2006). Just like the Orientalists drew on a stock of presupposed knowledge about the Orient, the colonists and missionaries arriving in Rwanda were highly influenced by the thoughts and experiences of the first explorers visiting the area.

One of those in particular is important here: English explorer John Hanning Speke. He travelled the Great Lake Region and named Lake Victoria in 1859, before discovering the source of the river Nile. Although he did not enter Rwanda itself, he was the first European to enter Burundi, together with fellow explorer Richard Francis Burton. In present-day Tanzania Speke encountered men "who were as unlike as they could be to the common order of the natives of the surrounding districts," describing them as having "fine oval faces, large eyes, and high noses, denoting the best blood of Abyssinia" (Speke,



1863, p.203). His colleague Burton had a similar experience in present-day Burundi, leading him to note the following observation:

“The Warundi are evidently natives of a high cold country; they are probably the ‘white people resembling Abyssinians,’ and dwelling near the Lake, of whom European geographers have heard from Zanzibar.”[...] “Their limbs are stout and well proportioned, many stand upwards of six feet high, and they bear the appearance of a manly and martial race” (Burton, 1860, p.145)

Speke referred to these tribes collectively as Wahūma (Hima), who were related to the Galla or Abyssinians from North-East Africa, and of whom the Watūsi (Tutsi) had spread furthest to the South. He claimed them to be cattle herding foreigners, who had invaded dark Africa and had subdued the local agricultural natives. About their origins he theorized:

“It appears impossible to believe, judging from the physical appearance of the Wahūma, that they can be of any other race than the semi-Shem-Hamitic of Ethiopia. The traditions of the imperial government of Abyssinia go as far back as the scriptural age of King David, from whom the late reigning king of Abyssinia, Sahéla Sélassié, traced his descent” (Speke, 1863, p.246).

Ultimately he traced their origins back to Asia. Intermarriage with the Africans would explain their distinctive physical attributes, although some Asian features remained present, like the bridged nose (Speke, 1863, p. 247).

Speke’s writings spawned the ‘Hamitic hypothesis’. This theory named the Hima pastoralists as descendents of the biblical Ham, who was cursed by his father Noah. In the European thinking of that time the ‘Hamites’ represented a lost branch of the Caucasian race. They were categorised and placed at the bottom of the racial ladder, underneath the Slavs, but still well above the Africans (Sanders, 1969).

Their sheer existence was seen as an explanation for everything the Europeans found unfitting on the African continent. According to Sanders they came to be seen as ‘culture-bearers’: “Every trace and/or sign of what is usually termed ‘civilized’ in Africa was attributed to alien, mainly Hamitic, origin. In such a way, iron-working was supposed to have been introduced to the Negroes by pastoral Hamites, along with complex political institutions, irrigation and age-grade systems” (Sanders, 1969, p.530).

The German colonists in Rwanda found a kingdom inhabited by two classes of people: the

ruling Tutsis and the serving Hutu (Kabagema, 1993, p.28). The pygmy Twa were seen as being less than humans, as strange little creatures or mere dwarfs (Louis, 1963). The visitors were impressed by the complex society they encountered. With its centralised power structure and hierarchical social order, which resembled European feudalism, it could not possibly have originated in dark Africa in a natural way.

With the Hamitic hypothesis in mind they attributed every form of development to the Tutsi. Although they encountered abuse against the Hutu the Germans saw no reason to question the domination of the Tutsi; perceiving their rule as a natural order of things. The colonial mission was chronically understaffed for its entire existence, but German reasoning included more than simply pragmatic support for the status quo. They identified with the Tutsi rulers. Most of the army officers had an aristocratic background and likened the Tutsi aristocracy in Rwanda to the Junkers in Germany (Lemarchand, 1970). Similarly, the White Fathers believed that the Tutsi should rule because of their natural superiority and god-given talents (Longman, 2010).

Europeans and Rwandan intellectuals willingly cooperated with each other to create the first written histories of Rwanda in a way that supported their views and served their own interests (Des Forges, 1999). According to these writings the history of Rwanda only began with the arrival of the Tutsi. The rich pre-colonial history of Northern Hutu kingdoms was left out (Lemarchand, 1999).

The colonists introduced in Rwanda that what Said called 'positional superiority'. Just as Orientalism placed the European and European culture above the Oriental and Oriental culture, colonial rule in Rwanda positioned the Tutsi above the Hutu. Positive characteristics were attributed to the tall and slender Tutsi, while the negative ones were ascribed to the short and stocky Hutu. This is most visible in the descriptions of that time. For instance, the Duke of Mecklenburg concluded:

“One received the impression of being in the presence of an entire different class of men, who had nothing further in common with the ‘niggers’ than their dark complexion” (Duke of Mecklenburg, in Lemarchand, 1970, p.41).

