

THE BURUNDI ETHNIC MASSACRES  
1988

David Ress

Editorial Inquiries:

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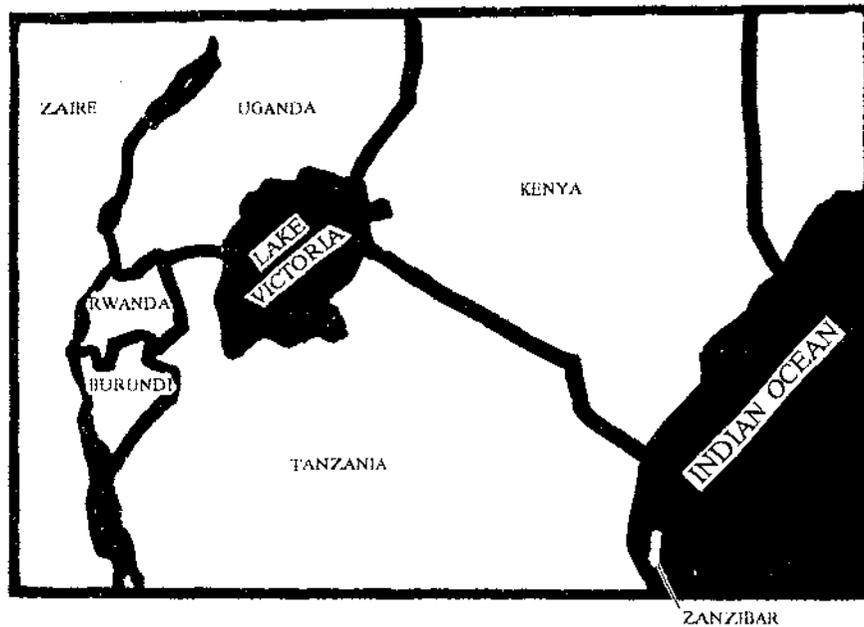
This attempt to examine the mystery of Burundi's ethnic massacres, among the bloodiest in the world, was made on the solid foundation of the historical research of such distinguished scholars as Emile Mworoha, Jean-Pierre Chretien, Philip Ntahombaye, Claude Guillet, Christian Thibon and Rene Lemarchand. Any errors or misinterpretations which may exist in this book are my own fault.

My Burundian colleagues and friends, especially Deogratias Muvira, the foreign editor of Agence burundaise de presse, introduced me the notion that there are no simple answers to their country's tragedy. They also introduced me to their country's lovely people, its proud precolonial history and to its stunningly beautiful landscape.

At Reuters, I owe thanks to Vincent Inami, Francis Mdlongwa, Eric Onstad and Robert Powell. I cannot say how much I owe to Hos Maina, the Kenyan photographer who is my friend and was my eyes into so much of East African life.

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## Chapter I

### The Massacre

The killing started on Sunday evening, August 14, 1988.

In the tiny hamlet of Ntega, in an isolated corner of the little central African republic of Burundi, in the very heart of Africa, people picked up their machetes, their axes, and stones from the ground and started slaughtering their neighbors. It was an explosion of violence and murder that raged for more than a week and that, by the time the Burundian Army suppressed it, had spread across some 90 square miles of rugged mountains and marshlands along the country's northern border.

In one week in August, 1988, nearly one in every 15 men, women and children living in those northern Burundi hills died.

There has been almost nothing like it anywhere else - but the same kind of mass murder happened in Burundi in 1972, when the death toll came to somewhere between 100,000 and 250,000 of the four and a half million people then living in the Maryland-sized country. It happened in Burundi in 1969 and in 1966 and in 1965. It happened in the neighboring Republic of Rwanda, too, in 1962-63 - just after both nations won their independence from Belgium - and in 1959.

The grounds for killing were tribal. Some died because they were members of the minority Tutsi people - the tall, thin people long thought of as Burundi's aristocrats, for whom the popular 1960s dance the "Watusi" was misnamed and from whom comes the tiny elite that governs Burundi and staffs its Army. Even more died because they were members of the majority



Hutu group, the shorter farmers whom the Belgian colonial administrators used to describe as darker-skinned and inferior. It was Africa's nightmare, as bad as it ever gets - maybe even worse because, unlike the tribal killings done by, for example, Idi Amin's army in Uganda, unlike the civil wars in Zaire or Nigeria's Biafra region, this was not killing done by soldiers whipped up into a war frenzy but murder - mass murder - by ordinary people. Lots of killers and lots of victims.

