

THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF ETHNICITY, CLASS AND RACE IN COLONIAL RWANDA

*The Cases of Prison Policies, Corvées, Taxation, Census
and Identity Booklets*

- Petra Vervust -

Thinking of ethnicity in Rwanda, most people automatically think of the Hutu/Tutsi distinction. Much literature was produced on the subject in the aftermath of the genocide in 1994, but few authors bothered to actually dig into the dusty colonial archives. When these archives are dug into, focussing exclusively on ethnic labels nevertheless does not clear the Hutu/Tutsi distinction once and for all. On the contrary, understanding ethnicity in colonial Rwanda requires an understanding of its historical contingency. Focussing on particular people, moments, places and perspectives in the context of the colonial administration shows that the importance of ethnicity and race has to be put into perspective. The importance of class, on the other hand, seems overwhelming. As an analytical construct, class definitely questions the practicability of ethnic and racial labels in Rwanda during the colonial period.

I. Introduction

Social and scholarly debates about the so-called ethnic division in Rwanda among Tutsi, Hutu and Twa have been shaped and re-shaped by historical power relations. At the onset of the colonial period (1898–1962), for instance, *mwami* [king] Musinga framed the difference between Tutsi elites at the court and Hutu as a difference between rulers and subjects¹. Europeans frequently based their discourses on those produced by Tutsi elites of the central Kingdom and presupposed the existence of “three distinct ethnic groups” or “three distinct races”². Tutsi, Hutu and Twa were generally described, respectively, as a superior looking ruling minority of cattle breeders, a subject majority of agriculturalists and a very small minority of hunters and potters³.

Towards the end of the colonial period, the discourse of Tutsi rulers versus Hutu (and Twa) subjects was no longer in vogue among Tutsi elites. In the 1950s, Musinga’s successor Rudahigwa stated that there was “no criterion to differentiate the terms *mututsi* and *muhutu*”⁴. At that time of political change, the denial of ethnic distinctions went along with the desire to abolish ethnic labels altogether and fit the image of precolonial harmony that was – and at the present moment is again – propagated by Tutsi elites⁵.

Recently, the question of whether ethnicity is a colonial invention has been hotly debated. On the one hand, so-called pro-Tutsi voices maintained the view that Tutsi, Hutu and Twa lived together harmoniously in precolonial times, until European colonialism invented ethnic cleavages and put an end to social mobility. On the other hand, so-called

1. Richard Kandt, 20.10.1900 (BB, R1001/262, 142). For histories of the German colonial rule, see GUDRUN HONKE, *Als die Weissen kamen : Ruanda und die Deutschen 1885-1919*, Wuppertal, 1990; INNOCENT KABAGEMA, *Ruanda unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft 1899-1916*, Frankfurt am Main, 1993 and HELMUT STRIZEK, *Geschenke Kolonien : Ruanda und Burundi unter deutscher Herrschaft*, Berlin, 2006. For studies of the installation of the Belgian administration, supervised by the League of Nations, see JEAN RUMIYA, *Le Rwanda sous le régime du mandat belge (1916-1931)*, Paris, 1992 and INGEBORG VIJGEN, *Tussen mandaat en kolonie. Rwanda, Burundi en het Belgisch bestuur in opdracht van de Volkenbond (1916-1932)*, Leuven, 2005. For a history of the Belgian and German rules, see INNOCENT NSENGIMANA, *Le Rwanda et le pouvoir européen (1894-1952). Quelles mutations ?*, Berne, 2003. 2. For instances of the phrase “three distinct ethnic groups”, see, e.g., ALBERT PAGÈS, *Au Ruanda. Sur les bords du Lac Kivu (Congo Belge). Un royaume hamite au centre de l’Afrique*, Bruxelles, 1933, p. 28 or ANTOINE VAN OVERSCHELDE, *Quelques notions sur la Géographie du Rwanda*, 1.12.1928 (MGPB, O91/1). For the phrase “three distinct races”, see e.g. KARL ROEHL, “Die sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Verhältnisse Ruandas”, in *Koloniale Rundschau*, nr. 5-6, 1914, p. 271. 3. For a few striking examples of these descriptions, see e.g. JEAN RUMIYA, *Le Rwanda...*, p. 139-141. 4. M.A. MAUS, “Lettre au Vice-gouverneur Général (25.4.1956)”, in FIDDLE NKUNDABAGENZI, *Rwanda politique, 1958-1960*, Bruxelles, 1962, p. 13-14. 5. For colonial representations, see “Les chefs du Ruanda expriment leur loyalisme envers le Mwami (in *Le Courrier d’Afrique*, 1.10.1956)”, in FIDDLE NKUNDABAGENZI, *Rwanda politique...*, p. 34; JACQUES JÉRÔME PIERRE MAQUET, *The premise of inequality in Ruanda. A study of political relations in a central African Kingdom*, London, 1961, p. 82-83. For an analysis of the post-genocide “revival of the aristocratic representation of Rwanda’s pre-colonial past”, including representations of “an idyllic, integrative society devoid of ethnic division and tension”, see JOHAN POTTIER, “Representations of Ethnicity in Post-genocide Writings on Rwanda”, in OBI IGWARA, *Ethnic hatred. Genocide in Rwanda*, London, 1995, p. 36-57.

pro-Hutu voices asserted that Hutu were conquered and enslaved by Tutsi; therefore, colonial powers had not invented but solely reinforced the essentialist ethnic identities that already existed⁶.

Contrary to what politicized opinions of essentialism versus invention suggest, the question of whether ethnic groups were a colonial invention cannot be answered with a plain “yes” or “no”. As will be confirmed in this article, ethnicity does not exist in a vacuum as an independent variable or substance and therefore, post-independence scholars have rightly conceptualized ethnicity as processes of ethnicization and racialization. Whereas ethnicization implies the increased social and political relevance of ethnicity during the colonial period, racialization was part of this ethnicization. Racialization implies the increased relevance of a racial ideology, including the introduction of the so-called Hamitic hypothesis, which presupposed the superior and exterior (e.g., Ethiopian, Egyptian, ...) origin of the Tutsi rulers.

In Rwanda, the process of ethnicization intensified under colonial rule, due to the German and, after the First World War,

Belgian military support to the central court to pursue a state-building process and incorporate peripheral regions. This process was consolidated no earlier than 1931 and with it, the authority of the central court and its predominantly Tutsi chiefs was firmly secured⁷. Moreover, the Belgian administration – supervised by the League of Nations – sought to limit “traditional” obligations such as *uburetwa*, described by Johan Pottier as “the hated *corvée* labour service through which populations regained access to the lands they had lost to Rwabugiri (...); it was restricted to Hutu”⁸. The Belgians also introduced new obligations, including “imposed taxes, compulsory cultivation of certain crops, regulation of the labor force and forced labor (*corvée*) which served to make chiefly rule more oppressive and to define the primary objects of this oppression (the Hutu) in ethnic terms”⁹.

Ultimately, these measures firmly increased the degree of exploitation because they were implemented at the level of individuals rather than of lineages¹⁰. Severe damage was caused to the solidarity among lineages by the introduction of the category “adult and able-bodied men” as the basis for imposing *corvées*

6. CATHARINE NEWBURY, “Ethnicity and the politics of history in Rwanda”, in *Africa Today*, nr. 1, 1998 (45), p. 9-10. For an elaborate discussion of so-called pro-Hutu and pro-Tutsi views on ethnicity, see MAHMOOD MAMDANI, *When Victims Become Killers. Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton, 2001, p. 41–59. For a brief summary of the debates, see PETER UVIN, “Ethnicity and power in Burundi and Rwanda: Different paths to mass violence”, in *Comparative Politics*, nr. 3, 1999 (31), p. 254. For a discussion of the “metaconflict” in Burundi, which is similar to the case of Rwanda, see RENÉ LEMARCHAND, *Burundi: ethnocide as discourse and practice*, Cambridge, 1994. 7. RENÉ LEMARCHAND, *Rwanda and Burundi*, London, 1970, p. 21; FILIP REYNTJENS, *Pouvoir et droit au Rwanda: droit public et évolution politique, 1916-1973*, Tervuren, 1985, p. 103. 8. JOHAN POTTIER, *Re-imagining Rwanda: conflict, survival and disinformation in the late twentieth century*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 13. 9. CATHARINE NEWBURY, *The cohesion of oppression: clientship and ethnicity in Rwanda 1860-1960*, New York, 1988, p. 179. 10. CATHARINE NEWBURY, “Ethnicity in Rwanda: The case of Kinyaga”, in *Africa: journal of the International African Institute*, nr. 1, 1978 (48), p. 23.

and taxes¹¹. Hutu chiefs and subchiefs were dismissed and Tutsi supremacy was sought in the educational and judicial fields¹². When the Belgian administration introduced identity cards in the early 1930s that mentioned people's ethnicity, this further complicated the negotiation of ethnic categories¹³.

Yet, the importance of the processes of ethnicization and racialization must not obscure the initial and remaining importance of other identities besides ethnicity and race in Rwandan history. European observers have often, but not exclusively, underestimated, ignored, or overlooked the reality of class distinctions – as well as the complexity of regional, clan and lineage labels – in favour of the Tutsi and Hutu labels. The main premise that will be discussed in this article regards the relative importance of ethnicity (including race) in its intertwinement with class.

Three interrelated main arguments will be put forward. First, it will be countered that ethnicity and race were the single most important identities that were shaped or reinforced by colonial power, as sometimes suggested by the existing literature. Even though ethnicity was considered highly relevant by the colonial administration, it will be argued that ethnicity was not always paramount compared to the relevance of other identities, such as class. The second argument regards what will be elaborated below as the symbolic shift from a class-based to a race-based ideology of ethnicity during the colonial

period. More specifically, the completeness and the linearity of this symbolic shift will be questioned. Third, colonial omnipotence will be put into perspective by referring to instances of Rwandan agency in the process of ethnicization.

After some explanatory remarks on ethnicity, class and race, several case studies will be explored to understand how ethnicity functioned in some administrative practices, in relation to class and race. The case studies regard the prison system, the imposition of *corvées* and the introduction of monetary taxes, censuses and identity booklets. These case studies are part of a larger PhD research project, which studied other cases as well, for example, the politics and policies of chieftancy, as well as missionary, educational and anthropological practices¹⁴.

The cases discussed in this article are based on, among other things, unpublished annual reports of the Belgian administration, as well as on unpublished missionary writings (letters, articles and the so-called *diaires* [diaries]) of the Catholic *Missionnaires d'Afrique*, also known as the White Fathers. These missionary sources are important, because the White Fathers were better aware of local power structures than colonial administrators, who often served for only short periods of time in particular places. Therefore, missionaries frequently acted as mediators between the administration and the population¹⁵. At the same time, many of the first European

11. JEAN-PIERRE CHRÉTIEN, *Le défi de l'ethnisme : Rwanda et Burundi : 1990-1996*, Paris, 1997, p. 14. 12. RENÉ LEMARCHAND, *Rwanda and Burundi...*, p. 72-73; CATHARINE NEWBURY, *The cohesion of oppression...*, p. 115. 13. NIGEL ELTRINGHAM, *Accounting for Horror. Post-Genocide Debates in Rwanda*, London, 2004, p. 19. 14. PETRA VERVUST, *The Limits of Colonial Symbolic Power. Ethnicization and Racialization in Rwanda 1890-1960*, Ph.D. diss., Ghent University, 2010. 15. INGEBORG VIJGEN, *Tussen mandaat...*, p. 177.