In the size and shape of their heads and the curve of their nostrils he noticed “unmistakable evidences of a foreign strain”, as opposed to the medium-sized Hutu, who “patiently bow themselves in abject bondage to the later arrived, yet ruling race” (Duke of Mecklenburg, in Lemarchand, 1970, p.18-19). The British ethnologist Charles Seligman described the tall people as “pastoral Europeans, arriving wave after wave, better armed

as well as quicker witted than the dark agricultural Negroes” (Seligman, in Lemarchand, 1999, p.8).

Observers especially placed emphasis on the physical appearances of the natives they encountered. According to another German, Dietrich Westerman, the Hamites were “light skinned, with a straight nose, thin lips, narrow face, soft, often wavy or even straight hair, without prognathism. Owing to their racial superiority they have gained leading positions and have become the founders of many of the larger starts in Africa” (Westerman, in Lemarchand, 1999, p.8). “Here live the tallest people of the world”, concluded Willy Scheel (Scheel, in Kabagema, 1993, p.34; author’s translation).

Besides the great difference in physiques, the behaviour of the natives was carefully analyzed. Again, positive and negative characteristics were attributed to respectively Tutsi and Hutu. As Tutsi were seen as being closer to Europeans, they automatically became more familiar in the minds of the colonists and missionaries. Simultaneously, the Hutu became ‘othered’ as unfamiliar, as their behaviour was different according to European standards.

Again this is illustrated best by the writings of that time. Hans Meyer, a German authority on Burundi noted after a visit:

“The longer one has travelled in negro countries, and the better one has got acquainted with the negro character, the more one is impressed with the proud reserve of the Tutsi. There is no restless curiosity, no noisy, partly fearful, partly good-hearted welcome, as with most other negroes. The tall fellows stand still and relaxed, leaning over their spears while watching the Europeans pass or approach, as if this unusual sight did not impress them in the least” (Meyer, in Lemarchand, 1970, p.41).

According to Meyer the secret of Tutsi domination was found in their “superior intelligence, calmness, smartness, racial pride, solidarity and political talent” (Meyer, in Lemarchand, 1970, p.19). Richard Kandt, the first German Resident in Rwanda, was especially impressed by the “gigantic stature”, of the Hamites, and the “sublimity of their speech, the tasteful and unobtrusive way of their dress, their noble traits and their quiet, penetrating, often even witty and irritating eyes” (Meyer, in Lemarchand, 1970, p.18-19). Catholic priest François Menard went even further, describing Tutsi as a “European under a black skin” (Menard, in Mamdani, 2001, p.88).

Even their respective ways of dressing were interpreted and used to instil difference and superiority or inferiority in them. The Hamitic Tutsis reportedly wore Togas,

which was seen as irrefutable evidence for an ancient connection with the Roman Empire in North Africa (Des Forges, 1995).

The imaginary geographies of European colonialism classified both population groups into binary divisions. The tall and slender Tutsi was put opposite the short and stocky Hutu, the Hamite versus the Negro. Other important binary divisions were ruler/servant, strong/weak, civilized/uncivilized, courageous/cowardly, alien/native, and so on. This process created two ideal types as each other's exact opposites; a dichotomy so to speak. Hutus could only be servants and were incapable of leading, while Tutsis were tall and slender, born to lead and above all rich. This selective way of thinking simplified age-old social bonds between Hutu and Tutsi and ignored regional differences and changing ethnic and social identities.

The notion of 'positional superiority' and the process of 'othering' one group over the other were reversed later on. After the Catholic Church shifted its support from Tutsi to Hutu starting in the late 1940's, the focus remained on ethnicity. The ideal types of the intelligent and reserved Tutsi-leader and the loud and spontaneous Hutu-servant were replaced by the arrogant and malicious Tutsi and the naturally modest and humble Hutu to fit the new colonial agenda (Verlinden, 1995).

The Hamitic hypothesis claimed a link between physical attributes and intellectual capacities. Applied in Rwanda, it entitled the Hamitic Tutsis with power and status, albeit not as much as their 'cousins' in Europe (Reyntjens, 1984). According to Sanders (1969) the hypothesis was so appealing for Europeans because it implied that the advancement of inferior Negroes depended on intervention by the White race, like the influx of the Hamitic Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi had been. It not only justified the support for and glorification of the Tutsi by European colonists, but ultimately European colonialism itself as well.

The almost obligatory 'civilizing mission' of the West which Said wrote about can best be described here as a self-appointed responsibility to elevate lower races; a so-called 'White man's burden' (Sanders, 1969). Key in that line of thinking was the position of the Tutsi. As a Hamite he was seen as being superior to the Hutu and therefore legitimated to lead them. Simultaneously, he was far removed from being an equal to his European 'cousins', and therefore included in the group that needed to be civilized.