In all, 5,000 people died in the 1988 massacres.

Tens of thousands more fled in terror - terror that is almost beyond imagining, almost beyond what a person can give voice to, or want to hear.

"I left because I was watching such things: people carrying machetes and spears, going from house to house. Everybody was crazy, "Tharcisse Manikiraza, a soft-spoken Hutu from the hills just to the north of Ntega told me, several weeks after the 1988 slaughter.

Most of his neighbors' tiny mud shacks in that tiny settlement of Mugendo - a wide spot in the rutted dirt road linking Ntega with the Rwandan border nearby - were still abandoned. The fields climbing up the bare hills across the way were untended, a wild tangle of waist-high weeds with only the occasional ear of unripe corn or pale-colored sorghum to be seen. Downhill, towards the invisible creek, there were dozens of uprooted banana trees, their fragile, delicately ribbed fronds now brown and ripped and flapping in the light breeze. The doors of about half the dozen-odd huts had been ripped from their frames and some of the mud-brick walls had been smashed. Further up the road were dozens of empty, roofless shells. In the dark interior of Manikiraza's shop - barely eight feet by eight feet - there was nothing for sale.

I was there as a wire service correspondent to report on the death and the damage. And to report on the startling flood of refugees returning to the emptied land from their safe havens in United Nations' emergency camps across the border in Rwanda. It was a story of murderous anger which had erupted like a volcano and then ebbed away into a tranquil, day-to-day commonplaceness. In this forgotten little republic on the eastern fringe of the Rift Valley, wedged between Zaire and Tanzania, mass murder happens - and those who remain learn to live with it.

My friend Deo - a senior editor at Agence burundaise de presse, the national news agency - handed the tired-looking shopkeeper a warm brown bottle of Zairian beer.

"So many people have died that I don't know the number," Manikiraza told us.

The equatorial sun beat down and he turned from us to the shade of the eucalyptus tree by the hamlet's water pump, walking on towards his grove of head-high banana trees, set back slightly from the road.

The killing started quietly, secretly. The killers went from house to house with their machetes and knives. In three days, the murdering had spread over an area of about nine by five miles, centered on Ntega. After another four days, the killing grounds covered a region just over fifteen miles long and six miles wide and had spread to the district of Marangara, just to the south and west.<sup>1</sup>

House by house, from neighbor to neighbor, by neighbor against neighbor, that was how the terror came for about one week in August the rich farming country of Ntega and Marangara.

The hills there - as in most of the rest of the country - are thickly populated, but people rarely come together in anything as consolidated as a village. Houses are typically no closer than a quarter-mile or so apart, spotted almost randomly in a complex of small plots of corn, coffee and sorghum, groves of brilliantly green banana trees and tiny copses of eucalyptus or evergreens. People belong to communities which are, essentially, the hill on which they and their neighbors - Hutu and Tutsi together - live.

Burundian government and diplomatic investigators said afterwards that the way the people have distributed themselves across the hills helped the slaughter spread.

"They would come in the night and kill and go on to the next place, and the people in the next hut wouldn't have heard anything until the killers

<sup>1</sup> The estimated spread of the killing comes from local residents, diplomats based in the Burundian capital of Bujumbura, and local officials in Ntega and Marangara as well as from news media reports filed between August 18 and 30, 1988.

Special figure!

arrived," one diplomat, based in the Burundian capital city of Bujumbura, told me.

House by house, hill by hill, the terror continued, even after the Army had arrived. People went from house to house to show the soldiers where the Hutu lived. Many Hutu so identified were taken into the woods and shot. Others were simply bayoneted.

The killing frenzy had reached Mugendo, which is about seven miles and two ridges to the north and west of Ntega, by August 16. A heavily-armed detachment of Burundian soldiers arrived two days after that.

