

Rwanda-Belgium, division and reconciliation

Short historical study as preparation of the Belgium-Rwanda-reconciliation conference 7-14 July 2009

Introduction

If we think of Rwanda today, we think of the genocide of 1994. The fact that this outburst of violence between Hutu's and Tutsi's is linked to the history of the Belgian colonial reign in Rwanda is almost completely unknown to many Belgians. Hence this short history to refresh the Belgian memory or to inform for the first time.

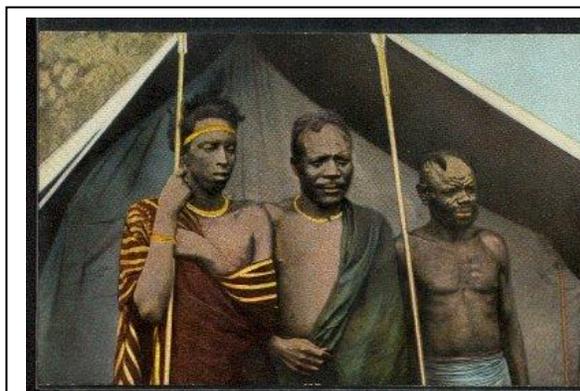
In general

Rwanda is an area of approximately 4/5 of Belgium (26.338 km²) and has 10,2 million inhabitants. The ethnical people are 84% Hutu, 15% Tutsi and 1% Twa. Currently 56% of the people are catholic, 12% protestant, 9% muslim and 25% is animist. Since 1897 Germany colonised this area as part of German East Africa (now Tanzania). During the first World War the area was taken in 1916 by troops of the Force Publique of Belgian Congo, as revenge for the German invasion in Belgium. At the Treaty of Versailles (1919) Ruanda-Urundi was placed under Belgian care by the League of Nations. This was ratified in 1924-25 in the Belgian law. In practice Belgium treated and exploited it like a colony.



Hutu's and Tutsi's

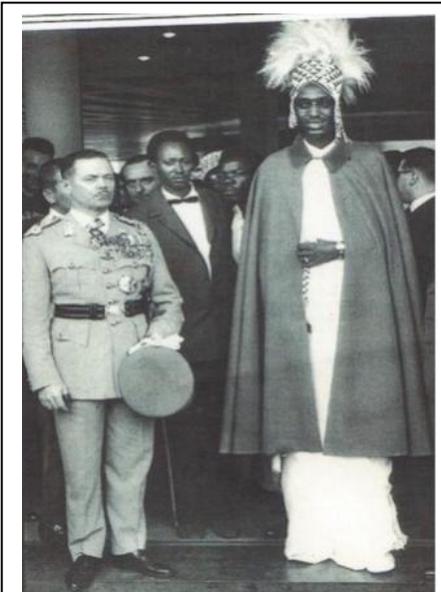
Rwanda was, when the Europeans arrived, for several centuries a socio-political unity, lined by natural borders, with a common language (Kinyarwanda) and with common religious and philosophical principles. For centuries there have been different tribes: Hutu's (mainly farmers), Tutsi's (mainly herdsmen) and Twa's (pygmies, hunters). There are different theories on the origin of Tutsi's and Hutu's. The first Europeans who arrived mistakenly thought it were two different races. The name 'Tutsi' originally means 'he who owns cattle' but gradually became an indication for 'ruler', the leading elite. The name 'Hutu' originally means 'subordinate' or 'client of a mighty person' and finally became an indication for 'ordinary people'.



Hutu, Tutsi and Twa

Tutsi's are usually tall and skinny, have a lighter skin and finer features; Hutu's are usually smaller, thick-set, rougher features. According to some they belong to a different race (by which Tutsi's immigrated), according to others they started to differ due to marrying among themselves and different food. These farmers and herdsmen lived in a relative peace, spoke the same language and had the same religion. The majority married within the group in which they were raised, but marriages between the two groups were there as well. It was also possible for a Hutu to become a Tutsi if he acquired more cattle or climbed the social ladder.