As a result the concept of positional superiority within European colonialism created an imagined hierarchy in Rwanda consisting of three layers, each corresponding with a class of people. On top ranked the European, followed by the Hamitic Tutsi, and

finally the Hutu ranked last. The less-than-human Twa was to be found even lower, not being qualified as a member of society in the minds of the colonists.

### **4.3 'Tutsification' and 'Hutufication'**

Prior to the arrival of Europeans a similar hierarchy had already existed in the Nyiginya kingdom. However, the categories of Hutu and Tutsi were then still relatively flexible and social mobility between the two occurred. It was in the colonial period that the categories became more rigid and absolute (Newbury, 1988). Although the imaginary geographies of Germany and Belgium were extremely similar, it was the Belgians who tried to put them into practice. The Germans relied completely on indirect rule and were forced to abandon the colony due to the First World War.

Only after rule had been established by the more pro-active Belgians, the imaginary geographies of European colonialism would find their way into practice. In 1920 the Belgian minister of colonies described the relation between Europeans and Rwandans as one of teacher and student (Melvern, 2004). He outlined their approach towards the natives as:

“We have to protect them [the Hutu] against the injustices they often face...but we will go no further. We find the Watutzi established since ancient time, intelligent and capable, we will respect that situation” (Lema, in Melvern, 2004, p.10).

These words could be interpreted in many ways, as to what exactly 'respecting that situation' meant. Ultimately, the emphasis placed on the preservation of Tutsi domination gave birth to a coherent colonial policy that can best be described as 'Tutsification'. By consolidating and strengthening the Tutsi position in society this policy inscribed the Hamitic hypothesis into the colonial space of Rwanda.

This 'Tutsification' of society was attempted in different ways. First, Tutsi control was extended to every corner of Rwanda. In the regions of Ndorwa, Mutara and Mulera in North and Busozo, Bukinzi and Bushiru in the North-West all Hutu chiefs were removed and replaced by Tutsi (Lemarchand, 1970). It was part of the Belgian policy in the 1920's and 1930's to rationalize the political system and to incorporate semi-autonomous Hutu regions on the periphery into the centralized power structure.

With this policy the Belgian colonial administration effectively re-imaged Rwanda as a homogenous space. The ideal types of the Tutsi leader and the Hutu servant were willingly exported from the ethnically mixed Central and Southern Rwanda to the North,

where Tutsi were far less in number. Furthermore, the regions in question had historically never been under Tutsi control. By replacing the Hutu chiefs with Tutsi an 'ethnic element' or layer was introduced there (Reyntjens, 1984).

Second, the colonial administration formalised the categorisation of the natives. A census was organised in 1933 to classify every Rwandan as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa, and identity cards were issued. Everyone was counted and scientists measured and weighed the natives to fit them into one of the groups, based on their physical appearance. According to Gourevitch (1998) the census confirmed the presuppositions held by the Europeans. Scientists established for example that the average Tutsi nose was about two and a half millimetres longer and almost five millimetres thinner than the average Hutu nose. This was seen as scientific proof that the Tutsi were more aristocratic by nature than the animal-like Hutu.

The census was problematic in the sense that it did not create uniformity. In northern Rwanda people were classified as Tutsi based on their wealth. In the South people from mixed origins were classified as Hutu, even if they fit the Tutsi stereotype in terms of physical appearance (Melvern, 2004).

Furthermore, the issuing of identity cards racialized identities into fixed categories. Rwandans were henceforth born as either Hutu or Tutsi (or Twa) and kept that label permanently. Social mobility between the two categories, which occurred in pre-colonial times, now became almost impossible. Hutus that gained wealth stayed Hutus and poor Tutsis could not lose their social status and fall down to Hutu status (Mamdani, 2001). It allowed the colonial administration to reshape Rwanda in accordance with the Hamitic hypothesis into a caste structure, where status and options were pre-determined by race of birth. The Tutsi were after all seen as 'born-rulers'. All important institutions adopted the racialized identities, further increasing a Tutsi monopoly on public life (Des Forges, 1999).

The third area where 'Tutsification' was imposed was education. After missionaries took over government schools in the 1930's a system of apartheid was created, that restricted access to Hutus and privileged Tutsis. Where Hutu students were allowed, they never accounted for more than half of the students (Verlinden, 1995). Furthermore, in most places there were separate classes for Hutus and Tutsis. Since the Tutsi were destined to lead, they received a different education than the Hutu students. The Tutsi were taught in French and were prepared for administrative jobs. The Hutu received an inferior education in Swahili that prepared them for a life of manual labour (Mamdani, 2001). Part of the curriculum was the teaching of separate ethnic identities (Longman, 2010).