Manikiraza had left by then but his neighbor, Angela Barbarankuru, had stayed behind. When the soldiers broke into her house, she said they made her and her nine children lie down on the ground of their compound. They were bayoneted in the neck and left to die. The children, aged one to fifteen, died. Barbarankuru survived, to be found by a cousin who carried her down through the valley to the marshes of the Kanyaru River, which forms the border with Rwanda, and beyond to the safety of a U.N. refugee camp in the southern Rwandan hills.

Pascal Bangumukunzi, a Hutu, was taken from his home on Gisehuru hill near Marangara by two soldiers on Thursday night, August 18. The soldiers bound his hands. They grabbed his nearest neighbor and then they led the two of them into a grove of eucalyptus trees nearby, threw them on the ground and stabbed them with their bayonets.

His neighbor died. Bangumukunzi managed to crawl deeper into the night-time forest when he heard the soldiers coming back to check on their work. Still later that night he made it back to his house but found no one there. Eventually, he found two of his three children at his sister's house. Two days later, on Sunday, the 1st, he and his two children made it across the Kanyaru into Rwanda. His wife and third child are still missing.<sup>2</sup>

About 50,000 people in all crossed the malarial border marshes and Kanyaru River to the neighboring Republic of Rwanda. Three-fifths of them were under ten years of age.<sup>3</sup> Many waited for days in the marsh reeds,

<sup>2</sup> Reuter, Gakoma Mission, Rwanda, August 21, and 22, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Estimates of diplomats in Bujumbura, and U.N. relief staff based in Bujumbura, and the

fearing the soldiers would find them, before splashing across the muddy, 30-yard wide river and on into Rwanda. Thousands more fled in the opposite direction up and over the north-south ridge on which lie Kirundo Town and Route d'interet general (public highway) 14, the packed dirt track that is the main road into the northern Burundian province of Kirundo.<sup>4</sup>

Some of those who tried to flee never made it.

Gaspard Brimana, a mechanic working on a Rwandan irrigation project by the shores of the Kanyaru, said he saw scores of bodies floating down the muddy, reed-bordered waters of the river.

"I saw 27 on Friday morning [August 19] alone, some of them were chained together," he said, speaking a few days later as a group of three bodies drifted by under the Kanzenze Bridge, which crosses a loop of the river lying entirely in Rwandan territory. One of the bodies had seven stab wounds in the neck. The hands of all were bound behind their backs.<sup>5</sup>

The killing was cold-blooded and deliberate.

Killers and would-be killers would come once, and come back again, and even again sometimes, to make sure their work was done. The men with machetes or the men in uniform, it made little difference.

"I had to run because the word was out that I had been hiding Tutsi," Gregoire Bankumukunzi, a Hutu farmer who lives a half hour's walk from the Rwandan border, told me.

He said a group of neighbors came and threatened him.

They came the next day, too.

"Some men came and made me pay 37,000 (Burundi) francs (\$270). It was the dowry for my daughter that I had to pay to not be killed," he said. The sum was approximately equal to a year's earnings for him.

"I thought they would come again and I had no money, so I left," he said.

Did he find out what happened to these men?

"They were all killed by the Army, except for one who is still here. I know

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refugee camps in Butare province, Rwanda.

<sup>4</sup> Estimates by local residents in Ntega district and by Commander Gaston Nteziribu, appointed military administrator of Ntega and Marangara after the massacres.

<sup>5</sup> Reuters, filed from Kigali, Rwanda, August 25, 1988.

him," Bankumukunei said.

Not surprisingly, perhaps - most of the people of Ntega and Marangara knew who the killers were, knew them intimately. And who the victims were, too. If they didn't know the soldiers who came later and killed, they knew the neighbors who accompanied the Army squads and told them whom to shoot.

Hutu and Tutsi speak the same language - Kirundi - and live in the same places, without any segregation. In the countryside, their small, mud-brick thatched houses look the same. They have the same kinds of small plots of banana trees, of coffee, grain and beans. [The Tutsi, however, tend to like to have a few head of longhorn cattle. These animals, which can have gently curving horns four feet long or more, are rarely eaten but are the main wealth of many Tutsi.] There is little cash - and not much to spend it on - in most of rural Burundi. But except for a very few Tutsi, the wealth that these cattle represent is negligible, especially in any practical sense. Burundian farmers rarely eat meat. Milk is not particularly popular, and most of what is drunk is goat's milk.