Geographical map with Rwandan pre-colonial subcultures (from Newbury, Catherine and David, "The Construction and Corrosion of Statist Historiography in Rwanda", in *American Historical Review*, no. 3, 2000, p. 832-77).

observers came from aristocratic and conservative backgrounds, which made it self-evident for them to take over what will be elaborated below as the class-based ideology of ethnicity.

The sources used are colonial in nature, written from the perspective of foreign invaders and cannot give an all-encompassing view on historical discourses and realities. Despite the colonial origin of the sources, this article attempts to reconstruct the perspective of Rwandan actors as well, by means of anthropological writings. A key source that was consulted to trace Rwandan views is the work of the German White Father Peter Schumacher¹⁶. During his first stay in Rwanda from 1907 to 1936, Schumacher interviewed four main informants : Rwanyege, Sezibera, Kayijuka and Sekarama. This “handful of specialists at the court” were “all trained at the court of Rwabugiri”, ruler of central Rwanda from about 1860 until 1895¹⁷. Therefore, their views can be considered as standing in a continuous line with those of nineteenth-century Tutsi elites.

II. Ethnicity, class and race

Ethnicity is known for its many defining markers, which have been described as “a composite of shared values, beliefs, norms, tastes, behaviours, experiences, consciousness of kind, memories and loyalties”¹⁸. However, over the past couple of decades, scholars – those of Rwanda included – have argued in favour of a more dynamic approach to studying ethnicity in terms of a historical process of ethnicization, rather than in terms of a given substance¹⁹. As elucidated by John Comaroff, “ethnic identities are always caught up in equations of power at once material, political, symbolic. They are seldom simply imposed or claimed; more often their construction involves struggle, contestation and, sometimes, failure”²⁰. Therefore, ethnicity must be studied as a variable that depends on historical constellations of material, political and symbolic power. In this article, the relationship between ethnicity and these constellations of power will be studied by looking at the relative importance of ethnicity, class and race in the colonial administration.

16. Especially one important work of Schumacher titled *Ruanda*, which has not been used by many scholars because it is written in German and published on well over 1000 pages of microfilm in 1958. 17. JAN VANSINA, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda. The Nyiginya Kingdom*, Madison, 2004, p. 7-8. 18. R.A. SCHERMERHORN, “Ethnicity in the Perspective of the Sociology of Knowledge”, in *Ethnicity*, nr. 1, 1974 (1), p. 2, cited in BILL ASHCROFT, GARETH GRIFFITHS & HELEN TIFFIN, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, London, 2007, p. 75. 19. CATHARINE NEWBURY & DAVID NEWBURY, “Bringing the Peasants back in : The Construction and Corrosion of Statist Historiography in Rwanda”, in *American Historical Review*, nr. 3, 2000 (105), 854-855; JEAN-LOUP Amselle & ELIKIA M’ BOKOLO, *Au coeur de l’ethnie. Ethnies, tribalisme et état en Afrique*, Paris, 1985; JEAN-PIERRE CHRÉTIEN & GÉRARD PRUNIER, *Les ethnies ont une histoire*, Paris, 1989; CAROLA LENTZ, “‘Tribalism’ and ethnicity in Africa. A review of four decades of anglophone research”, in *Cahiers des sciences humaines*, nr. 2, 1995 (31), p. 303-328. 20. JOHN COMAROFF, “Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference in an Age of Revolution”, in EDWIN WILMSEN & PATRICK McALLISTER, *The politics of difference : ethnic premises in a world of power*, Chicago, 1996, p. 166.

Our aim is not to find out exactly who “the” Tutsi and “the” Hutu were, either in past or present times, but to illustrate the historical contingency of these labels. It is argued that the question of the Tutsi-Hutu difference cannot be answered once and for all. Only parts of this question can be answered, depending on our historical knowledge of particular people, moments, places and perspectives. Due to the premise of the historical contingency of ethnic labels, those who are looking for a more powerful definition of “the” differences between Tutsi and Hutu will be disappointed. Those who are looking for a better understanding of the nature and the workings of ethnicity in colonial Rwanda, without falling into the trap of either essentialism or inventionism, will hopefully agree that it is the historical contingent nature of the ethnic labels itself, as well as their limited functioning in particular historical practices, that deserves our attention.

“Unlike ethnicity”, Crawford Young argued, “class categories are analytical constructs in the first instance, though they may acquire social meaning and become powerful foci of solidarity”²¹. According to Immanuel Wallerstein as well – while referring to Marx and Weber – class and peoplehood constructs such as race and ethnicity are “orthogonally defined”, because classes are “analytic categories, statements about contradictions in an historical system and not descriptions

of social communities”. When becoming foci of solidarity as classes “für sich”, Wallerstein attributed their elusiveness to the fact that “constructed ‘peoples’ correlate ... heavily, albeit imperfectly, with ‘objective’ class”²². “Class” is used in this article in the sense of Young and Wallerstein as an analytical construct that can acquire social meaning and point to social contradictions. The latter include distinctions of status, wealth and/or occupation.

Class membership is of crucial importance to understanding issues of ethnicity in colonial Rwanda. But, however much class and ethnicity seem to have overlapped one another, it needs to be stressed that they were not one and the same. The categories Hutu, Tutsi and Twa – as they existed before the colonization – have been defined by Jean-Pierre Chrétien as “patrilinear hereditary identifications” and “ancient social cleavages, the Hutu being rather agriculturalists and the Tutsi rather cattle breeders (the Twa, very much a minority, rather hunters, fishers or potters), without allowing us to speak of social classes either”²³. The belief among Europeans that all Tutsi were wealthy and powerful prevailed, according to Chrétien, “until the 1956 demographic survey”, which showed that Tutsi “were 13 to 18 percent of the population (depending on the region) and that they could not all be reduced to a privileged ‘leisure class’”²⁴.

21. CRAWFORD YOUNG, “Patterns of Social Conflict : State, Class, and Ethnicity”, in *Daedalus*, nr. 2, 1982 (111), p. 73. 22. IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN, “The construction of peoplehood: racism, nationalism, ethnicity”, in ETIENNE BALIBAR & IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN, *Race, nation, class. Ambiguous identities*, London, 1991, p. 79, 84. 23. JEAN-PIERRE CHRÉTIEN, *Le défi de l’ethnisme...*, p. 13. 24. JEAN-PIERRE CHRÉTIEN, *The Great Lakes of Africa. Two Thousand Years of History*, New York, 2003, p. 285.

As suggested by the data derived from the work of Philippe Leurquin during the mid-1950s, “no significant differences [existed] between rural Hutu and Tutsi in income and access to food”²⁵. According to Ian Linden, Hutu and Tutsi did not correspond to two real classes, defined in a way applicable to pre-capitalist formations as groups of people having the same relationship to the modes of production. For this to be true, all Hutu should have been direct agricultural producers in a “feudal” mode of production, which was not the case, since rich Hutu employed labour or gained clients as well. Likewise, all Tutsi should have appropriated surplus labour, which is clearly contradicted by the very large group of *petits Tutsi* who provided labour and services for their patrons. The “class struggle”, as it was manifested before and during the 1959 revolution, “took place within the framework of the dominant ideology of the colonial period ‘ethnicity’”, with a discourse of Tutsi as “the ruling class”²⁶.

Regarding the central Rwandan kingdom, Jan Vansina stated that during the second half of the nineteenth century, an older class consciousness was being replaced by the absolute division between Hutu and Tutsi. Vansina described this older class consciousness as resulting from “a political phenomenon rather than from a pure notion of class” and entailing “a very fine social scale in which families were deemed to be more or less ‘good or bad’ according to their occupations and their relative well-being but

it also made a rough distinction between the elite (*impfura*) and the bulk of the people, or between wealthy and poor people”. Vansina described the new situation towards the end of the nineteenth century as “the scission of society into the Tutsi and Hutu social categories”, which he considered “as a case of disaggregation between a ruling *class* [my stress] and its subjects, at the level of the whole society”²⁷. Therefore, I strongly insist that instead of equating ethnicity with class, it makes more sense to consider ethnicity in central Rwanda at the onset of European rule as underpinned by a class-based ideology.

The ideology that underpinned ethnicity in late nineteenth-century Rwanda evolved during the colonial period from a class-based to a race-based ideology. Based on the work of Catharine Newbury, Pottier stated that in the second half of the nineteenth century “wealth, not race, was the basis of the ethnic distinction between Hutu and Tutsi”, whereas it was “colonial interventions that sharply accentuated, indeed racialised, the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic division”²⁸. As phrased by Chrétien, the paradigm of racialization implies that the “archaic social configuration has been set to music on a racial score so to speak during the colonisation”²⁹.

When this article mentions the symbolic shift from a class-based to a race-based ideology of ethnicity, “class” is used in the sense that applies to late nineteenth-century Rwanda as a distinction of status between the wealthy elite

25. CATHARINE NEWBURY & DAVID NEWBURY, *Bringing the Peasants back in...*, p. 867. 26. IAN LINDEN, *Church and revolution in Rwanda*, Manchester, 1977, p. X-XI. 27. JAN VANSINA, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda...*, p. 191-192. 28. JOHAN POTTIER, *Re-imagining Rwanda...*, p. 14-15. 29. JEAN-PIERRE CHRÉTIEN, *Le défi de l’ethnisme...*, p. 13.

or *impfura* and the simple people or *rubanda*. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that class relations changed drastically during the colonial period due to the introduction of new, western-style resources. “Race”, in contrast, can generally be defined as referring to socially constructed groups either with or without imagined inherent characteristics, which often include somatic distinctions³⁰. On an analytical level, the more specific meanings of race were changeable in time and space, just like the more specific meanings of ethnicity and class³¹. In the case studies discussed in this article, race refers to a process of racialization, including the partly European-coined concepts of immutable, static races in either the Gobinistic (nineteenth-century, elitarian, class-based sense) or the later, more inclusive and class independent sense³².

III. Ambiguities in prison

The Catholic diarist of Save recorded in 1904 that five Tutsi clients of Kabare (the powerful uncle of the *mwami* or king), who had been chained for robbery and murder, had now been executed by soldiers. Five more were still chained and were cultivating, which – according to the editors of the diary – was a deeply humiliating punishment for the ruling

classes³³. In a similar vein, the diarist of Save mentioned in 1918 that four Tutsi, who were imprisoned at Nyanza, were even given a hoe to cultivate³⁴. That making highly placed Tutsi cultivate was a common punishment at the court was confirmed as well by the diarist of Kabgaye, who mentioned in April 1922 that *mwami* Musinga had arrested a small chief, who had protected a gang of thieves. In addition to taking away all of the chief’s cows, small livestock and provisions, it is telling that Musinga swore “that at the end of the six months of prison, he would give him a hoe to go cultivate his fields like a common *muhutu*”³⁵. Thus, it is likely that the habit to give Tutsi a hoe and make them cultivate as a form of punishment was older than the European-styled prison system.