Differentiation in the classroom was not just a reflection of the unequal status of Hutus and Tutsis in Rwandan society, but an endless reproduction of that inequality. There was even a special school established, Groupe Scolaire d'Astrida, for the children of chiefs and sub-chiefs. The children there – all Tutsis naturally – were trained to become part of the new Hamitic elite.

After the colonists and missionaries switched their support from the Tutsi to the Hutu cause from the late 1940's onwards, the Hamitic ideology was reversed. All of the sudden the policy of 'Tutsification' was shelved and replaced by one of 'Hutufication'. In practice this meant democratisation of the country. The Hutu majority was to replace the ruling Tutsi minority. Only a few decades after removing Hutu chiefs and replacing them with Tutsis, the Belgian colonial administration promoted the exact opposite.

## **Chapter 5: Colonialism and genocide**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Using my findings from the last chapter on the imaginary geographies underlying European imperialism, I will now move on to the next step. The focus in this chapter lies on post-colonial violence. Specifically, I am interested if links can be established between colonialism and the genocide.

First, I will briefly cover the ongoing debate on the causes of the genocide, to have the arguments defined both for me and the reader. From there I can build further by expanding on them, using the imaginary geographies uncovered in the previous chapter. The final paragraph will focus on this colonial ideology in terms of the construction of identities and its intrinsic role in the genocidal propaganda.

### **5.2 Discussion**

Throughout the years many causes have been named for the 1994 genocide. Most historians seem to agree that colonialism played a part in it, although exactly what part that was remains a matter of debate. According to the new rulers of Rwanda, the mostly-Tutsi RPF, ethnicity was an invention of the colonists. They used it as a strategy of divide and rule to dominate the Hutu and Tutsi, who supposedly lived together in harmony prior to their arrival (Abbink & Van Dokkum, 2008).

Although this version of history is convenient for the RPF, which has ruled the Hutu majority since 1994 with a post-genocide ideology of victim versus killer, it is in fact doubted by many. Most historians agree that Rwanda already was a strongly hierarchical society with different classes prior to the arrival of the colonists. They did not create difference between Hutu and Tutsi, but merely exaggerated this difference by stereotyping and racializing them into two distinct groups in a way that fit their own interests (Destexhe, 1995). Nor did the colonists create a centralized, Tutsi-dominated state. They simply extended its reach and methods of domination (Newbury, 1998).

Under Belgian rule Rwandan society was reshaped into a system of caste based on race. The policies of modernising and rationalizing the non-modern and irrational political system – more binary divisions – in Rwanda had changed it into an autocratic or even despotic form of state administration (Mamdani, 2001). According to Reyntjes (1984) the



decision of the Belgian colonial government to fuse the land, cattle and army chiefs in every district into one function disrupted the balance of power in Rwanda dramatically.

The three had been each other's competitors and relied on their Hutu subjects for their power, whereas the Hutu peasants relied on the Tutsi chiefs for protection. The fusion significantly increased the power of the remaining chiefs and decreased their accountability towards the peasants. Combined with the increasing mandatory labour for the chiefs, the Hutu would come to regard the Tutsi less and less as their protectors or allies and more and more as their oppressors.

Since 1994 it has been established that the genocide was not sparked primarily by anti-Tutsi sentiment. It was a pre-planned extermination campaign designed to mobilize support for the Habyarimana regime, which saw its power waning due to the increasing pressure inside and outside of Rwanda. Among the victims of the genocide were Hutu critics and opponents of the regime.

It was not uncommon for politicians in pre-genocide Rwanda to use ethnic discourse dating back to the colonial period to close the ranks and override regional factionalism among the Hutu (Destexhe, 1995). It is similar to what happened in 1990, when the government staged an attack on Kigali and blamed it on the Tutsi, to legitimate the arrest or killing of Hutu dissidents. This ethnic rhetoric can therefore best be seen as the public justification for the genocide, instead of the root cause (Abbink & Van Dokkum, 2008).

This conclusion is in accordance with the work of Straus (2006), who interviewed 230 perpetrators of the genocide. According to Strauss the killers' motives were primarily political and much less ethnic of origin. In fact, most of the killers claimed to have had Tutsi friends and/or relatives. They were said to have been motivated by the president's assassination and the civil war with the RPF. Both Straus (2006) en Gourevitch (1998) also stress the role of coercion during the genocide. Most killers claimed to have been either forced or conscripted by others. The same social structure that had enabled the mobilization of communities for mandatory labour was now used to mobilize people for genocide.