The Belgians in Rwanda



King of Rwanda with Belgian general.

The Germans had left the local governing structure (consisted of the king (mwami) and his chiefs) intact; although the mwami was subject to the authority of a white man with a white army to maintain this authority. The rebellions in German East-Africa were suppressed harshly and several hundred thousands were killed. At first the Belgians followed the same rule of 'indirect rule', but later started to interfere more and more in the existing structures. In the 1920's they changed the Rwandese state because of a more efficient administration and broke the delicate native balance of power. The people were forced to grow coffee, up to 50% of their working hours, often whipped if they were not willing and severe taxes were charged.

As of 1900 monks (Patres Albi) and some protestant missionaries resided in Rwanda. Out of practical (church-political) motives the religious workers cooperated with the German and later Belgian colonial governors. All types of tasks (food-supply, road maintenance, transport for the ruler) were organised by them.

Refusal to work was punished in a military way and this did not contribute to the



First Patres Albi in 1900

spreading of the "good news". These Patres Albi were painfully unpopular, also because of forced Catholicism. The mass and teaching were in Latin.

In 1931 king Musinga was deposed because he didn't cooperate enough with the ruler and replaced with his son, Mutara III. He was baptised in 1946 and dedicated Rwanda to Christ. Rwanda was seen as of then as a role model of a catholic state.

The 'tutsification' of Rwanda

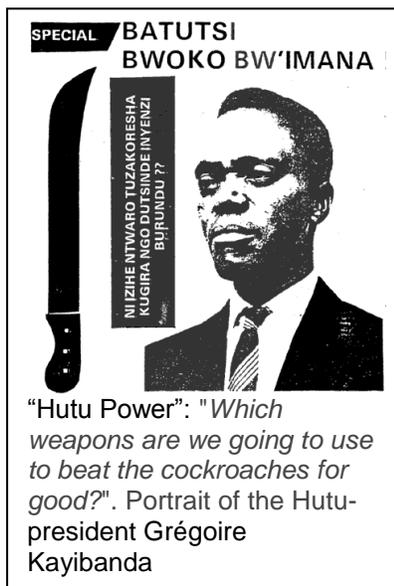
Both Church and state organised the governing system so that only Tutsi's could occupy senior functions; Hutu's were discharged from powerful positions and refused higher education. The Tutsi's gratefully accepted this role. To empower the new situation and legitimize it the Church (especially Mgr Léon Classe) brought up the myth of ethnic superiority. Tutsi's were claimed to be of the Chamitic race (of Cham, Noah's son) and were closer to the white race which would explain their superiority (a version of "social Darwinism", a theory of "evolution" of the people that was practiced in that era). Shortly, Tutsi's as born leaders should be the reigning class. To explain this racial difference they performed all kinds of "scientific" tests of skulls, noses and sexual organs (similar to how the Nazi's wanted to prove the superiority of the Arian race in Europe). Using the educational system many generations in Rwanda were fooled by this race-hypothesis.

The Hutu's believed that the hard forced labour was imposed by the Tutsi's and those who did not obey were ill-treated by the Tutsi bosses.

Since identification based on external features seemed difficult the Belgians started a compulsory registration as of birth in the thirties. Each person had to declare to which group he belonged (Twa, Hutu or Tutsi) and this was recorded on his ID-card. Everyone with more than 10 cows was automatically labelled as Tutsi. This written registration has deformed the self-image of the people of Rwanda towards their own group identity. During the Belgian colonial reign the foundations for the later post-colonial ethnic tensions and political instability were laid.