Although the Tutsi are, by repute, taller and longer-faced than Hutu, being what some anthropologists describe as a Nilotic people, (like the Nuer of southern Sudan, the imperial family and nobles of Ethiopia and the proud desert nomads of Somalia), the differences have faded over the centuries that the two peoples have lived in Burundi, displacing the original Pygmy Twa people who had been there. Burundians say their inability to tell Tutsi from the supposedly shorter, blacker-skinned and round-faced Hutu - who are, the anthropologists say, a Bantu people like the Blacks of South Africa - is largely due to intermarriage and a similarity of diet.

Tribal identification is, in any event, almost entirely a question of paternal descent, through the father's family.

The only way of being sure which group a Burundian belongs to, or so Burundians themselves say, is to know who his parents and grandparents were - the sort of facts that a neighbor might know but that an outsider would not.

It is the killing of someone known that well to the killer that makes the Burundian massacres so horrifying.

In most of the rest of Africa, tribalism has clearer roots. When Idi Amin's soldiers - drawn from the northern Acholi tribe and the Moslem farmers of Amin's isolated home province of West Nile - went on the warpath in Uganda in the 1970s, they could pick out their Buganda and Bunyoro victims by appearance and by the language they spoke. The pattern continued when Milton Obote eventually emerged as Uganda's new dictator, after Amin's overthrow in 1979. And unlike Burundi, the scars are still throbbing - the southern Ugandans who now comprise the bulk of the National Resistance Army include many of the sons of Amin's and Obote's victims. Some of these soldiers are just 14 years old. It's one reason why, say Acholi Ugandans, that many of the victims of the Army's anti-guerrilla operations in the north are civilians - including dozens who died when their homes were burnt to the ground as well as the more than 40 teenage boys who died of suffocation and hunger after being interned by the Army for three days in an old freight train without food or water.

When, in 1989, Senegalese Wolofs attacked Mauritanian Moslems - Black Africans who had fled discrimination and oppression in their own famine-hit Saharan nation - religious and language differences also helped attackers pick out their victims. Language and skin color were the criteria in the mirror-image conflicts which soon erupted on the other side of the Senegalese-Mauritanian border.

The conflict is even more sharply drawn in the Sudan, where the Africanized Arabs of the northern deserts and Nile Valley just to the south of Egypt govern. The Christian and animist Blacks of southern Sudan have been fighting them since the early 1980s with an elaborate, organized, uniformed rebel army - the third such civil war since Sudan won its independence in 1956. The rebels have shot down aircraft flying emergency supplies of food and in 1989, the devoutly Moslem military government in Khartoum ended the ceasefire covering so-called supply corridors aimed at bringing relief supplies in to southern towns and villages.

Tribalism is why South African whites say apartheid - racial segregation and white rule - is necessary. It was the basis of the so-called Grand Apartheid which created the tiny, nominally-independent tribal enclaves South Africans call homelands. Tribal slaughter is the great nightmare of the

white South African, as well. Many, in fact, see themselves as members of a tiny, if powerful and wealthy, African tribe that just happens to be white-skinned and just happens to be descended from Dutch settlers who arrived three centuries ago.

Tribal-based armies killed thousands of Africans in Zaire's civil wars, in Biafra, and elsewhere in Africa.

Many Burundians say their own army was out of control in 1988, exacting vengeance on the Hutu people of Ntega and Marangara. It is, however, a complaint that the Burundian government rejects categorically.

"When you are stopping people from killing, it is necessary to use violence. You can't embrace people who are in the process of killing," Foreign Minister Cyprien Mbonimpa said shortly after the massacres, following his briefing of U.N. Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar on the killings and his efforts to try to fend off Belgian and European Community criticism of the Burundian government's actions.

"The Burundian Army is one of the most disciplined in the world, and it never lost control. It controlled the situation in three days," Mbonimpa said.<sup>6</sup>

But it took many of the people of Marangara district - which is the origin of most of the accusations of Burundian Army reprisals - at least that many days to overcome their fear of leaving their forest or marshland hideouts while the Army was around. And it took even more days to make the trek over the forested ridges of Nyamugari Mountain to the tiny government hospital at Kiremba.