This however does not fully explain why it was so easy for the killers to equate unarmed Tutsi civilians – men, women and children – to RPF fighters, like happened during the genocide. Tutsis were perceived as enemies or potential enemies, no one exempted. How does this relate to the production of bipolar racial identities under colonialism? Fact is that the Hamitic hypothesis had applied to many groups in the Great Lake Region. Yet only in Rwanda (and Burundi) has it led to ethnic violence and genocide. According to Mamdani

(2001) this can be explained by the fact that only in those two countries were the Hamites actively classified as a separate, superior racial group.

### 5.3 The role of imaginary geographies

*“The mobilization of the masses, when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man’s consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny and of a collective history” (Fanon, 1969, p.73).*

In *The wretched of the earth* (1969) Franz Fanon describes the process of decolonization as a unifying, sometimes violent, attempt by the colonized to remove the compartments and heterogeneity of colonialism. Applied to the context of Rwanda it might offer an interesting insight. In Rwanda there was no great struggle between the colonist and the colonized, as decolonization in 1962 was a matter of formality. The only comparable struggle for freedom and democratization took place during the Social revolution of 1959, making it an equivalent for decolonization in other countries.

Problematic here is that the role of ‘colonial ruler’ during that struggle was not played by the Belgian or the European, but by the Tutsi. This was inherent to the Belgian system of ‘indirect rule’, which implicated the Tutsi as executioners of Belgium’s policies of oppression and exploitation. The actual rulers stayed out of harm’s way and continued to pull the strings during the Social Revolution.

Proof for this hostility towards Tutsi can be found in the Hutu Manifesto. First off, it was called ‘Hutu Manifesto’ instead of ‘Rwandan Manifesto’, deliberately excluding the Tutsi. Originally it had even been called: ‘Notes on the Social Aspect of the Racial Native Problem in Rwanda’, with the racial native problem referring to the Tutsi. Second, it called for an end to both Hamitic and White colonization (Mamdani, 2001).

As I have mentioned in the previous chapter European colonialism classified the natives into binary divisions. Regarding Rwanda, a crucial binary division was alien/native. It constructed a dichotomy between Hutu and Tutsi and codified Rwanda as a bipolar society. Even more important: it branded the Tutsi as an alien race that had its origins outside Rwanda. Naturally, this was a crucial point in the imaginary geographies underlying colonial rule. The superiority of the Tutsi was after all attributed to their presupposed foreign roots.

This ‘foreignness’ of the Tutsi minority became a problem with the outbreak of the Social Revolution. If the Hutu taking control of the country were the natives, where did this leave the alien Tutsi? Colonel Guy Logiest, who interfered on behalf of the revolutionaries

and did not stop the killings of Tutsis, later justified his actions as protecting the Rwandan people and giving them back their dignity (Gourevitch, 1998). It appeared the Tutsi were no longer seen as Rwandans.

### **5.3.1 'Us versus them'**

At some point in Rwandan history the name 'Hutu' came to refer to the Bantu tribes in Rwanda and Burundi. It may have originated as a demeaning designation used by the political elite, as I have written in the historical overview, or as something completely different. The early European visitors – with Speke's writings in mind – came to regard the Bantu collectively as non-Hamites and adopted the epithet 'Hutu' (Vansina, 2004). Under colonialism this Hutu class of peasants and servants was constructed as a separate racial group of non-Tutsis.

Important to note here is that the Bantu did not see themselves as Hutu, but as different Bantu tribes, like the Kinyaga and Ndugu. Only through experiencing common hardship as colonial subjects – opposed to the elevated Tutsi – and through ethnic registration and categorization, 'Hutu awareness' began to develop (Vansina, 2004). This common Hutu identity is therefore inextricably bound to the colonial period and the systematic positioning of Tutsi over Hutu.

Gregory (2004) calls this the 'architecture of enmity' spawned by colonial modernity. Architectures of enmity inhabit fears, desires and a certain perception of the outside world. This perception in turn determines the meaning of 'self' and 'other' or 'us' and 'they'. According to Gregory the distinction between 'us' and 'them' has the power to override other distinctions, namely that of 'just' and 'unjust' (Gregory, 2004, p.27).

It was this thinking in terms of 'us' and 'them' that contributed to ordinary Hutus killing ordinary Tutsis in waves of violence, beginning with the Social Revolution and finally culminating in the 1994 genocide. To be able to establish a connection between the phenomenon of post-colonial violence in Rwanda and the perceptions held by Hutus, it might be valuable to take note of the following passage by Franz Fanon:

“At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect” (Fanon, 1969, p.74).