Amazina y'abana n'ighe bavukuye	Vavuzwe	Igitama
Sexe, umwanya, utari utari	Umwanya	Umwanya
Amazina	Nyuma	Nyuma
1. Umunyaza	1917	1917
2. Umunyaza	1918	1918
3. Umunyaza	1919	1919
4. Umunyaza	1920	1920
5. Umunyaza	1921	1921
6. Umunyaza	1922	1922
7. Umunyaza	1923	1923
8. Umunyaza	1924	1924
9. Umunyaza	1925	1925
10. Umunyaza	1926	1926
11. Umunyaza	1927	1927
12. Umunyaza	1928	1928

The Hutu-revolution



In 1946 Rwanda became a Trust-area of the United Nations, which meant that the Belgians would prepare the area for independence (which happened on July 1, 1962). In the years after WWII everywhere in Africa movements for independence started. In Rwanda these were mainly progressive Tutsi's but also Hutu's. In addition a post-war generation of Belgian rulers was more aware of the problems of the suppressed people, the Hutu's. The Hutu's were appointed now in junior governmental positions and were allowed to receive education in seminaries. A new reversed myth was born: the Hutu was no longer the dumb, dirty farmer, but a people that had suffered under a Tutsi tyranny for ages. Tutsi's were no longer the sophisticated, related to white aristocrats, chosen to reign, but were now portrait as underhand cons and bloodthirsty warriors who had shed a trail of blood from Ethiopia all the way to Rwanda.

In 1957 the 'Bahutu-manifest' was published that expressed the will for emancipation of the Hutu's en levelled out all social difference to the racial difference. The church with Mgr Perraudin as spokesman supported this document fully.

In 1959 the violence against Tutsi's started and ten thousands fled over the border to Congo, Tanzania and Uganda (between 1959 and 1973 approximately 700.000; later they did not receive permission to return). In the colonial army all Tutsi chiefs were replaced by Hutu's. In the same year the moderate king Mutara III Rudahigwa died under strange circumstance (he died shortly after a vaccination by a Belgian doctor; many people in Rwanda consider it a murder). His half brother Kigeli V succeeded him, but after a trip to the UN in New York, access to Rwanda was denied by the Belgian governor Harry. Rwanda was made a republic with a Belgian stamp.



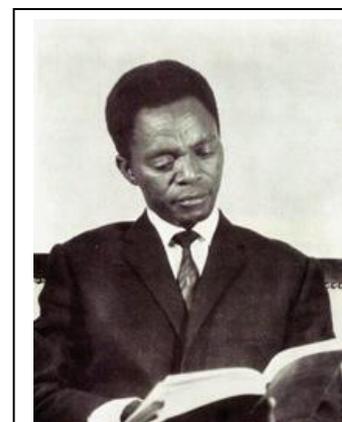
The Belgian King Baudouin and King Mutara III

From elections to independence

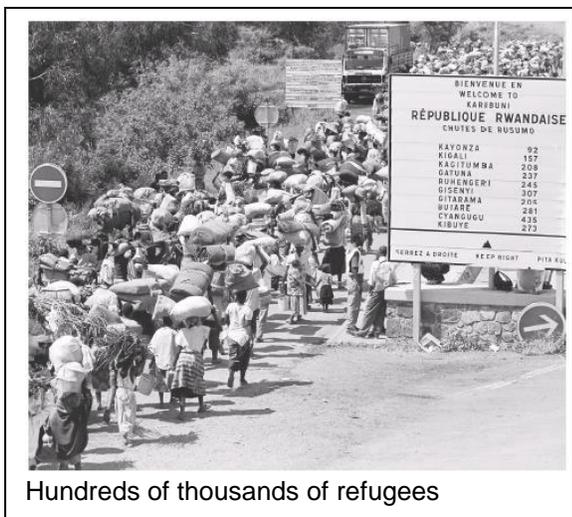
During the preliminary to the first communal elections in 1960 many murders took place on both sides. The reprisals of the Hutu's became more and more violent. Belgian military prevented an armed defence by the Tutsi's. The Hutu-revolution had not been possible without the active military and political support of the Belgians. Due to a boycott of the elections by the Tutsi's the Hutu party 'Parmehutu' gained an absolute victory in the elections of 1961. The UN rejected the elections and demanded a conclusion of the Belgian mandate.