German officials regularly took prisoners, whom they chained to prevent escapes³⁶. Because they imprisoned both elite and ordinary people, this sometimes led to difficult situations. White Father Brard wrote that an officer had told him about a “noble *mututsi*” whom he had imprisoned, whose servants had built a hut of mats in the middle of his fellow inmates, to protect him against the gazes of the secular. Brard explained that “the rich *batusi* never eat in the presence of the poor *bahutu*, they even pretend to have

30. FRANK DIKÖTTER, “Introduction”, in FRANK DIKÖTTER, *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan*, London, 1997, p. 5; PETER ROBB, “South Asia and the Concept of Race”, in PETER ROBB, *The concept of race in South Asia*, Delhi, 1995, p. 1-2. 31. ETIENNE BALIBAR, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?”, in ETIENNE BALIBAR & IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN, *Race, Nation, Class : Ambiguous Identities*, London, 1991. 32. For an analysis of the history of race in Rwanda, regarding the process of hybridization between Rwandan and European conceptualizations of race, see PETRA VERVUST, *The Limits...*, p. 39-68. 33. ROGER HEREMANS & EMMANUEL NTEZIMANA, *Journal de la Mission de Save (Rwanda), 1899-1905*, 1987, p. 120. 34. *Diaire de Issave*, 3.1918 (MGPB). 35. *Diaire de Kabgaye*, 29.4.1922 (MGPB). 36. E.g. *Diaire de Nyundo*, 5.8.1908 (Archive de l’archevêché de Kabgayi).

different foods³⁷. Whereas Brard interpreted this problem as a problem of rich Tutsi versus poor Hutu, we may rest assured that poor Tutsi would not have had servants to protect them from inferior looks.

Keeping in mind that class mattered more than ethnicity in cases such as this, these cases might have caused the Belgian administration to issue “article nineteen”, which prescribed the separation of Tutsi and Hutu in prisons³⁸. That means that ethnicity in itself was made the decisive factor in the Belgian policy of prison segregation, which therefore may be understood as part of the process of ethnicization. Although this “article nineteen” was probably a reaction to problems that occurred from class differences, it is nevertheless possible that the Belgian policy was ethnicized in that poor Tutsi were separated from Hutu as well. The separation of Tutsi and Hutu was practised in some places, with women as a third, supra-ethnic category, probably due to the practice of gender separation in European prisons³⁹.

However, the ethnicization of prison policies was not complete, because prisons in many places were in bad shape and not equipped

with a sufficient number of rooms to apply the rule⁴⁰. The separation of men and women was sometimes all that was possible, which suggests that the material power was insufficient and the symbolic power of ethnicity was limited by that of gender⁴¹. Whereas it was sometimes stated that Tutsi were separated “when it is possible”, at other places it was simply noted in the report that article nineteen was “not applicable”⁴².

According to Schumacher’s interlocutors, thieves were treated too mildly by Europeans : “they receive meat in abundance and that is exactly what they wish for, they eat it in peace and quiet, without having had to risk their lives for it”. These informants saw it more or less as a reward, because after a couple of days in prison, that is, by the time the thieves were relieved, they had become all fat and were ready to continue their “vocation for life”. The only ones who got skinny in prison were Tutsi : “for them the meals are distasteful, they have to swing the hoes, sleep badly and have no choice but to constantly be together with filthy Hutu”⁴³. Beyond being another confirmation of the continued practice of making those Tutsi cultivate who were not used to it, this information shows that elite Tutsi did suffer in

37. BRARD, Lettre du P. Brard, P.B. datée du 8 Février 1902 à Monseigneur Livinhac sur la mission de Issavi (MGPB, 098 523, p. 17). 38. Other than the indirect information in the administrative reports that mentioned whether or not this article was being applied in particular territories, I did not find more detailed information on this article. 39. DE COSTER, Rapport Annuel. Territoire de Bushiru-Kingogo 1928 [AA, RA/RU(95)1D]; Rapport Annuel. Territoire de Bushiru-Kingogo 1926 [AA, RA/RU (95)1C]. 40. E.g. LENAERTS, Rapport annuel. Territoire de Nyanza. Sur la prison de Nyanza Ruanda 1932 [AA, RA/RU(93)2bis]. 41. E.g. Rapport Annuel. Territoire de Shangugu 1938 [AA, RA/RU(103)2B]. 42. Rapport annuel. Territoire de Kibuye 1935 [AA, RA/RU(82)2]; R. VERHULST, Rapport annuel. Territoire Gabiro 1933 [AA, RA/RU(68)3]; VERHULST, Rapport annuel. Territoire de Gabiro 1934 [AA, RA/RU(68)4]; VERHULST, Rapport annuel. Territoire de Gabiro 1935 [AA, RA/RU(68)5]. 43. PETER SCHUMACHER, *Ruanda*. Vol. 28 A, Freiburg, 1958, p. 481.

prison due to their elite habits, probably all the more so when the rule to separate them from Hutu was not followed.

Mihana, one of the Tutsi whom the American anthropologist Helen Codere interviewed, had been sentenced to three years in prison. He stated : "It was impossible for me to get used to it. The soldiers never left me alone because I had nothing to give them – no money and no liquor. I did not eat and was hungry and the food was poorly prepared. And I was in the section that was made to do forced labor". When he complained to the police commissioner that he was not able to do the kind of work he had not done since his childhood, the soldiers no longer forced him to work. After two years of prison, he almost died from the bad food, after which he could go home⁴⁴. Mihana's story illustrates that Tutsi could suffer in prison, even without belonging to the highest elites. Especially due to his age and physical weakness, he was allowed to quit working. That Tutsi were usually not dismissed from work in prison was illustrated by earlier examples (see above). Nevertheless, one administrator of Mulera stated in 1923 that Tutsi did not have to work in prison, in contrast to Hutu, which suggests that Tutsi were not necessarily forced to work⁴⁵.

Another issue in Mihana's story was the bad food that made him ill. Apparently, prison food could be a curse or a blessing depending on what people were accustomed to eat. Just like the thieves, who got fat in prison,

Schumacher's interlocutors also mentioned a Twa who was glad to be in prison because of the food that was served to him. The biggest curse to him was that he was forced to cultivate and he even admired the Hutu who were used to doing this kind of work daily⁴⁶. However, sometimes efforts were made to make Tutsi's stay in prison less dreadful to them. The report of Rubengera in 1926, for instance, mentioned that the normal ration for detainees included bananas, vegetables (beans, green peas, or sweet potatoes) and 1 liter of skimmed milk. For Tutsi, by contrast, the ration included full-cream milk, beans, green peas, sorghum flour and bananas⁴⁷.

Because of the importance of milk to Tutsi, the difference between skimmed and full-cream milk is striking, although it remains questionable whether the wishes of Tutsi prisoners regarding milk were respected. On the one hand, the significance of milk to Tutsi can be illustrated by an utterance of one of Schumacher's interlocutors. The latter said that a poor man had taken service with him, after which he obtained a cow that soon became a herd. "Thanks to the milk they enjoy", he continued, the poor man's "children, boys and girls, grow up to be important and distinguished people"⁴⁸. On the other hand, Tutsi – at least Tutsi women – did not necessarily appreciate full-cream milk. Nyiramugwera, a Tutsi woman of nobility interviewed by Codere, noted that "when the girls approached puberty" they could no longer drink fresh milk, but had to drink

44. HELEN CODERE, *The biography of an African society, Rwanda 1900-1960 based on forty-eight Rwandan autobiographies*, Tervuren, 1973, p. 82. 45. Rapport annuel. Territoire de Mulera 1923 [AA, RA/RU (95)3]. 46. PETER SCHUMACHER, *Ruanda...*, p. 462. 47. Rapport annuel. Territoire de Lubengera 1926 [AA, RA/RU(80)5]. 48. PETER SCHUMACHER, *Ruanda...*, p. 485.



So-called 'White Fathers' together with the local population in Rwanda in 1921, five years after Rwanda came de facto under Belgian administration. Seated, fourth from the left, is the then Mwami (or King) Musinga. (Photos archives Pères Blancs, Namur)

curdled milk. Otherwise, they “would have muscular limbs like those of Hutu women and not supple ones”⁴⁹.

In sum, the politics of ethnicity in colonial prisons were quite ambiguous. As was the case with the rule to separate Tutsi from Hutu to give the first more privacy, occasional statements about Tutsi not having to work, such as the one in Mulera (see above), or those describing a different menu were other examples of the benevolence towards Tutsi in colonial prisons. Although the logic behind these cases was based on the habits of Tutsi elites only, other sources suggest that sometimes everyone benefited from their imprisonment except for Tutsi elites. Thieves who were not used to eating on a regular basis were well fed in prison, but those who were not used to cultivating often suffered because they were forced to do so. The precolonial habit of humiliating highly placed Tutsi by making them cultivate was continued into the German and Belgian periods.

Whether Tutsi were spared or suffered, their treatment in colonial prisons was underpinned by the class-based ideology of ethnicity. Even if official rules were ethnicized in that no distinction was made between Tutsi elites and Tutsi non-elites, this was a generalization of the class-based ideology that logically underpinned the distinction between Hutu and Tutsi. In practice, however, the colonial symbolic power involved in the ethnicization

of the prison system was incomplete and inconsistent. For a start, the class-based ideology of ethnicity never disappeared. Moreover and in addition to material problems concerning the infrastructure – which indicate that the prison system was a low priority of the colonial administration – there remained many ambiguities about whether Tutsi should be punished extra or, by contrast, enjoy a more humane or even special treatment.

IV. Imposing colonial *corvées*

Already in the German period, it was obvious to some European observers that Hutu would play the main part in the economic development of the country, even if Tutsi were perceived as the then-dominant part of the population⁵⁰. The Polish anthropologist Jan Czekanowski stated that Musinga hated the Belgians because they wanted to eliminate the unproductive nobility and exploit the natives by themselves⁵¹. Schumacher’s interlocutors also mentioned that in the early days of Belgian rule, some thought it was better when all the cattle would be removed from the country, “for then the Tutsi would have to work themselves and their pride would be broken”⁵².

Even if the Belgians eventually hung on to a policy of indirect rule, they did not want to exempt all Tutsi from forced labour, since it soon became clear that not all Tutsi belonged

49. HELEN CODERE, *The biography...*, p. 162. 50. “Ruanda”, in *Koloniale Rundschau*, nr. 12, 1912, p. 752. 51. JAN CZEKANOWSKI, *Forschungen im Nil-Kongo-Zwischengebiet. Band 1 : Ethnographie. Zwischenseengebiet. Mpororo, Ruanda, Wissenschaftliche Ergebnisse der deutschen Zentral-Afrika-Expedition 1907-1908 unter Führung Adolf Friedrichs, Herzogs zu Mecklenburg. Band 6*, Leipzig, 1917, p. 254. 52. PETER SCHUMACHER, *Ruanda...*, p. 223.

to the leisure-class minority. Wouters, the Belgian administrator of Mulera, noted in 1928 that “every adult and able-bodied man (*mututzi* or *muhutu*) is obliged to fifteen days of labor a year”, which had to be registered on individual work cards. According to Wouters, this change would match the views of the governor perfectly, that is, the “formation of a cadre of chiefs – diminution of *corvées*”. Moreover, Wouters continued, “it would force a certain category of the noble class to work”⁵³. This means that Wouters had noticed and wished to alter the matter of particular “nobles” refusing to do manual labour.

This matter does not seem to have been cleared in 1931, since the administrator of Gabiro stated that the administration should decide who could be requisitioned. He was frequently asked by subchiefs and chiefs: “the *batutsi*, do they have to work? or the owners of cattle, do they have to work?” In his opinion, it was not advisable to make two categories of local wage labourers. If Tutsi were able to have themselves replaced by paying others to fulfil obligations of cultures and reforestation, he thought it obvious that they could be forced to do other jobs, even at the risk that they would buy themselves out again. After all, the administrator concluded, “before 1910 could the rich in Belgium not have themselves released from military service by paying?”⁵⁴.