This could very well apply to a bipolar society like Rwanda under colonial rule, with ethnic classification and differentiation extending as far as in the classroom. After the Social

Revolution and independence from Belgium many Hutus feared the return to power of the Tutsi, which they envisioned as the inevitable return to feudalism and subjugation. Hutu rulers and propagandists willingly took advantage of these fears. Going back to the Fanon citation at the beginning of this paragraph, Rwanda's post-colonial history shows that the external threat of Tutsi has proven to be an effective way to mobilize the Hutu masses by referring to the common Hutu architecture of enmity.

By backing the extremists on both sides the Belgian colonial government and the White Fathers have directly contributed to the escalation of hostility between the two groups. Their initial support for the Mwami and his Tutsi conservatives, followed by the radical change in favour of the Hutu hardliners, did not offer any room whatsoever for the moderate Hutus and Tutsis to develop a trans-ethnic dialogue (Verlinden, 1995).

Similarly, the introduction of an ethnic Tutsi layer in Northern Rwanda had serious implications. It was here that Hutu Power was born in the early nineties and where the genocide escalated first and the killings were the fiercest. This stands in opposition to the more racially mixed south of the country, where Hutu and Tutsi had a combined history dating back long before colonial rule, and where the killings were the least fierce.

### **5.3.2 Propaganda**

The imaginary geographies of the colonialism period played a crucial role before and during the 1994 genocide. Although Straus (2006) claims that war and coercion outweighed them in importance as motives for killing, they were a key element in the reasoning and propaganda underlying the massacres. The Hamitic hypothesis, which was used by Europeans to justify their imperial rule in Rwanda, was re-imagined into any ideology that justified the total annihilation of the Hamitic Tutsi. Since the killings were pre-planned and instructed from above, the hypothesis should be seen as an inextricable part of the 1994 genocide (Lemarchand, 1999, p.18)

The Tutsi remaining in Rwanda were used as an internal scapegoat for internal instability (Newbury, 1998) and external threats from their ethnic 'brothers' across the border. In fact, the Tutsi civilians were equated to the RPF fighters, as is shown by a song sang during the genocide:

Umwanzi wacu n'umwe  
turamuzi  
n'umututsi

Our enemy is one  
We know him  
It is the Tutsi

(Des Forges, 1999, p.203)

This equation was possible to make by invoking the Hamitic hypothesis. The 'foreignness' of the Tutsi was used as an argument to plead for their removal from Rwanda. They were categorised as colonisers, as the Belgians had been. The Hutu were seen as the only real natives of Rwanda. This reasoning only worsened after the RPF invaded Rwanda in 1990. Again the foreign Tutsi came from outside Rwanda to subjugate the Hutu and reinstate their feudal system, or so the propagandists claimed. They saw proof in the attack for a Tutsi master plan to dominate the whole region. From there it was only a small step to imagine the Tutsi civilians in Rwanda as 'infiltrators' and 'collaborators'.

In 1990 the radical pro-Hutu newspaper *Kangura* published a pamphlet called the 'Ten Commandments of the Hutu'. According to the pamphlet the long term strategy of the Tutsi was to "establish in the Bantu region of the great lakes (Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Tanzania, Uganda) a vast kingdom for the Hima-Tutsi, an ethnic group that considers itself superior, on the model of the Aryan race, and which uses Hitler's Swastika as its emblem" (Des Forges, 1999, p.80).

The way the 'Hima-Tutsi' are described here – seeing themselves as superior and having some sort of link with Hitler and the Aryan race – is obviously meant to demonize them. However, it resonates with the colonial propaganda of the superior Hamitic Tutsi as a long lost branch of the Caucasian race.

Further mocking the Tutsi, the same newspaper printed a cover with the ironic title "Tutsi, Race of God". Underneath it, a machete was depicted together with the question: "what weapons can we use to defeat the Inyenzi [cockroaches] once and for all?" (Des Forges, 1999, p.74). Another example of demonization directed against the Tutsi making use of the Hamitic hypothesis published in *Kangura* is the following excerpt:

"There is indeed a diabolical plan prepared by the Tutsi and related groups and targeting the systematic extermination of the Bantu population as well as the extension of a Nilotic empire from Ethiopia and Douala to the sources of the Nile and from Gabon to Lesotho going through the vast basins of the Kongo, the Rift Valley of Tanzania down to the Cape and the Drakensberg Mountains. What are the Bantu peoples waiting for to protect themselves against the genocide that has been so carefully and consciously orchestrated by the Hamites thirsty for blood and for barbarian conquests and whose leaders dispute the golden metal of cruelty with the Roman Emperor Nero..." (Chrétien et al., in Des Forges, 1999, p.79-80)

The call to send the Tutsi colonisers back to Ethiopia, where they supposedly originated according to the Europeans, had been heard in Rwanda since the Social Revolution (Destexhe, 1995). This became a recurrent theme in the genocidal propaganda. Léon Mugasera, a leading Hutu Power ideologist who had also written the Ten Commandments pamphlet, made a notorious speech in 1992. Referring to the foreignness of the Tutsi, he called upon the Rwandans to be vigilant and not let themselves be 'invaded' (Des Forges, 1999, p.84).