The farmers who carried Marcianne Msugaye, a seven-year-old who never talks anymore, over the mountain to Kiremba had hid with her in the forests for a long, fear-filled week. They cared for Marcianne as best they could - she had been shot by soldiers. The wounds festered during the days in the forest.

When she arrived in Kiremba, the doctors amputated her right arm and left leg. Her father discovered her like that when he returned, months later, to Burundi from a Rwandan refugee camp. He had thought she had died.

I met Marcianne in a dank, dark ward of the Kiremba hospital, the air

thick with the cloying, sugary smell that comes when gangrene and rotting human waste and old wound dressings are imperfectly disinfected. I wanted to learn of the story of the little girl from Marangara, just the age of my own son, the little girl who had lost her arm and her leg. But she had no words at all to say anymore. Not about the hatred and violence that had brought her there, not about anything at all.

In the next ward, I talked with Evaristo Hagungimada, a stocky, sad-faced seventeen-year-old Hutu. He had survived, somehow, when a helicopter gunship crew opened fire on him and his friends.

"I was with about 10 others. They all died," he told me. He was buried under their bodies - his neighbors found him at the bottom of the gruesome pile.

But by the time his neighbors managed to carry him the many miles to Kiremba, it was too late to save his injured left leg. The gunshot wounds were so badly infected, the bone so completely smashed, that the hard-pressed, ill-equipped doctors had no choice but to amputate. I heard his story, in halting French and painfully slow Kirundi, which my friend Deo translated, as the doctor muttered all along that the young man was never going home, for what could a peasant father do with such a son, how could he be cared for?

And I met Venciane Uwimana, a proud-faced Tutsi woman from the Ntega hills. Deo and I drove her and her 12-year-old daughter to the clinic in Kiremba. The skinny little girl was trembling with malaria caught while hiding with her mother in the marshes north of Ntega, hiding from the neighbors who killed her father. Neighbors whom she knew. Neighbors she had grown up next to, neighbors her mother had grown up with. Neighbors who were still living on the same hill-side community with them.

"We know who they are," Uwimana said, her eyes glinting and her mouth set in a tight grin. "They better watch out."

<sup>6</sup> Reuters, from Geneva, August 28, 1988.

## Chapter II

### The People Who Hate Each Other

Who are these people who hate each other so?

And why do they?

It is the dark secret of the mountains, this raging, killing-passion of the Burundian hills, the mountain folk's anger that simmers for years before exploding, the furore that sets neighbor against neighbor, slashing machete in hand. It seems almost beyond understanding.

This book is a detective story and its subject is murder.

Its subject, too, is a hatred as fierce as any on earth. Some say that the hatred is an enmity that is centuries old, a clash between ancient invader and even more ancient native, a conflict won by an aristocratic and warlike tribe, and a loss resented to this day by the overwhelming majority of the mountain folk.

To trace this, to track down the roots of this enmity is essential for understanding what moves Burundians to commit mass murder.

This invasion is the stuff of legend - there are no records. The skeletons of the dead have never yet been found and the attackers' lances have long since rotted in the ground. Even the palaces of the conquerors have vanished without a trace.

It is yet another of the obscure mysteries of the Burundian mountains.

But it is not the only mystery.

For, if Burundi is a country populated by two of the most mutually antagonistic peoples on earth, surely there should be some way of telling them apart?

There is virtually none.

The German and Belgian colonial officials who governed Burundi from the turn of the century managed to type Hutu and Tutsi by appearance, seeing in the tall, high cheekboned Tutsi traces of the Ethiopian nobility they believed were the born rulers of Africa since Biblical times. But nobody today can do it.

Pierre Buyoya, the Tutsi president of Burundi, is several inches shorter than his towering prime minister, Adrien Sibomana, a Hutu. The president's face is round and fairly pale and he is plump enough to strain the khaki uniform of a tank corps major that he favors. He is a basketball fan but has not played since his school days.

One key study, the 1954 survey of the Belgian anthropologist Jean Hiernaux, found that the somatotype measurements of some 879 people from both Burundi and Rwanda supported the notion of the Belgian colonial administration that the two groups were racially distinct.<sup>1</sup> But historians and anthropologists in France and Burundi have since criticized Hiernaux's work, saying that that sample was carefully selected to prove a pre-determined point about Hutu and Tutsi.