It is striking that when the subchiefs and chiefs asked the Belgian administrator about who was supposed to do the *corvées* for the

colonial administration, they first asked about “the *batutsi*” and then about “the owners of cattle”. They most likely added “owners of cattle” because it was a more tangible criterion than the Tutsi identity. It was not uncommon to consider all cattle owners as Tutsi, nor was it always that clear whether or not somebody was a “real” Tutsi. People’s ethnicity could be contested for political reasons or because the process of ethnic mobility could take several generations. At the same time, the statements of the Belgian administrator show that he was not at all in favour of an ethnicized policy. To him it made much more sense to let the criterion of wealth prevail. Whoever was wealthy enough to buy himself out of colonial *corvées* should be allowed to do so. The utterances of the administrator demonstrate that whereas the class-based ideology of ethnicity was not operational in the colonial practice of imposing *corvées*, class in itself was, because it was based on the measurable criterion of wealth. Thereby, the symbolic power of ethnicity was overruled by the material power of class.

Just as the administrator of Gabiro had compared Tutsi to rich Belgians, one of Schumacher’s interlocutors compared Tutsi to Europeans. Schumacher had asked why Hutu should always be the only ones having to work, whereas there were so many Tutsi who did not carry out specific duties. They just decorated the courts and nevertheless lived of Hutu’s taxes. However, instead of stating that the rich bought themselves out of

53. WOUTERS, Rapport annuel. Territoire de Mulera. Réponses au questionnaire de monsieur le gouverneur du Ruanda-Urundi 1928 [AA, RA/RU(95)7]. 54. Rapport annuel. Territoire de Gabiro 1931 [AA, RA/RU(68)1].

military service – as done by the administrator of Gabiro – one of them said that Tutsi did not work because of their military service. He asked Schumacher if Europeans did not have professional military men, who were provided for by all others. When Schumacher replied that the army had become superfluous as a result of the European rule, his informant argued that in addition to the army, Tutsi also had duties in jurisdiction and cattle breeding.

Forced into a corner by Schumacher's replies, his informant eventually asked rhetorically if there were no rich Europeans who had not earned their own money but had simply had inherited it: "they themselves loaf about, but pay their laborers and settle their taxes; what else can be expected from them? And when it should occur to them to stand around all day, is that not their business?" Accusing Europeans of denouncing much, without understanding the system in Rwanda, where wealthy cattle keepers paid their labourers in many ways, Schumacher threw in the towel. He had nothing else to reply and moved on to his next question⁵⁵. Once more, the argument of the rights of the wealthy had triumphed in the matter of who was supposed to work. Because this was no more than a theoretical discussion, in contrast to the practical issues raised by the administrator of Gabiro, both Schumacher and his interlocutor could conceptualize Tutsi and Hutu according to the class-based ideology of ethnicity.

While relying completely on the class-based ideology of ethnicity, Schumacher himself argued in a way that was typical to the German ethnology of his days. Regarding the question of who was supposed to work, he was convinced that the "*Eigenart der völkischen Elemente*", that is, the specific nature of the popular elements – would have to be considered. However, the reasons for Schumacher's argument stemmed from the very real consequences of forcing some Tutsi to do manual labour. According to Schumacher, "the rich lords" vehemently opposed manual labour, unless forced to do it because of extreme poverty. He wrote that when they once had been forced to help with road constructions, three of them had instantly committed suicide. One had been a father who had been supposed to deliver his son, but the following morning his wife found her husband dead⁵⁶.

In his work on Twa, Schumacher stated that the newly built wood road did not have any bad consequences for the herds of the Tutsi of the Bigogo settlement. But, if Tutsi were forced to help build it, many would commit suicide⁵⁷. Even if Schumacher must have realized that poor Tutsi who cultivated to survive would never commit suicide when forced to do manual labour, it is telling that he nevertheless pled to consider the specific nature of "the popular elements". In a similar vein, he also gave examples of failed attempts of Belgian administrators at making Twa

55. PETER SCHUMACHER, *Ruanda...*, p. 1073-1074. 56. PETER SCHUMACHER, *Ruanda...*, p. 778.

57. PETER SCHUMACHER, *Expedition zu den Zentralafrikanischen Kivu-Pygmäen. I. Die physische und soziale Umwelt der Kivu-Pygmäen (Twiden)*, Brüssel, 1949, p. 73, 82.

cultivate, because the latter were made to hunt and – just like “the herders” – resented manual labour that would tie them down as serfs⁵⁸.

Beyond resistance against colonial *corvées*, Tutsi were also said to protest against manual labour in the missionary context because of their leisure-class privileges. Missionaries complained from the start about proud Tutsi who would refuse to do any manual labour, such as construction works at the mission posts⁵⁹. In the 1950s, nothing had changed; missionary Levie stated that the herders at the mission did not want to do anything other than what they had been assigned to do. According to him, they were “batutsi one hundred percent”, who despised manual labour⁶⁰. Even the missionaries interviewed by a Belgian student, Katrien Van Gelder, in the late 1990s declared that the sons of the chiefs were difficult students because they were “*fils-à-papa*” and did not want to work⁶¹. Thus, while a generalized ethnicization of work ethics was definitely present in European discourses, in practice, the symbolic power of ethnicity was limited. Ethnic differences were difficult to make concrete and exceeded by differences of class.

V. Introducing colonial taxes

Before Europeans made efforts to collect taxes, the *mwami* of the central court already sent his Tutsi delegates to do so in the peripheral areas of the kingdom. However, this was easier said than done. The local populations despised the delegates and resisted payment of taxes, so these Tutsi were unable to collect taxes⁶². Bakiga were often described as recalcitrant to pay taxes to Tutsi officials and Schumacher’s interlocutors recalled that similar situations of rebellion used to occur even in central Rwanda. The people of Save, for instance, were said to have attacked *mwami* Rwabugiri when he travelled through, because some of his Twa had captured a goat⁶³.

In addition to commercial taxes, such as that on the export of hides, the German administration introduced the head tax under the auspices of official Wintgens⁶⁴. Wintgens wrote in 1914 that the tax recovery in Kigali had been a success, because it brought in three times as much as had been previously estimated. Communications from Gisenyi and Shangugu claimed that taxes had been collected in the same simple and calm way as in Kigali. The population was said to pay willingly

58. PETER SCHUMACHER, “Les Pygmées Batwa des régions du Kivu”, in *Grands Lacs*, n° 3, 1946, p. 191; ID., *Expedition zu den Zentralafrikanischen Kivu-Pygmäen. II. Die Kivu-Pygmäen (Twidien)*, Brüssel, 1950, p. 244-245. 59. RÖSELER, “Stationsleben in Kirinda”, in *Nachrichten aus der ostafrikanischen Mission*, nr. 7, 1910 (24), p. 135. 60. ETIENNE LEVIE, Lettre, Kabgaye, 1.11.1954 (MGPB, N°543/2). 61. KATRIEN VAN GELDER, *Witte missionarissen tussen missie en réalités locales in Rwanda (1945-1959)*, licentiaatsverhandeling, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1998, p. 103. 62. E.g. LÉON CLASSE, “Au Kivu Oriental”, in *Missions d’Afrique des Pères Blancs*, 5.1904, p. 140; PETER SCHUMACHER, “Ethnographische Momentaufnahmen aus Ruanda”, in *Afrika Bote*, nr. 23, 1916-1917, p. 168. 63. PETER SCHUMACHER, *Ruanda...*, p. 473. 64. CATHARINE NEWBURY, *The cohesion of oppression...*, p. 152; INGBORG VIJGEN, *Tussen mandaat...*, p. 34.



At the top : Mwami (King) Rudahigwa (left) welcomes a Twa leader, during the 1950s. The photograph, taken from a worm's eye perspective, displays European observer's fascination with 'giants and dwarfs'. Original subscript : "Deux chefs, deux races : un chef Batwa serrant la main du Mwami du Ruanda". (GASTON DERKINDEREN & PIERRE RYCKMANS, Atlas du Congo belge et du Ruanda-Urundi, Paris, 1955, p. 66)

At the bottom : On 17 October 1955 the Mwami of Rwanda was invited to the Gala Bwana Kitoko held in honour of King Baudouin in the Palace of Fine Arts, Brussels. Here he is shown talking to Léon Duwaerts, President of the Brussels Press Association and film director André Cauvin. (Photos CEGES/SOMA, nos. 14944 and 141141)

because they hoped for protection from Tutsi's arbitrariness and injustice. According to Wintgens, missionaries quietly hoped that with the arrival of the head tax, Hutu would be freed from paying taxes to the chiefs and the *mwami*⁶⁵.

In 1905, the White Fathers of Nyundo assumed that the authoritarian regime in Rwanda would end on the day that colonial taxes would be introduced. But, the chronicler wrote, "instead of taking away from the ruling class of the Batutsi a bit of their power, they will have it increased"⁶⁶. Time has told that in reality, obligations demanded by the colonial state only increased indeed and even aggravated the so-called "traditional" charges⁶⁷. Having introduced the head tax of one rupee, Wintgens had clearly disoblged *mwami* Musinga⁶⁸. At the same time, both the *mwami* and some important chiefs had attempted to profit from the situation by trying to collect taxes in those regions where the European administration had not yet collected, such as the area of Ruhengeri. However, the population – among whom can be counted the Bakiga – had not let them⁶⁹.

In a communication regarding the worries of Musinga, Wintgens explained the system. The tax amounted to one rupee per head of every man who was able to work. The administration collected taxes by means of the chiefs, who

had to make a list of all taxpayers, collect the taxes and force all those who could not pay to twenty days of labour in public works such as road construction. Forcing those who could not pay to work, Wintgens called a *conditio sine qua non* for the success of the taxation⁷⁰. One consequence was that, for fear of being obliged to do manual labour, Tutsi sold oxen to missionaries in order to obtain rupees to pay the taxes⁷¹. So already under the German rule, some people – mostly collectively labelled as "the Tutsi" – had been terrified that they might be forced to perform manual labour.

Initially, the German administration did not seem to make an ethnic distinction in who was supposed to pay taxes, for Wintgens only mentioned "every man who was able to work". The Belgian tax policy entailed the introduction of a head tax in 1917, as well as an additional cattle tax. In 1920, this additional cattle tax meant that men with five or more head of cattle had to pay more than those without cattle and in 1921 the criterion was raised to ten head of cattle. From 1926 onwards, this regulation was officially cancelled, because from then on an extra taxation was levied for each head of cattle. During the rest of the colonial period, taxes increased and were complemented by additional taxes, such as the tax levied on polygamous men⁷².