He also called upon them to take matters into their own hands and "to exterminate this scum" in order to not allow them to get away again, like the then-diasporic Rwandans had done after 1959. He also warned the Tutsi, stating: "I am telling you that your home is in Ethiopia, that we are going to send you back there quickly, by the Nyabarongo [River]." The Nyabarongo refers to a river that feeds into the Nile and which was used for dumping corpses during massacres of Tutsis in the past (Des Forges, 1999, p.85).

With his prophetic words becoming reality only two years later, this is seen as the single most important and influential speech before the genocide.

Physiques played an important role during the genocide, showing just how effective the propaganda was. During the genocide there were cases of Rwandans being killed, who were legally Hutu, but looked Tutsi (Des Forges, 1999). According to journalist Philip Gourevitch a popular torture technique used by the killers was chopping off the hands and feet of Tutsis. The idea behind it was that it would literally cut the 'tall people' down in size. Afterwards crowds would often gather around to mock the helpless victim (Gourevitch, 1998).

On a side-note: the Hutu leaders were not alone in their effort to re-imagine the imaginary geographies from the colonial period for propaganda-purposes. Their opponents from the RPF did exactly the same, as is illustrated by a famous RPF song from that time:

"It is the white man who has caused all that, children of Rwanda. He did it in order to find a secret way to pillage us. When they [the Europeans] arrived, we were living side by side in harmony. They were unhappy that they could not find a way to divide us. They invented different origins for us, children of Rwanda: some were supposed to have come from Chad, others from Ethiopia. We were a fine tree, its parts all in accord, children of Rwanda. Some of us were banished abroad, to never come back. We were separated by this division, children of Rwanda, we are all called to unite our strength to build Rwanda" (Chrétien et al., in Des Forges, 1999, p.693).

### **5.3.3 Outside Rwanda**

The Hamitic hypothesis has proven to be resilient. Years after the Rwandan genocide had passed the ideology underpinning it re-emerged in neighbouring Congo. There, it was re-interpreted and modified to fit the local situation. To combat Rwanda's influence in Congo president Kabila invoked the hypothesis, calling out to cleanse Congo of its 'Rwandese elements' in 1998. His request sparked witch hunts throughout the country against everyone who even as much as looked like a Tutsi. Among the victims were some that had lived in Congo for generations (Abbink & Van Dokkum, 2008).

Hundreds or even thousands of people are estimated to have been murdered during the witch hunts. Just like in Rwanda happened during the genocide the national radio in Congo identified the enemy, using similar descriptions: "Watch the nose, it's thin and narrow, and the height: Tutsi are tall!" The justification for the massacres was also more or less the same, with the Tutsi presence in Congo being named a threat for Bantu identity (Lemarchand, 1999, p.23).

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The main research objective of the thesis was to get more insight in the relation between the workings of European colonialism and the eruption of post-colonial violence in Rwanda. This was done by applying Said's theory of *Orientalism* to the specific context of that country, culminating in the following research question: to what extent was Rwanda orientalised by European colonialism, and in what way has this advanced post-colonial violence and genocide?

Before going into detail on the research questions, first I want to review my experiences with Said's theory. Although Rwanda and the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa are obviously not part of the traditional 'Orient', the theory of Orientalism can be applied there as well. Said has stated himself that European colonialism used the same mechanisms over and over again in different parts of the world.

My research shows that colonial knowledge of the Great Lake Region was formed prior to colonialism, like was the case with the Orient. In a similar way were the ideas and impressions formed in Europe at that time based on a stock of presupposed knowledge, which in turn spawned the inevitable imaginary geographies: a mental process of shaping, dividing, and attributing meaning. While the Orient was seen as exotic, mysterious and weak, Rwanda (and other parts of the region) was perceived in a dual way: one the hand strong and familiar, one the other hand exotic and weak. But above all: mysterious.

When applied to Rwanda colonial modernity, which Gregory presented as a double-headed coin, did not just constitute of asymmetrical power relations between metropolis and colony. By using the imaginary geographies these asymmetrical power relations were in fact extended into the space of Rwanda to construct difference. The double-head coin came to define the Hutu/Tutsi divide in Rwanda, with one side showing the face of modernity (Tutsi) - standardized, disciplined and hierarchical - as opposed to the backside depicting modernity's other (Hutu): primitive, irregular and mysterious.