Many Tutsi's fled to neighbouring countries like Uganda where they organised themselves and raided Rwanda which was answered with even harder violence. De Belgian military that stayed in Rwanda until 1962 rarely intervned against the crimes committed by Hutu's whereas those of Tutsi's were punished severely. Even before the independence some said that if the Belgians left this would lead to the massacre of the Tutsi's. Finally only a limited armed force would remain.

When on 1 July 1962 Rwanda became independent there was no representative of the Belgian government, parliament or monarchy. In the



Founder of Parmehutu and later the first president, Grégoire Kayibanda



Hundreds of thousands of refugees

Belgian media hardly any attention was given to it. Kayibanda became the first president, propagated radically the Hutu-philosophy and would take no opposition.

Dress rehearsal

After a coup in 1973 general Habyarimana (Hutu) gained power. He was supported by the senior clergy of the Roman Catholic church. Even



The second president, Juvénal Habyarimana

though 70% of the clergy were Tutsi, 7 out of 9 bishops were Hutu during the time of the genocide. The Arch Bishop was a fervent supporter of the president. In 1986 the president declared that Rwanda was too densely populated to allow the Tutsi refugees to return. The RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) that cared for the Tutsi's in exile went with a small army on the first of October 1990 from Uganda to Rwanda. The president managed to get the military support of Belgium, France and Zaïre to stop them and retaliate severely.¹ In 1990 "the 10 commandments of Hutu-Power" were written, a very fascist document that called every cooperation or mingling with Tutsi's as treason. In several places during the first years of the 90's dress rehearsals of the genocide took place. The government called it upsurges of tribal violence. Despite evidence of systematic murdering the foreign diplomats did not want to admit that the government was committing crimes. In 1993 an international commission concluded that the head of state and his entourage were actively involved in mass murder against the Tutsi's but the UN refused to start a debate in the human right commission on the report and none of the donor countries drew any conclusions.

From Arusha to the genocide

In August 1993, after a year of negotiations, president Habyarimana was pressured hard by the World Bank and donor countries to sign the peace treaty of Arusha (Tanzania) between the rebel army (RPF) and the government. This treaty stipulated: the guarantee to return of Tutsi exiles to Rwanda, recognition of Tutsi political parties in Rwanda, the instalment of an interim government with plans for free elections and integration of Tutsi soldiers in the army of Rwanda. The UN sent a limited peace force (MINUAR) to guarantee the implementation of the treaty, of which a battalion (KIBAT I) of 400 Belgian blue berets who arrived in November in Kigali.

Radical Hutu parties and the army of Rwanda started to oppose the treaty of Arusha, so that in practice it was never implemented. The president was seen as a traitor of the Hutu case. In August '93 the infamous RTLM-channel (radio Mille Collines) was launched with a lot of popular music, and financially supported by the president amongst



¹ The French would continue to give active military support to the regime of Habyarimana even during the genocide, e.g. with enormous weapon trade. According to some observers French soldiers would have even trained the notorious Interahamwe-militia, and at the end of the genocide helped the guilty ones escape to the south. This explains the very tense relation between Rwanda and France until today.

others. At the right moment they would launch the hate propaganda and instructions for terminating the 'Inyenzi' (cockroaches) to a large audience. With the help of Chinese and western companies 580 tons of machete's and other weapons were imported under the cloak of 'self defence' against a new Tutsi-dominance.

A new party 'Hutu-power' was established and called other Hutu parties to unite. The armed part of the party establishes, with the support of the army, militias of 'self defence' in the whole country. Moderate Hutu's were now considered traitors and would be murdered during the genocide as well because of their political membership.