65. WINTGENS, *Betrifft Steuerfrage*, 1.2.1914 [AA, *RU (5600)22*, p. 221]; WINTGENS, 21.5.1914 [AA, *RU (5600)22*, p. 247]; WINTGENS, 24.7.1914 [AA, *RU (5600)22*, p. 211]. 66. Diaire de Nyundo. Chroniques, 1905 (Archive de l'archevêché de Kabgayi, p. 15-16). 67. RENÉ LEMARCHAND, *Rwanda and Burundi...*, p. 123. 68. PETER SCHUMACHER, *Ruanda...*, p. 217-218. 69. WINTGENS, 24.7.1914 [AA, *RU (5600)22*, p. 211-212]. 70. WINTGENS, *Betrifft Steuerfrage*, 1.2.1914 [AA, *RU (5600)22*, p. 222]. 71. WALTHER TRITTELVITZ, "Kurze Nachrichten", in *Nachrichten aus der ostafrikanischen Mission*, nr. 7, 1914 (28), p. 116. 72. CATHARINE NEWBURY, *The cohesion of oppression...*, p. 172; FILIP REYNTJENS, *Pouvoir et droit...*, p. 138. For a review of the different taxes collected in Ruanda-Urundi in 1957, see *Le Ruanda-Urundi*, Bruxelles, 1959, p. 134-136.

From the beginning of Belgian rule, ethnic distinctions were made in the tax policy. In 1918, the diarist of Rwaza – located in the northwest peripheral area of Mulera – mentioned that a census would soon be conducted, aimed at the taxation of five francs per head. In that first year, because of the famine, no Hutu were supposed to pay the taxes; only the few Tutsi who resided in this area. “Nobody”, the diarist added, “be it a mututsi or be it a muhutu, may be dispossessed of their goods, if it is not on the king’s command, who will have to agree with the Government”. Moreover, “the chiefs will not be allowed to introduce new corvées, such as Buletwa, kusarira, but have to stick to what was the custom in the country until now”⁷³.

These statements of a White Father in Rwaza suggest that on the one hand it was everything but obvious for the population to pay the taxes in the aftermath of the First World War, which had caused, among other things, a famine⁷⁴. On the other hand, chiefs were eager to increase the exploitation of their subjects by introducing clientship obligations that were new to the region. When measures such as the introduction of *uburetwa* clientship were nevertheless carried through, this was not merely a colonial decision, for local elites quite actively attempted to reinforce their own authority. In the same region of Mulera, a Belgian administrator even stated in 1926 that as a result of the introduction of five francs taxation, Tutsi asked themselves for a distinction between them and the Hutu⁷⁵.

Other sources demonstrate that an ethnic distinction in taxation policies was also implemented in how much Tutsi and Hutu, respectively, had to pay. The diarist of Zaza in the southeast Gissaka wrote in 1918 that a visiting administrator assumed that he could collect two rupees and a half taxes of the Tutsi and one rupee and a half taxes of the Hutu, or at least their equivalent in francs. The half rupee would be for the chief, as compensation for lost income⁷⁶. In Rubengera, administrator Fiolle explained in 1922 that the head taxation had been carried out without too many difficulties. “The natives”, he claimed, “have shown their good will, even though the fixed sum of five francs for the Wahutu was for many above their means”. It was assumed to be harder for Hutu than for Tutsi to find revenues. Whereas Hutu often did not find wage labour other than carrier services as porters, many Tutsi sold cattle to the “Laboratoire Vétérinaire de Kissengyi”. Compared to the previous year, more Tutsi and fewer Hutu had paid taxes, which Fiolle ascribed to the fact that five francs simply was too much for most Hutu⁷⁷.

Not all Tutsi were keen to pay a different amount of taxes than Hutu, as was the case in Mulera. In southwest Shangugu, the diarist of Mibirisi discussed in 1920 at some length what had happened when the Belgian Monsieur Hanard had come to collect taxes at the mission station. Everyone brought their two francs to his satisfaction. Then it turned out that some of the people at the mission were “of the Batutsi race”, who were supposed to pay

73. Diaire de Rwaza, 25.1.1918 (MGPB). 74. JEAN RUMIYA, *Le Rwanda...*, p. 70. 75. Rapport annuel. Territoire de Mulera 1926 [AA, RA/RU(95)]. 76. Diaire de Zaza, 22.11.1918 (MGPB).

77. FIOLE, Rapport annuel. Territoire de Lubengera 1922 [AA, RA/RU(80)15].

five francs. “Why?”, the diarist wrote, directly followed by the exclamation, “They managed with two!”⁷⁸. Even if the diarist did not give more explanation, his account suggests that Hanard could not give a valid reason why the Tutsi at the mission should pay more than their Hutu colleagues.

However, collecting the taxes from the surrounding households proved to be a different kettle of fish. Hanard ordered that the heads of the households to present themselves with their people at the mission in the evening. When only some of them showed up, he told them how many taxpayers he expected and that he wanted to keep those who had presented themselves as guarantors. Because the missionary advised him to not do this, Hanard told the men that if they did not pay, he would come to their hills to capture their cattle and chop down their banana trees. When the following morning Alfredi, a small chief who had been baptized, presented himself to Hanard saying that he did not own a franc, he had to lay on the ground, received about twenty strokes and was kicked in the chest by Hanard. Because of the brutal and racist attitude of the latter, who refused to “be mocked by a negro”, Alfredi eventually brought him thirteen men who paid taxes. When subsequently 180 men came, who claimed to be from a place called “Mwaro”, but – according to the diarist – mostly came from other places called “Munyinya”, “Rukungu” and “Kimpagiro”, a Tutsi had to laugh. Because Hanard thought

he was being mocked, he ordered that the man received twelve strokes⁷⁹.

In the early practices of taxation, being able to pay taxes was obviously easier for the wealthy than for the poor. However, being Hutu or Tutsi could matter for those Tutsi who were not wealthier, but nevertheless were supposed to pay more than Hutu. This was part of the ethnicization of taxation policies. In the end, the process of collecting taxes could become a self-fulfilling prophecy, but it was everything but trouble-free. Colonial taxation policies were limited in that collecting taxes did not necessarily mean that the population had actually been able to pay them, nor that the population had paid without being violently forced to, nor that the population who paid was the same population who was supposed to pay taxes in a certain region.

The humanistic idea that Hutu would be protected from Tutsi’s arbitrariness and injustice became quite incredible as well, in the case of Hannard. Chiefs were pressured by a colonial administrator to deliver a certain number of taxpayers, who for their part were pressured by their chiefs⁸⁰. In this system of repression, ethnicity clearly was less relevant than in the more private context of a mission station. And even there, the difference between Hutu and Tutsi was not relevant enough to convince the taxpayers that they should pay a different amount of tax, which confirms that the functioning of the process of ethnicization was limited.

78. Diaire de Mibirizi, 8.3.1920 (MGPB). 79. Diaire de Mibirizi, 8-9.3.1920 (MGPB). Sentencing someone to a whipping became so common that Rwandans would remember Belgian rule as the “time of the whip”, see ALISON DES FORGES, *Defeat is the Only Bad News: Rwanda under Musinga, 1896-1931*, PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1972, p. 274. 80. See also INGEBORG VIJGEN, *Tussen mandaat...*, p. 182-183, 205, 207-209.

VI. Identification between taxation and census

In the practice of taxation, ethnicity initially played a role as a criterion of differentiation, but from the beginning, ethnicity alone was not sufficient to be used as a criterion in practice. Nevertheless, ethnicized discourses remained unaffected and the administration continued to focus on just how many of each ethnic category were in the country. In a local census of 1928 in the territory of Akanyaru, for instance, records were kept of all adult, able-bodied men, that is, of all taxpayers. The first column “name of the taxpayer” was immediately followed by a column “race”, which was filled in with Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa⁸¹.

In a report of 1953 regarding the territory of Biumba, it was noted that the subchiefs who were instructed to carry out the census were supposed to ask the natives “to answer sincerely to the posed questions”⁸². This suggests that the administrative inscription of people’s ethnicity was not imposed “from above”, at least not by the colonial authorities. Administrator Guillaume noted in 1953 that notably in Astrida, many enriched Hutu had declared themselves Tutsi and had been counted as such. “Subsequent tests carried out in two territories of Ruanda”, he continued, “have allowed to establish that at least a part

of the natives counted as batutsi actually belonged to bahutu families”⁸³. A similar remark was made by White Father Pagès, who stated that many descendants from bad behaving Tutsi who had mixed with Hutu also “pretended to have been classified among the nobles”, which had caused in some regions a percentage of Tutsi of almost twenty instead of not even ten⁸⁴.

These statements clarify how colonial administrators often did not acknowledge the fact that the same people could be both Hutu and Tutsi, depending on the point of view or context⁸⁵. Whereas in the Rwandan context, someone stemming from a Hutu family could be called Tutsi from a socio-economical point of view, European observers perceived this as dishonesty. And when someone stemming from a Tutsi family misbehaved by intermingling with Hutu, they no longer were entitled to be called Tutsi. In a Gobinistic sense, racial mixture was conceived as an impermissible degeneration. The eagerness of local actors to be registered as Tutsi and not as Hutu only reinforced colonial actors’ absolute interpretation of ethnic labels.

Knowing that local elites did not favour ethnic climbers and that the executors of censuses were picked from among these elites, it does not come as a surprise that ethnic climbers were sometimes banned from the statistics⁸⁶.

81. Rapport annuel. Territoire de l’Akanyaru. La vie indigène 1928 [AA, RA/RU(64)3]. **82.** Rapport annuel. Territoire de Byumba. Rapport Politique 1953 [AA RA/RU(72)1], p. 14. **83.** H. GUILLAUME, Rapport Annuel. Territoire de Shangugu. AIMO 1953 [AA, RA/RU(103)6]. **84.** ALBERT PAGÈS, *Les Batutsi du Rwanda*, (s.d.) (MGPB, O95/2, p. 4). **85.** PETRA VERVUST, *The Limits...*, p. 58. For an example of how White Father Léon Classe, by contrast, did acknowledge the multiple meaning of the Tutsi label, depending on the region where it was used, see LÉON CLASSE, *L’organisation politique du Ruanda au début de l’occupation belge. Notes à la demande de l’Administration belge*, 28.8.1916 (DC, BN10000). **86.** PETRA VERVUST, *The Limits...*, p. 174.

In the report of Nyanza, administrator Lenaerts stated in 1936 that the population of the territory comprised 10,479% watutsi, which is a difference of 1,93% compared to the previous year – a difference which we explain by the fact that the nobles have chased several watutsi families of dubious origins to the category of wahutu⁸⁷.

This means that, in the end, not the colonial administration but the local elites could deny a Tutsi identity to some. However, that they did so based on the argument of “dubious origins”, does suggest that this argument was acceptable to the colonial administrators.

In their reports, Belgian administrators often counted Twa as a separate ethnic category as well, but sometimes they did not⁸⁸. The quite passive colonial policy towards Twa was reflected in the census, when administrator Ducene stated, for instance, in 1955 that about 1500 Twa had been counted but not surveyed in the territory of Ruhengeri⁸⁹. Women, for their part, were often included in the census as an extra category, alongside the male Hutu and Tutsi and their own ethnicity was not always specified⁹⁰. However, in the censuses from the 1930s onwards, the ethnicity of all categories other than adult able-bodied men was sometimes listed as well.

In the report of Gabiro of 1934, administrator Verhulst gave a survey of the native population, divided into Batutsi and Bahutu, which in their turn were divided into five categories: adult able-bodied men, exempts, women, boys and girls. In the final demographical survey of the report, this resulted in the following eight categories: “Batutsi adult men”, “Batutsi women”, “Batutsi boys”, “Batutsi girls”, “Bahutu adult men”, “Bahutu women”, “Bahutu boys” and “Bahutu girls”⁹¹. Therefore, even if it is true that not all censuses included data on the ethnic composition of the population, claims that the latter were not mentioned at all need to be rejected. For instance, it has been stated mistakenly that in the period before 1950 “the various partial censuses made by the Belgian authorities did not include information on ethnicity, the only categories being those of men, women, girls and boys”⁹².