By almost any other definition one can imagine; whether you look at culture and behavior of Burundians, whether you look at the economy and how the wealth of the lush mountains is shared, whether you look at geography and where various peoples live, the Burundi - the name they give themselves, whether Hutu or Tutsi, in their common language, Kirundi - look like one homogeneous people.

They are farmers.

In fact, the overwhelming majority of Burundians - ninety-five percent of the country's five million people - are farmers. That is true of the Tutsi as

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<sup>1</sup> Hiernaux, J. *Les caracteres physiques des populations du Ruanda et de l'Urundi*, Brussels, 1954, cited by Chretien, Jean-Pierre; "L'age du fer et l'histoire du peuplement", in Mworoha, Emile (ed); *Histoire du Burundi*, Hatier, Paris, 1987, 100.

of the Hutu. There is little difference in wealth or in the quality of lands in cultivation between most Tutsi and most Hutu families.

Both groups manage to feed themselves surprisingly well on the produce of their tiny garden-like plots.

They farm the mountains.

Plots of banana, grains, sweet potato and coffee are planted on hillsides with slopes of forty-five degrees or more. Many houses have small vegetable gardens. Rice and cane grow in the valley bottoms and farmers can end up climbing or descending heights of 500 to 1,000 feet, sometimes more, just to tend their dispersed holdings.

Even so, to an outsider, it can seem an idyllic life.

The Burundi live in what should be one of the most fecund patches of the earth, a mountainous, equatorial country. It is a country which, because it lies at altitudes mostly more than a mile high, is not especially hot. Temperatures vary little and over twenty-four hours average around seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit across most of the regions. In the high mountains just behind Bujumbura, the capital, the forests are of pine and other evergreens and farmers grow such temperate-zone fruits as strawberries.

Heavy, if seasonal, rains let Burundian farmers turn their hands to a wide variety of crops, from bananas to rice to corn, and including root crops like sweet potatoes as well as more traditional African grains like sorghum. More than eighty inches a year fall along the highest mountain ridges in the north country, while the valleys of the interior average sixty inches. Even the driest regions along the shores of Lake Tanganyika and in the northeastern province of Kirundo average 40 inches. In most of the country, farmers get more than one crop a year from their fields of corn, peas and root crops. Beans, the main source of protein, are harvested three times a year in much of Burundi.

With its gentle climate, rich soil, and beautiful hills, it is hard not to believe Burundi and the people who live there are not especially favored, that life there is not especially sweet. But, in fact, it is not sweet. Burundian life is hard, Burundians are neither carefree nor soft people. There is something behind the idyll, hard to put a finger on, a dark undercurrent of passion and ferocity and even hate.

"All sweet, child that I share," goes the Burundian lullaby,  
 That I share with God,  
 All sweet, tree like a parasol,  
 Sheltering mothers...  
 All sweet, child I would never give up  
 Like the calf being weaned  
 All sweet, irreplaceable  
 Like the kettle, like the pot  
 Forget your anger my child, my child  
 Let me ease your upset,  
 I will be less alone.  
 Calm yourself and let us chatter on  
 Let us recognize those whom we hate  
 In the neighbor's compound."<sup>2</sup>

One reason for the tension is access to land. With an average population density on arable land of more than 500 people per square mile - and growing - there's no longer much land to share. Burundi is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, even though it has only one, relatively small city: Bujumbura, with a population of about a quarter of a million.

What that means is that the size of Burundian farmers' separated plots, when added together, rarely exceeds an area of 100 yards by 100 yards. Holdings are often much smaller. Almost every last bit of space is cultivated and even the fencing between fields is put to use: Burundians plant the reeds they use to thatch their roofs to demarcate their property lines.

The tiny groves of trees which also separate these little plots - even the larger copses on the highest ranges - have a well-groomed, park-like air. Dead trees and windfalls are quickly hauled away for firewood.

Burundian farmers tend their fields with little more than machetes and hoes. Draft animals are virtually unknown and the coffee beans or produce bound for market, the water bound for home, is generally carried in graceful, amphora-shaped baskets or pots on the tops of women's heads or in sacks slung over their shoulders.