Warnings

There were many warnings sent by clergy, human rights activists and others during this period with the message: 'act now or many people will die!' Diplomatic representatives knew enough to realize that a disaster was in the making. The Belgian intelligence agencies and embassy repeatedly announced the armament of the Interahamwe-militias (radical Hutu-youngsters) by the army, of training camps of the Presidential Guard for young men in view of razzia's in Kigali and secret arms depots. The head of MINUAR, general Dallaire, sent many telegrams to the head quarter of the UN in New York to enlarge his mandate to dismantle these arms transports and depots, but each time the answer was no. Already in January the Belgian colonel Marchal requested his superiors in Belgium for heavier weapons and – in case of further escalation – to be allowed to act with Belgian beret in stead of UN-blue beret. The Belgian government tried without success to point out how serious this was to the UN and that there was a need for expansion. In February the Belgian intelligence agencies were already informed of the plan to attack Belgian MINUAR soldiers so that the Belgian troops would withdraw.



No wonder that MINUAR lost all credibility in the eyes of many people in Rwanda. According to Alison Des Forges (internationally recognized Rwanda-specialist) the UN feared that expansion of the personnel and additional material would lead the Security Council to cancel the whole peace keeping mission due to lack of resources.

The genocide



On April 6 1994 around 20h30 the airplane with the Rwandese president Habyarimana and the Burundese president Ntaryamira was shot by a rocket (the question which of both parties did it has not been answered yet). In the first hours after this crash all political (moderate) Hutu opponents were murdered in Kigali to eliminate any political resistance against the murder plan. The prime minister of the former interim government, madame Agathe Uwilingiyimana was escorted by 15 badly

armed soldiers of MINUAR, among which 10 Belgian blue berets. They were attacked by the Rwandese army. The prime minister was killed in cold blood as well as the 10 Belgian paratroops.

The well prepared slaughters quickly picked up speed. Units of the Rwandese army organised together with the Interahamwe-militias razzia's on various places, went from door to door (the lists had been prepared in advance!) and killed all Tutsi's present. The locals often actively helped in pointing out Tutsi's or moderate Hutu's. Most of the time knives of cudgels were used and victims where tortured before they were killed. At the end of April Tutsi's were no longer murdered in their houses, but under pretext of asylum were lead to schools, hospitals and stadiums where they were systematically slaughtered. Tutsi's were prevented to flee by many road control posts and patrolling gangs of often drunk and drugged militia. Along the roads were



The ten murdered Belgian soldiers

many bodies rotting away or thousands were lying in rows waiting to be chopped in pieces. Unknown cruelties took place: Tutsi's were forced to kill their own children, Hutu's were forced to kill their Tutsi partner, parents were raped or tortured in front of their children, others were thrown alive in



a cesspool... Children were killed to rule out a next generation. Even the Catholic Church kept its end up. Tutsi clergy were murdered. Several catholic and protestant clergy men participated actively, other silently agreed with the mass murders. The priest Wenceslas in Nyange even gave the order to militia to go over his



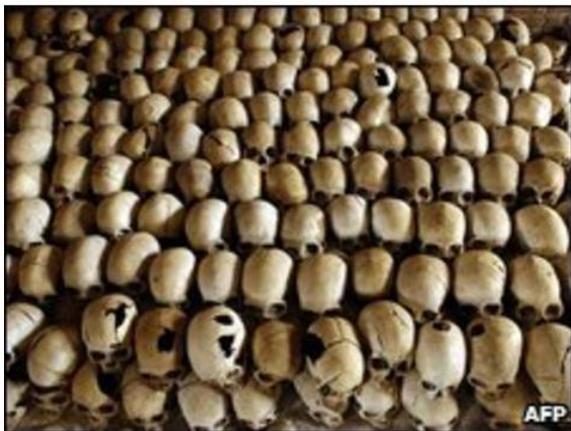
church with a bulldozer, filled with 2000 of his members. Several priests or nuns who could have saved lives, refused to, but there are exceptions as well.

As of the first day of the genocide troops of the RPF came from the north (lead by Paul Kagame) against the Rwandese army. In the northern and eastern regions that they conquered, Tutsi's were mostly safe. In the conquered regions there were sometimes revenge actions against suspected Hutu civilians and also against Tutsi's suspected of collaboration.