To understand the history of censuses, it is important to realize that erroneous estimates were made from the beginning and had to be made from the beginning, since Rwandans did not use ethnic labels in an absolute sense⁹³. The ideology that equated all Tutsi with the small minority of elite Tutsi rulers resulted in estimates of, for instance one, two, or five

87. LENAERTS, Rapport annuel. Territoire de Nyanza. Rapport politique 1936 [AA, RA/RU(93)1H]. 88. E.g. W. ANTONISSEN, Rapport annuel. Territoire d'Astrida 1951 [AA, RA/RU(65)7]; W. ANTONISSEN, Rapport Annuel. Territoire d'Astrida 1952 [AA, RA/RU(65)8]; A. PREUD'HOMME, Rapport Annuel. Territoire d'Astrida 1947 [AA, RA/RU(65)3]; Rapport annuel. Territoire de Ruhengeri. Rapport politique 1953 [AA, RA/RU(98)1G]. 89. J. DUCENE, Rapport annuel. Territoire de Ruhengeri. Rapport AIMO 1955 [AA, RA/RU(98)8]. 90. E.g. STOFFIN, Rapport annuel. Territoire de Gatsibu 1928 [AA, RA/RU(69)7]. 91. VERHULST, Rapport annuel. Territoire de Gabiro 1934 [AA, RA/RU(68)4]. 92. PETER UVIN, “On counting, categorizing, and violence in Burundi and Rwanda”, in DAVID I. KERTZER & DOMINIQUE AREL, *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*, Cambridge, 2002, p. 156.. 93. For a study that consults demographical sources in central Africa in the colonial period, see BRUCE FETTER, *Demography from Scanty Evidence: Central Africa in the Colonial Era*, Boulder, 1990.

percent Tutsi⁹⁴. Schumacher once asked his informants whether Hutu or Tutsi were more numerous in Rwanda. They replied “The Hutu of course, the number of Tutsi may be the same as the number of Batwa and comprise hardly a third of the entire population”, which illustrates that Schumacher’s elite informants did not have a very precise idea of the demographic proportions either⁹⁵.

However, it must be kept in mind that the meaning of Hutu and Tutsi was relative and that it was therefore not possible or desirable to give exact numbers. There were several reasons why the German and then Belgian administrations wanted to count the population. Beyond its direct link “to the development of taxation as a means to finance the colonial enterprise”, figures of an increased population later also served as a justification for the Belgian mandate vis-à-vis the League of Nations, which became the United Nations. Moreover, Belgian policies to combat the negative consequences of overpopulation, needed to be corroborated by statistical evidence⁹⁶.

The early censuses, conducted by the German administration, did not cover the whole of Rwanda. They only covered those regions where the head tax had been introduced, that is, Bugoye, Bwanatshombwe (Kigali), Bulisa, a

part of Buganza and Gisaka. Therefore, White Father Classe informed the newly installed Belgian administration that “it is difficult to give an exact number for the mututsi population of the centre”⁹⁷. According to a publication of 1959, the Belgians introduced a system in 1922 where only the adult and able-bodied men who were supposed to pay taxes were registered. In 1931, this system was “expanded and transformed into a system of registration on cards, this time concerning the men, able bodied or not and their families”⁹⁸. The motivation behind this innovation was the lack of exact numbers. One administrator in the territory of Rubengera noted in 1925 that “so far, the census has always been done according to the taxation. In the course of the exercise I realized, while drawing up the list of subchiefs, that this way of proceeding will never give us exact numbers”⁹⁹.

From 1931 onwards, demographic studies of representative regions were then extrapolated with statistical methods. In 1952, new statistical methods were integrated into new demographical studies, which, among other things, resulted in the famous census of 1956, where the percentages of 16,59% Tutsi, 82,74% Hutu and 0,67% Twa was published¹⁰⁰. Thereby, the much higher percentage of Tutsi was for the first time acknowledged in official numbers that covered the whole of Rwanda¹⁰¹.

94. A. BRARD, “Skizzen aus Ruanda”, in *Afrika Bote*, nr. 7, 1900-1901, p. 124; PAUL FUCHS, “Die wirtschaftliche Bedeutung von Ruanda”, in *Nachrichten aus der ostafrikanischen Mission*, nr. 4, 1909, p. 76; KARL ROEHL, *Die sozialen...*, p. 273; PIERRE RYCKMANS, *Dominer pour servir*, Bruxelles, 1931, p. 25-26. 95. PETER SCHUMACHER, *Ruanda...*, p. 469. 96. PETER UVIN, *On counting...*, p. 150-151. 97. Léon Classe, *L'organisation politique du Ruanda au début de l'occupation belge. Notes à la demande de l'Administration belge*, 28.8.1916, (DC, BN10000, p. 7). 98. *Le Ruanda-Urundi...*, p. 31. 99. Rapport annuel. Territoire de Lubengera 1925 (AA, RA/RU(80)4). 100. *Le Ruanda-Urundi...*, p. 32-35. 101. JEAN-PIERRE CHRÉTIEN, *The Great Lakes of Africa...*, p. 190.



Typical dress with feathered hats during a dance. The dancers are members of the royal dance group, photographed in 1939. (Photos CEGES/SOMA, nos 147759 and 133940)

This reflected a race-based ideology of ethnicity, for now all Tutsi who wanted (or had been allowed) to be counted as such – independent of their class status – had been counted as such. Before the 1950s, regional censuses also reported high percentages of Tutsi, but especially in those regions where the concentration of Tutsi elites was high. For instance, the administrator Lenaerts reported in 1935 that a census in Nyanza had indicated the presence of 12.67% Tutsi¹⁰².

But not everyone acknowledged the higher percentage of Tutsi as legitimate. White Father De Lacger, for instance, mentioned that “the batutsi of pure race” counted no more than five percent, but that this number was doubled or tripled by those who referred to some title of their relatives¹⁰³. This shows that the class-based ideology sometimes still overruled a more inclusive race-based ideology of ethnicity. More specifically, de Lacger’s utterance refers to the older, nineteenth-century conceptualization of race as used by de Gobineau for elites only¹⁰⁴. Others, such as the advocates of the 1959 revolution, argued, by contrast, that the problems Rwanda was facing were not racial but social, because not all Tutsi were oppressors and not all Hutu were oppressed. Instead, 99,9% of the Tutsi population was said to enjoy no political, social, cultural, or other privilege whatsoever¹⁰⁵. In this case, the material power represented in class differences once more overruled the symbolic power of ethnicity.

Because cattle was the most important expression of status and wealth in Rwanda, it makes sense that the newly installed Belgian administration was interested to know the exact number of cows and their owners, whether these were Tutsi or not¹⁰⁶. As discussed in the previous sections, the ethnic criteria “Tutsi” and “Hutu” were not sufficient to determine who was supposed to do *corvées* or pay taxes. Therefore, Belgian administrators soon introduced the number of cattle heads as a criterion for taxation, as well as other means, such as defining the competences of a court. In Mulera, for instance, the report of 1927 mentioned that when the representative of the Resident or his assistant presided over the court, the material competence of the court was fixed at “2000 francs or 10 heads of big cattle”¹⁰⁷. Another context in which the phrase occurred was the regulation that allowed particular categories of natives to buy off *uburetwa* obligations from 1938 onwards. One of these categories was described as “the rich Tutsi, owners of at least ten head of big cattle”¹⁰⁸.

As mentioned above, owning ten cows was also used as a criterion to determine who had to pay how many taxes, at least until 1926. The administrator of Gatsibo wrote in 1923 that, based on the very imperfect numbers of 1919, the territory counted “4000 taxable Batutzis or owners of more than 10 cattle heads (...) and 25000 taxable Bahutus”¹⁰⁹. The phrase “taxable Batutzis or owners of

102. LENAERTS, Rapport annuel. Territoire de Nyanza. Rapport politique 1935 [AA, RA/RU(93)1G]. **103.** LOUIS DE LACGER, *Ruanda*, Kabgayi, 1961, p. 50-51. **104.** PETRA VERVUST, *The Limits...*, p. 41. **105.** A. MUNYAGAJU, “Aspects des problèmes importants au Rwanda-Burundi (30.1.1959)”, in FIDDLE NKUNDABAGENZI, *Rwanda politique...*, p. 107. **106.** E.g. in Gissaka, see *Diaire de Zaza*, 2.11.1917 (MGPB). **107.** Rapport annuel. Territoire de Mulera 1927 [AA, RA/RU(95)6]. **108.** FILIP REYNTJENS, *Pouvoir et droit...*, p. 136. **109.** Rapport annuel. Territoire de Gatsibo 1923 [AA, RA/RU(69)2].

more than 10 cattle heads” reminds of the rhetoric of the post-genocide period. In efforts to explain the colonial impact on the process of ethnicization in Rwanda, it was – and still is – frequently referred to Belgians who used the criterion of ten cows to discriminate between Tutsi and Hutu. Mamdani, for instance, correctly observed that “the ten-cow rule both holds a kernel of truth and has been turned into fodder for a polemic that holds that the Belgian authority arbitrarily cooked up the Hutu/Tutsi distinction at the outset of colonial rule”. But Mamdani’s argument that the ten-cow rule was used as one among several criteria and not even always as the main criterion still suggests that the colonial administration imposed an ethnic identity to individuals¹¹⁰.

However, at least in the context of taxation in the 1920s, this was not entirely the case. The criterion of ten cows was used indeed, but instead of defining who was Tutsi and who was not, it merely defined which Tutsi were taxable and which were not. In this case, ethnicity was rather circumvented than reinforced. Moreover, the criterion of ten cows was no general rule to determine taxable Tutsi for the whole of Rwanda. In Shangugu, for instance, “taxable watutsis” were described in 1925 as “owners of more than 5 cattle heads”¹¹¹. That Tutsi in the 1930s

were assumed to have hidden their cattle or to have lied at the time of a census to escape the taxation was due to the fact that the cattle tax had become dependent on the total of cattle heads from 1926 onwards¹¹².

Detailed demographical studies of (part of) individual hills of the late 1920s, of which some copies occasionally have been retained in the archives, confirm the thesis that the number of five or ten cattle heads was not used to identify and ascribe people’s ethnicity. In these studies, examples can be found of Tutsi with three or five heads of big cattle, or of Hutu with ten or eighteen or even forty heads of big cattle¹¹³. These pieces of evidence disprove the claim that Belgian administrators ascribed an ethnic identity by means of arbitrary criteria such as the number of cattle heads.

The Belgian anthropologist Danielle de Lame was right to call into question the existence of a census in the 1930s that would have established “a discrimination between “Tutsi herders” and “Hutu farmers” on the arbitrary basis of owning ten cows. Until proof of the contrary”, she claimed, “this regards nothing but a rumour”¹¹⁴. The archives of the Belgian administration do not confirm the ascription of an ethnic identity in the census by means of the criterion of possessing ten cows.