Rural Burundi is a place where everything moves on foot.

There are few villages. Farmers generally have their houses close by their fields, in the rural American pattern, instead of in villages, as in Europe or elsewhere in Africa. The villages that do exist, like Marangara or Ntega, tend to have been built around an institution like a church, mission, dispensary, school or government establishment. The market, usually held once or twice a week, is the heart of these settlements. The stately women of the hills, wrapped to their ankles in achingly bright red or yellow patterned robes, come from miles around to bring small baskets of beans or fruit for sale. There is seldom any meat on offer, although amulets of wood and antelope horn as well as herbs are often available. Buildings are ranged around the beaten-earth square where the market women spread their cloths and lay out the goods they have to sell.

Finding anything from beyond the neighboring hills is rare indeed. Burundi doesn't import a lot, a very little of that makes it very far outside of Bujumbura. Just about everything that comes to the landlocked country is trucked in ramshackle, smoking tractor-trailers that must crawl their way for a week or more over the axle-breaking dirt roads of Tanzania from the port of Dar es Salaam, 870 miles away. The rest either comes up Lake Tanganyika from eastern Zaire and Zambia, or is trucked over even longer distances from Kenya's port of Mombasa by way of Uganda and Rwanda. In all, economists reckon that thirty percent of the price of any imported goods in Burundi goes to cover transport costs.

It can take most of a morning for many Burundians to reach even these tiny hamlets, when market day comes or when medical care is needed or when it is time for church. On a mid-morning drive, twenty miles out on the main road north from Bujumbura, winding up through the switchbacks of the escarpment, you can see women balancing heavy pots on their heads bound for the capital's market, the richest in the country. They'd be heading back in the evening, often not returning to their mountain huts until well into the night.

For many, the pattern of settlement means the Burundian government's health, education and police services, such as they are, are relatively inaccessible. Until recently, all students had to board in Bujumbura if they wanted to attend a secondary school. Even now, the day

<sup>2</sup> Recorded by Centre de civilisation burundaise in 1979 and printed in a *Universite du Burundi* occasional paper "Le concept d'umuyeyi a travers les bereuses rundi" 1981.

that students go back to their schools paralyzes Burundi's bus system - every one of the mini-buses linking the country's larger villages and towns is commandeered to carry them. It can be two or three days before bus service returns to normal.

In much of the countryside, even the smallest must board away from home if they are to attend elementary school. Many do not - only about 65 percent of young children attend primary schools. The literacy rate is 30 percent.

For most Burundians, the hill on which they live is just about the whole world.

Every hill has a name and every hill is a community.

Whether an umusozi, a round-topped hill, an umurambia, a flat-topped mountain or an umutumba, a ridge, Burundians see their hill as home - as a human rather than a physical thing. The generic word for hill is rugo - the same word which, to the handful of urban Burundians living in cities, would be used to mean neighborhood. It is the word Burundians use to describe the place they come from.

Burundians' small mud-brick houses - some built in a European-inspired, squared-off style, but many still made with traditional circular walls - are scattered through the complex pattern of small plots, woods and pasture. Almost all farmers' houses, whether modern or traditional, Tutsi or Hutu, have thatched roofs. Metal from the few cans to reach the Burundian backcountry is too valuable to be used for roofing, although such flattened containers are a common building material in neighboring countries. Few Burundian houses have more than one room. Typically, a grove of banana trees or tiny woodlot surrounds the house and the small, dirt enclosure, the urugo, where families keep their animals. The trees typically grow thick and tall enough to shade the compound from the intense midday sun. Within the compound, there is often a small indaro, a miniature hut where offerings to ancestors are placed; as well as a shrine, the igitabo, for gifts to Kiranga, the King of the Spirits. The offerings of milk or beer don't have to be made on any kind of schedule, but, Burundians say, the spirits must be placated - they are a malevolent and mischief-making bunch. Usually the spirits themselves

take the initiative to remind a family when offerings are due by visiting illness or injury on the household.

The family, usually comprising father, mother, and unmarried children, is the basic unit in Burundi, but occasionally, three or four huts of an extended family will share a common, larger urugo. About three-quarters of Burundian families are believed to be monogamous; most of those men who are not, have just two wives. In addition to the religious prohibitions taught by Catholic and Protestant missionaries, simple economics demands this structure: few Burundian farmers can afford a second wife.