In 100 days 800.000 to 1.000.000 people died, 300.000 remained orphans; 4.000.000 people were refugees and it took many years before most of them dared to return. Many were maimed and traumatised, the infrastructure was almost totally destroyed and there was complete anarchy. 120.000 people were taken to prison, some innocent. All trust was gone: in every family there were dead or killers, refugees or prisoners. In the years after the genocide many ten thousands would lose their lives in East-Congo during punitive expedition and in the following civil war many hundred thousands more and that is not mentioning the suffering of millions of refugees.



The genocide, Belgium and the rest of the world.



Whilst the genocide had been raging for several weeks, the Security Council of the UN was debating whether this was a genocide or ethnic cleansing (for only then they could intervene). Only 4 weeks later and after 200.000 killed the answer was 'yes'. It wasn't difficult to quickly get some foreign troops there to evacuate all Europeans but for the Tutsi's there was no place on the trucks¹ - these troops would have been enough to stop the genocide. The world watch through the TV... and did nothing.

In retrospect most military specialists agree that a small foreign UN force (5000; according to others only 3000) could have ended the campaign of violence in the central and strategic areas in Kigali and that way stop it in the whole nation. Still some UN forces (also Belgians) took the initiative here and there to save

¹

Some touching movies on this history are "Hotel Rwanda", "Shooting Dogs" and "Rain in April"

lives, through which at least several thousand were saved.

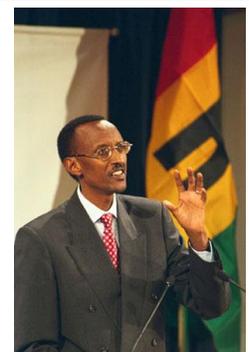
Although Belgium tried harder than other countries to mobilize a larger international involvement before the genocide, after the genocide they advocated in the UN the hardest to withdraw all troops from Rwanda. When the news of the murder of 10 Belgian para-commando's got through, minister Claes turned 180° and after a week all Belgians were gone.

After the genocide it took 2 years before there was an international tribunal, which in addition worked badly due to lack of funds? Is it strange that the people of Rwanda question why leaders in Rwanda are convicted for their participation in the genocide, but foreign leaders are not, whose passiveness furthered the scope and period of the disaster? *“Were the Belgian leaders prosecuted? Does it live in Belgium? Did the genocide leave a collective trauma here?... Is it Homeland History with capital letters or a foot-note?”* (Chris De Stoop). There has not been a deeper social reflection yet. The wounds, after 15 years, are still very painful and deep.

What next?

There is no reconciliation without justice. But there is also no justice without truth. *‘History must be told’* (Alison Des Forges). And *“the truth will set you free”* (John 8:32).

With this short history we hope to start an awareness with the Belgian people, in the first place in the churches. Our deepest desire is that this will lead to healing and reconciliation and heal the relationship between Belgians and the people of Rwanda.



Paul Kagame,
leader of the RPF
and actual
president

June 2009
Philip Quarles van Ufford
(Summary by Ignace Demaerel)

The letter of confession, read by the Belgian delegation at the conference in Gitarama (11 July 2009) can be found on www.pray4belgium.be.

Literature

- 1) 'Leave None to tell the story', red. Alison Des Forges, Human Rights Watch, ed. Karthala, 1999
- 2) 'Les militaires belges et le Rwanda', Patrick & Jean-Noël Lefèvre, ed. Racine, 2006
- 3) 'Het Goede Bondgenootschap, Kerk en Rwanda', Dirk Tuypens, Epo, 1998
- 4) 'Deutsche Kolonien, Traum oder Trauma', Gisela Graichen, Horst Gründer, Ullstein Verlag, 2005
- 5) 'Wij leven nog', Annick Kayitesi, Brilliant Books, 2005
- 6) 'Het complot van België', Chris De Stoop, De Bezige Bij, 2007