110. MAHMOOD MAMDANI, *When Victims...*, p. 98-99. **111.** Rapport annuel. Territoire de Shangugu. Rapport politique 1925 [AA, RA/RU (103)1, p. 5]. **112.** Rapport annuel. Territoire de Kigali. Rapport politique 1933 [AA, RA/RU(85)1, p. 14]; Peter Schumacher, *Ruanda ...* p. 106. **113.** Rapport annuel. Territoire de Lubengera. Étude Démographique sur une partie de la colline de Kibirizi 1927 et 1928 [AA, RA/RU(80)16]; Rapport annuel. Territoire de Shangugu. AIMO – Révision de l’Étude démographique pour l’année 1928 de la colline Nyakanyinya 1928 [AA, RA/RU(103)12]. **114.** DANIELLE DE LAME, “Autour d’un livre. Vansina (Jan) Le Rwanda ancien. Le royaume nyiginya. Paris, Karthala, 2001, 289 pages”, in *Politique africaine*, n° 83, 2001, p. 158.

Although the phrase of ten cows can be found in several contexts, it was introduced not in order to impose an ethnic identity but because ethnicity was inadequate as a criterion to distinguish between rich and poor. Owning five or ten cows did have a functionality in several administrative practices throughout the Belgian rule, such as taxations (before 1926), court competences (example of 1927), or buying off *uburetwa* obligations (from 1938 onwards). Furthermore, this confirms that the phrase of the ten cows was not invented out of the blue.

Before 1994, the view that a certain number of cows determined one's ethnicity was present as well. In 1985, Filip Reyntjens put into perspective the percentages of Twa, Hutu and Tutsi in the 1956 census, because everyone who possessed at least fifteen cows was considered as Tutsi, but many Tutsi had fewer than that number or no cattle at all¹¹⁵. In the colonial days, the number of cattle had been of great importance in general, among other things to determine how much taxes people had to pay¹¹⁶. It was a small step from phrases such as "taxable Tutsi or owners of so many cows" to phrases such as "Tutsi or owners of so many cows". Because the ethnic labels were used to be interpreted by Rwandans as depending on the context, it is even possible that non-taxable Tutsi were sometimes also considered as Hutu.

VII. Identity booklets under the microscope

It has been stated that European colonizers made ethnicity fixed instead of "abstract and negotiable" in Rwanda by registering people's ethnicities in censuses and on official documents¹¹⁷. This implies that they put a stop to the primacy of ethnicity's class-based workings in general and the existence of ethnic mobility in particular, because it did not fit their ideas of perennial or invariable races¹¹⁸. Peter Uvin suggested that the Belgian colonizers "instituted a system of rigid ethnic classification, involving such 'modern scientific' methods as the measurement of nose and skull sizes and the attribution of obligatory identity papers stating one's ethnicity"¹¹⁹. Later, Uvin made "a rather theoretical" distinction about what caused the impact of Belgian policies. According to him "what caused this social and political impact was not the act of categorizing and measuring as such (...) but rather the colonial policy of indirect rule and the racist ideology that was associated with it"¹²⁰.

Based on conversations with Alison Des Forges and Filip Reyntjens, Timothy Longman claimed that "it does not appear that the [identity] cards were issued for the express purpose of registering ethnic identities. Rather, registering

115. FILIP REYNTJENS, *Pouvoir et droit...*, p. 28. **116.** On the importance of taxes in the administrative practice, see JEAN RUMIYA, *Le Rwanda...*, p. 224-225. **117.** NIGEL ELTRINGHAM, *Accounting for Horror...*, p. 19; MAHMOOD MAMDANI, *When Victims...*, p. 101. **118.** IAN LINDEN, *Church and revolution...*, p. 256. **119.** PETER UVIN, "Prejudice, Crisis, and Genocide in Rwanda", in *African Studies Review*, nr. 2, 1997 (40), p. 95. **120.** PETER UVIN, *On counting...*, p. 159.

ethnicity was merely one component of a broader program to increase the regulation of Belgian subjects". Therefore, the expression "ethnic identity cards" is not appropriate in the context of colonial Rwanda. Nevertheless, Longman fully acknowledged the impact of identity cards in that "documenting each person's group identity eliminated the possibility of changing identities through traditional means", but he added as well that "in practice people found new ways to circumvent official attempts at fixing identity" and thus "official efforts to fix identity were not entirely successful"¹²¹. According to Uvin, in the earliest years after the introduction of identification cards by the Belgians in the 1930s, "there existed a brisk trade in identity cards (IDs), whereby those who could manage to do so bought Tutsi IDs in hopes of gaining greater power"¹²².

Longman gave the example of a Tutsi in the post-independence period who, after having "settled in a new community, (...) had received a new identity card that stated his ethnicity as Hutu". Many years later, specifically during the 1994 genocide, when asked by his granddaughter why he had become Hutu, the man argued: "Well, I was not rich, I had no power, so why should I be called Tutsi?"¹²³. This indicates that ethnic mobility was not stopped at all, because people could move and acquire new identity cards. Although

becoming Hutu in the post-independence period implied an upward mobility, this man used the same arguments that linked power to Tutsi during and before the colonial period. On the flip side, an example given by de Lame that stemmed from the late 1980s suggests that "becoming Tutsi" was no longer functional. One member of the rural elites, named Kabera, according to de Lame "calls himself the 'hill's little burgomaster', confiding that, in the past 'he would have become a Tutsi'"¹²⁴.

Thus, especially Longman and Uvin have suggested that registering ethnicity on identity cards unintentionally put a stop to ethnic mobility by traditional means, but at the same time did not prevent Rwandan agency from circumventing it. And this is very likely, when compared to the practices of censuses discussed in the previous section. Although identity cards were not meant to impose an ethnicity on people, sometimes they nevertheless did¹²⁵. Especially people in Rwanda's peripheral regions, who had not considered themselves to be Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa in the past, were now forced to be one of these three categories¹²⁶. Moreover, whereas it used to be possible for groups to be labelled as both Hutu and Tutsi, depending on the context, the necessity to belong to a single ethnic category excluded this possibility.

121. TIMOTHY LONGMAN, "Identity Cards, Ethnic Self-Perception, and Genocide in Rwanda", in JANE CAPLAN & JOHN TORPEY, *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, Princeton, 2001, p. 353. 122. PETER UVIN, *On counting...*, p. 156. 123. TIMOTHY LONGMAN, *Identity Cards...*, p. 346, 356. 124. DANIELLE DE LAME, *A hill among a thousand. Transformations and ruptures in rural Rwanda*, Madison, 2005, p. 223. 125. As suggested by, for instance, Nigel Eltringham, who mentioned the "imposed (non self-ascribed) racial distinction found on ID cards", see NIGEL ELTRINGHAM, *Accounting for Horror...*, p. 28. 126. TIMOTHY LONGMAN, "Nation, race, or class? Defining the Hutu and Tutsi of East Africa", in *Research in Politics and Society*, nr. 6, 1999, p. 109.



At the top : The Mwami (King) of Rwanda next to King Baudouin during his visit to Rwanda and Urundi in 1955. At the bottom : King Baudouin decorates one of the Tutsi officials during that same visit. (Photos CEGES/SOMA, nos. 135183 and 135181)

Keeping in mind that identity cards were issued to identify individuals and not per se to impose ethnicities on them, it is still worthwhile to put these colonial identity cards, which were actually identity booklets, under the microscope. In Belgium itself, identity cards had been introduced during the First World War by the German occupiers. After the war, the cards were kept, initially as a means to distinguish the German enemy from the Belgian population¹²⁷. The exact date when the Belgians introduced identity papers in “Ruanda-Urundi” is unclear: some scholars say 1926, 1933–1934 or 1935¹²⁸; others stick to the more vague “the 1930s”¹²⁹. Whereas identity booklets were issued for sure before 1944, the *Bulletin Officiel du Ruanda-Urundi from 1944* included an elaborate model of the booklet¹³⁰. This model gives some more detailed information on what exactly the colonial identity certificates looked like.

On the cover, it said in both French and Dutch “identity booklet”¹³¹. In addition to identifying information, the booklet also contained a certificate of aptitude, a crossing pass, indigenous and cattle taxes, a medical passport, a residence permit, weekly visa, visa dispensations, a firearms licence, a statement of health and miscellaneous information.

The identity booklets were linked to the census, in that the counted members of the population were supposed to be registered on cards, whose information was supposed to be reproduced in the identity booklet¹³². A model of the counting cards was added as well, which shows that the requested information included, among other things, the “race”, with the pre-printed options “Mututsi Muhutu Mutwa”. The rest of the requested information on the counting cards also included the “Family (*Ubwoko*)”, which shows that *Ubwoko* was officially used for “clan” in the colonial days and not as a synonym for race.

Considering the shift in the balance of power from a Tutsi dominated to a Hutu dominated system after 1959, it was no coincidence that the order of the pre-printed categories was changed from “*Mututsi Muhutu Mutwa*” to “*Hutu, Tutsi, Twa, Naturalisé*”. However, identity cards after independence were no longer issued in French and Dutch, but in Kinyarwanda and French, translating *Ubwoko* by *ethnie* and no longer mentioning the family or clan. This makes Vansina’s assumption likely that in Kinyarwanda, *Ubwoko* referred to both clan and “ethnic category”¹³³. Moreover, it also puts into perspective the accusation that the Belgian colonial powers

127. FRANK CAESTECKER, “Belgisch immigratiebeheer: veranderende doelstellingen, resultaten en statistische presentaties (1861-2005)”, in T. EGGERICKX & J.-P. SANDERSON, *Histoire de la population de la Belgique et de ses territoires*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2010, p. 376. 128. For 1926 see ERIN K. BAINES, “Body politics and the Rwandan crisis”, in *Third World Quarterly*, nr. 3, 2003 (24), p. 481; for 1933-1934 see CYPRIAN F. FISYI, “Of Journeys and Border Crossings : Return of Refugees, Identity, and Reconstruction in Rwanda”, in *African Studies Review*, nr. 1, 1998 (41), p. 20; for 1935 see PETER UVIN, *On counting...*, p. 195. 129. TIMOTHY LONGMAN, *Identity Cards...*, p. 352; CATHARINE NEWBURY, *Ethnicity and the politics...*, p. 11. 130. *Bulletin Officiel du Ruanda-Urundi*, 1944, p. 164–168. 131. In French *Livret d’identité* and in Dutch *Eenzelvigheidsboekje*. 132. *Bulletin officiel du Ruanda-Urundi*, 1944, p. 163. 133. JAN VANSINA, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda...*, p. 33, 233.

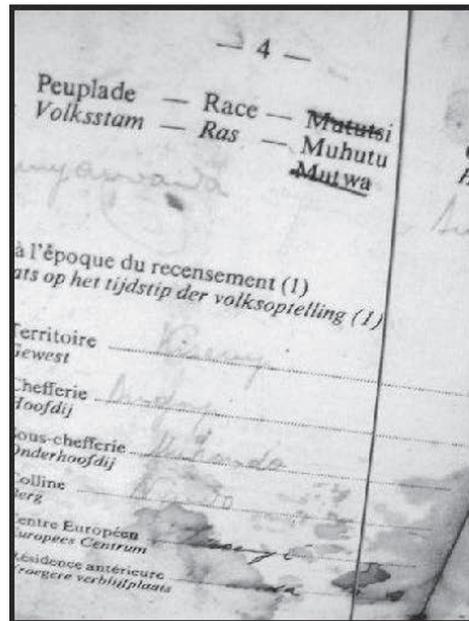
necessarily equated *ubwoko* with race. In the colonial identity booklet itself, a distinction was made as well between “family (*Ubwoko*)” referring to clan, “tribe” referring to the Rwandan “nationality” and “race” referring to the pre-printed “*Mututsi Muhutu Mutwa*”¹³⁴. This suggests that the symbolic power of clan was not totally overruled by that of ethnicity or race by the colonial administration. And therefore, statements in the present-day literature that claim that “[w]hen the Belgian colonial authority instituted national identity cards marked with the bearer’s *ethnie* or *Ubwoko* upon them, race was the intended meaning” are anachronistic¹³⁵.