I find Said's notion of positional superiority to be even more relevant in colonial Rwanda than in the context of the Orient. Colonial rule in Rwanda was defined by complicated triangular power relations between European, Hutu and Tutsi, that involved a great deal of asymmetry and positioning, and which changed over time in composition.

Finally, like the Orientals, the Hutu were not allowed to define themselves. They were defined by the Tutsi, who in turn were granted the right and power to define by the



Europeans. Only to be reversed later on. The collective of both Hutu and Tutsi was also defined by the Europeans.

The main research question was divided into four sub-questions. Those four combined form the answer to the main question. In order to formulate an answer, I will therefore cover each of the sub-questions separately:

- *What does the colonial history of Rwanda look like?*

In chapter 3 I have given a short overview of Rwandan history, covering the colonial period as well as the pre-colonial and post-colonial period. The colonial history of Rwanda was relatively civil, as the Europeans encountered a society that was already highly structured and hierarchical. With the exception of the punitive expeditions and World War One Rwanda did not see nearly as much violence as other colonies.

Rwanda was ruled indirectly, with first the Germans and later the Belgians relying on the Tutsi aristocracy. This preserved the natural order, but also made it possible for the Belgian colonial administration and their allies in the Catholic Church to implement policies of ethnic differentiation.

It was during the colonial period that the difference between Hutu and Tutsi was officially defined as one of ethnicity. Age-old social bonds were simplified and regional differences ignored. Hutu and Tutsi came to be distinctively different races. This was systematized through ethnic registration and the issuing of identity cards, which stated the race of the carrier, and through separate education in the classroom. Social mobility became virtually impossible.

- *What were the important 'imaginary geographies' of colonialism?*

In the fourth chapter the imaginary geographies of European colonialism were uncovered. They show that the Europeans had a strong interest in classifying the locals they encountered, culminating in the construction of a bipolar society with two opposing ideal types. In accordance with the Hamitic hypothesis physical appearances were connected to race theories about intellect. The Europeans likened the tall and slender Tutsi leader to themselves, while the short and stocky Hutu servant/peasant was 'othered' as different and inferior. Speke's Hamitic hypothesis played a key role in this as it linked the superior Tutsi to the Whites.

The imaginary geographies were turned into reality through the policies of the Belgian colonial administration. Rwanda was henceforth 'Tutsified', meaning

that its society was reshaped according to the views and ideas of Europeans. They envisioned a system of caste – or apartheid – in which position on the social ladder and opportunities in life were determined by race of birth.

- *In what way did the identities of Hutu and Tutsi change during colonial rule?*

This question runs like a red thread through the chapters 3 to 5. Both Hutu and Tutsi were colonial inventions. The Tutsi were racialized and branded as the superior Hamites. The Bantu tribes inhabiting Rwanda came to be defined collectively as non-Tutsi, or Hutu. Both groups' identities were strongly bound to the colonial period as they were constructed as homogeneous groups opposite of each other. This naturally increased the difference between and in fact constructed a dichotomy in which Hutu could not mean Tutsi and vice versa.

Not only were Hutu and Tutsi created as homogenous groups, the colonists and missionaries also attached advantages or limitations to them. In the separate classrooms they were indoctrinated by the European imaginary geographies and in fact stimulated to have separate identities.

- *Was there a clear connection between colonialism and post-colonial violence?*

In chapter 5 I have attempted to establish a link between colonialism and post-colonial violence in Rwanda. My findings suggest such a link existed. Colonialism influenced post-colonial violence in different ways, both directly and indirectly.

The hostility of many Hutu towards the Tutsi came forth out a common awareness of the oppression and exploitation they suffered under the Tutsi, who oppressed and exploited them increasingly in name of the colonists. Social relations between the two had been complicated and unequal prior to colonial rule, but under colonialism the distinctions sharpened, the inequality increased and the social relations were disrupted.

If the European colonists did not instigate or support violence themselves, like during the punitive actions or Social Revolution, it were colonial inventions like ethnic registration and ethnic identity cards that made it easier to target members of an ethnic group. Also, the coercive system of community-based labour – which was expanded significantly under colonialism, played an important role during the 1994 genocide.

Although the imaginary geographies of European colonialism may not have the most important motive for the killers during the genocide, they were in fact a key

element in the justification for the massacres. The Hamitic hypothesis was a crucial element of the genocidal propaganda. It was after all re-imagined by the hardliners as an ideology that perceived the Tutsi as foreign colonists, who had no place in Rwanda and who were infiltrators among the natives of Rwanda; trying to reinstate the hardships and oppressive regime of the colonial period.

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