The fact that the options for “race” were pre-printed suggests that otherwise there could have existed doubts about what to fill in. Women were not entitled to an identity booklet of their own but were inscribed on the booklet of their husbands or guardians¹³⁶. That the colonial administration believed it needed less detailed information from women demonstrates how women were considered as less relevant in general. Put differently, the symbolic power of female gender was clearly curtailed by the colonial administration, whereas the symbolic power of male gender was enforced. The question whether women were supposed to have an ethnicity of their

own or whether they “naturally” had the same ethnicity as their fathers did not seem to be at stake in the case of identity booklets, since no ethnic labels were pre-printed for spouses or children.

In addition to information on clan, race, spouses and children, the colonial counting cards also included information such as “mother”, “father”, “profession”, “head tax”, “additional”, “cattle” and “comments”. When comparing these categories to the identity booklet, it is clear that by “additional” and “cattle” the different amounts of paid taxes were meant. Therefore, it is (once more) very unlikely that people were counted as Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa based on a certain number of cattle or physical characteristics. That said, identity booklets also included the amount of cattle taxes, which makes it feasible that the number of cattle was linked to ethnicity. According to Liisa Malkki, Hutu refugees from Burundi in Tanzania in the 1980s even spoke of “tax cards” when referring to the colonial practice of having their ethnic labels recorded¹³⁷. Physical features such as a rolled fingerprint of the left little finger and the exact stature of the individual with the pre-printed “One meter ... centimetres” were included as well in the colonial identity booklet¹³⁸. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand

134. ‘Tribe’ is written in French (*peuplade*) and in Dutch (*volksstam*). In the example that is used in the exhibition at the Kigali Memorial Centre, the category ‘nationality’ is filled out with the word *Munyarwanda*. 135. CHRISTOPHER C. TAYLOR, *Sacrifice as Terror*, Oxford, 1999, p. 71. 136. *Bulletin officiel du Ruanda-Urundi*, 1944, p. 163. 137. LIISA MALKKI, *Purity and exile: violence, memory, and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania*, Chicago, 1995, p. 71. 138. Borgerhoff, an administrator in the Belgian Congo, had proposed in 1914 to identify the natives by means of a rolled fingerprint of their right little finger in their registration booklet (*livret d’immatriculation*). The reasons he named were that “the negroes of central Africa” did not keep their birth names, often gave false names to newly arrived administrators who conducted censuses and almost always gave false names to white employers. See BORGERHOFF, “Projet d’identification, par la dactyloscopie, des indigènes du Congo Belge”, in *Revue de Droit Pénal et de Criminologie*, 7.1914.



At the top : A fragment of a colonial identity booklet with a reference to ethnic descent. At the bottom : A post-colonial Rwandan identity card with a similar, but not identical reference to ethnic descent. (Photos Kigali Memorial Centre)

that in retrospect, practices such as counting cattle or measuring people were fused with the practice of writing down a person's "race".

The consequences of the introduction of identity cards are well known in the context of the 1994 genocide, where IDs were used to check Tutsi's ethnicity at roadblocks before killing them¹³⁹. However, even in 1959 – when houses that belonged to Tutsi were burnt down – identity papers such as the tax booklet were already used in cases of doubt. While talking to some Hutu about seven kilometres from the mission at Runaba on Wednesday, the 11th of November 1959, White Father Van Hoof wrote that two armed and very agitated fanatics arrive. They ask our interlocutors if it is true that the house below the road belongs to a mututsi. A muhutu stubbornly insists that it is a muhutu who lives there, but the arsonists do not want to believe him and demand that they bring them their tax booklet where it is written what race they belong to. After some hesitations, this booklet is brought and unfortunately, it is written that he is mututsi, but they try to explain them that it is not clear because both the words mututsi and muhutu have been crossed out several times. Later on, we hear that the house has remained¹⁴⁰.

This incident shows that the "race" written on identity papers such as the tax booklet was not always unequivocal because the fact that both "mututsi" and "muhutu" were crossed out, suggests that the booklet had been changed.

Considering that some people could be in a situation in which it was perfectly plausible that they were both Hutu and Tutsi, depending on the point of view, it is not surprising that people could claim both ethnicities. Moreover, that the house was not burned down in the end demonstrates that doubts were allowed and could even save a person's house, despite or thanks to the existence of ambiguous identity papers.

VIII. Conclusions

The relative importance of ethnicity, class and race in the colonial administration of Rwanda was demonstrated in several ways. First, class differences often remained more important than ethnic ones; and second, the elitarian, class-based ideology of ethnicity often remained more important than its more inclusive, race-based ideology. Moreover, it was illustrated that colonial political goals were often constrained by local power equations and agency. Nevertheless, the findings of this article also confirm that colonial power has reinforced the process of ethnicization. The colonial power involved in the prison policy reinforced central Rwandan rule, for instance, by generalizing its class-based ideology of ethnicity and by conceiving its dynamic logic in a static way, even if the results of this policy were quite contradictory and even when the ideology was still based on the class interests of a nobility.

139. ALISON DES FORGES, *Leave None to Tell the Story. Genocide in Rwanda*, Human Rights Watch, 3.1999, p. 92. 140. VAN HOOF, Lettre à Père Léo Volker (Supérieur Général), Runaba 13.11.1959 (MGPB, N°727/06313).

In colonial practices that were supposed to be implied on a much larger scale than handling prisoners, such as the imposition of *corvées*, ethnicity was debated as generally class-based as well, sustaining the ideology of Tutsi rulers versus Hutu subjects. These discussions were even corroborated by means of dramatic facts, such as the suicides of Tutsi elites for having been forced to do manual labour. More particularly, the ethnicization was reinforced by the formulation of a segregationist prison policy and in the formulation of initial tax policies. The racialization was reinforced as well in the census of 1956, when non-elite Tutsi were included and on identity papers, which made it impossible to be both Hutu and Tutsi depending on the context. This obliged people in peripheral areas, who might not have considered themselves as either one of these labels, to declare themselves to be Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa. Moreover, the introduction of identity cards also increasingly prevented ethnic mobility through traditional means.

However, the colonial power involved in the ethnicization was limited. It must be stated that prison policies were characterized by many ambiguities about how to treat “the Tutsi”. Even if they were in theory conceptualized as a corporate group, in practice no ethnic superiority guaranteed a better treatment. Sometimes even material circumstances, such as a lack of colonial prison rooms, were insufficient to apply ethnicized rules. In initial *corvée*, tax and census policies as well, it was just not unequivocal who was Tutsi and who was not; the final, true criteria to determine people’s ethnicity just did not exist. Even if colonial policies postulated that taxes had to be

based on a man’s ethnicity, which sometimes was the case in the early period, these policies were extremely hard to implement in practice. Whereas some Tutsi jumped at this policy and even asked for a distinction between them and Hutu themselves, others refused to pay more than Hutu, because they saw no reason. Moreover, repressive methods were applied in which the end justified the means, including means of ethnic distinction. Soon it became clear that an inclusive, race-based concept of ethnicity was not sufficient as a means of distinction in the praxis of taxation and therefore ethnic distinctions were overruled by local distinctions of class.

Nevertheless, the Belgian administration remained interested in knowing the exact number of people (including their ethnicities) through censuses, which from 1931 onwards were conducted independent of men’s status as able workers. The famous criterion of ten cows was used by the Belgian administration, but not as a means to determine people’s ethnicity. Even if it might have been perceived like an ethnicity-imposing criterion by the population, multiple colonial sources demonstrate that the definition of a certain number of cattle was rather used to circumvent than to ratify ethnicity. Although wealth was often specified through a certain number of cows, a certain number of cows was never used directly to determine someone’s ethnicity. That particular markers such as the number of cows or even physical characteristics were used on identity papers might nevertheless have reinforced the myth that these markers were generally and intentionally used to impose an ethnicity or race.

That the power wielded by the colonial administration was limited is also firmly supported by the many instances of Rwandan agency. When Tutsi at a mission station, for instance, successfully refused to pay more taxes than Hutu, this illustrated the inconsistencies and inefficiency of colonial power. That Rwandans had agency in the praxis of censuses and that colonial rulers lacked the power to impose an ethnicity was suggested as well by the case of enriched Hutu who considered themselves as Tutsi up to the 1950s, as well as by the resistance this provoked among the “old” elites.

Whereas colonial authorities did not directly impose ethnic identities on people, indirectly they did contribute to their fixation by counting people as either Hutu or Tutsi and no longer allowing people to be both in theory and practice, depending on the point of view. Because the Tutsi label was far more desirable than the Hutu label, local chiefs had an important say in who was allowed to be counted as Tutsi and who was not. The ambiguous identity papers of some people during the violence of 1959 suggested that the papers were sometimes changed, that Rwandans could still claim both ethnicities depending on the point of view and that Rwandans were able to circumvent an imposed ethnic immobility. The symbolic uncertainty, ambiguity and incompleteness of ethnicization prevented the reification of ethnic groups in practice and made

ethnicization in itself an uncertain, ambiguous and incomplete process.

Moreover, both female gender and clan identities were not overruled by ethnicity. In prison, the separation of men and women was deemed more important than separation according to ethnic categories. Although women initially were not counted in censuses, it is telling that they eventually were counted and even occasionally diversified, according to ethnic categories. However, that the acknowledgment of gender was far from general in colonial practices was illustrated by the identity booklets, where women’s ethnicity did not seem to be relevant. The symbolic power of clan, however, was not completely overruled by that of ethnicity or race, since “Ubwoko” and “race” were recorded as separate issues in the identity booklets.

In sum, when absolute, racial notions of Tutsi, Hutu and Twa were used in administrative policies, they were impossible to apply in practice, for the simple reason that Tutsi, Hutu and Twa were not corporate groups but historical contingent labels. Therefore, it makes sense to see the workings and relevance of ethnicity in a continuous line with the way it functioned in precolonial Rwanda, that is, along the lines of an elitarian, class-based ideology. Because colonial interests were constrained by local political and material power equations, the processes of ethnicization and racialization

were inevitably incomplete and always subordinated to colonial objectives and interests.

PETRA VERVUST defended her PhD dissertation “The Limits of Colonial Symbolic Power : Ethnicization and Racialization in Rwanda 1890-1960” at the Department of History of Ghent University in 2010. Since then, she has been living in Dresden, Germany, and can be contacted at pvervust@gmail.com.

Abbreviations

AA	Archives africaines (Rue des Petits Carmes, 15, 1000 Bruxelles)
AIMO	<i>Affaires Indigènes et Main-d’Oeuvre</i>
BB	<i>Bundesarchiv Berlin</i> (Finckensteinallee 63, 12205 Berlin)
DC	J.M. Derscheid Collection (University of Florida, George A. Smathers Libraries)
MGPB	<i>Maison Généralice Pères Blancs</i> (Via Aurelia 269, 00165 Roma)
RA/RU	<i>Rapports Annuels/Ruanda-Urundi</i>