At the family shrine in its compound, it is the small disk representing a deceased grandfather to which offerings are usually first presented. He serves as the main intermediary with the spirit world for the family, but Kiranga, the Spirit King, can also intervene.

To talk to Kiranga, you use the rugo's diviner, the umupfumu. He is a medium who speaks with the Spirit King or even Imana, God. He is the man who acts as conciliator, forecaster, and doctor. The people of the hill know they can trust their diviner because they trusted his father and his father before him and his father before him. And they know that their diviner has studied long and hard to master the art of seeing the future in the entrails of chickens and bulls, in the interpretation of dreams, or in the movements of a divination wand. He makes the amulets and talismans which protect them; he is the one who acts against the sorcerers to whom one appeals for revenge against a neighbor, when you want illness or bad luck to befall them.

The anger and tension which can lead people to turn to sorcerers are always bubbling under the tranquil surface of day-to-day life. Dissipating them is an essential function of Burundian culture and social relations.

Regular visiting back and forth cements the links which tie the people living on a hill, even across ethnic lines. They bring guterera, which are pots of beer, or kugemura, which are sacks of produce. They are abazimyamuro - the ones who will put out the fire destroying hut. They are the ones from whom you borrow when your machete shatters or your foods runs short. There are economic ties which also link all the people of the rugo - pastures for grazing and some woodland are held in common by the people of a hill.

When a child is born, and again at the christening ceremony all the people of the *rugo* come to see the baby and congratulate the parents. In a standard formula, they will be asked to help teach the infant.

*Umwana si uw'umwe, ni uw'umuryango n'igihugo*, the Kirundi saying goes: The child belongs to no one person but to the family and the whole country.

Without a family, a Burundian has nothing. Unless, that is, he looks to the bigger family, to the nation.

"Our father Bireme was born in a far away place called Bweru," one elderly Burundian lady told researchers from the Centre de civilisation burundaise in 1972.

She said that was a place where there were many animals to hunt - her father hunted a lot, so much that he always kept a dog and always told his children to have a dog with them wherever they went. His father, her grandfather, died very young, the old lady said, and her father's mother remarried soon after, still in time to have many more children. When came the time to marry, the family told Bireme, "Don't forget you're muzanano (a stepchild)". And he understood then that if he stayed with his mother, his two half brothers would make him a *mushumba* - that is, a servant - and that he would have nothing. Would he accept that? the old lady asked the researchers. And she answered her own question: No! Without telling his mother, his mother who bore him, the old lady said, he took his dog and left for the court of King Mwezi. It wasn't easy. He crossed the swamps and slept anywhere he could. On the road, he only asked one thing: the way to the court...

A noble of the court told him: "You, young man, how can you ask for a hearing from the king. This dog that you have, do you think you can take dogs to the court?" Bireme cut some herbs, presented them to the noble, and said: "I come from Bweru and I ask the protection of the king's men."

He got it. The noble took him in and introduced him to the king, who asked him about his father and his father's father and his clan. King Mwezi knew of them; that clan, he said, "knows well how to tend to calves and I will take this young man to guard mine." After some years, the king gave Bireme a wife, exactly as his father would have. He gave Bireme a herd of cows to

tend on the royal mountain of Mbuye. Bireme became a noble, close advisor to the king, a mediator of the ever-more-bitter disputes of princes during the late nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

The point of the story is that Burundian culture and religion put a heavy emphasis on social solidarity and on social obligations, even as even older traditional concepts of family and clan drive individuals apart. There are some 200 clans, or *imiryango*, and a multitude of divisions within each; membership of a clan or sub-clan can give or deny access to a particular parcel of land or to the favor of a particular official or chief. It creates alliances within a *rugo*, or alliances which cut across into other hill-communities. It can be a framework through which an individual can organize a campaign for redress of injury - or a feud. And just as the traditional religious creed sought to mitigate the tensions and conflicts bred by the clan structure, so does the modern political ideology, such as it is, of the Burundian republic. National unity is the catchphrase. There is no other political ideal.

"The central ambition of our policy, the ideal of national unity, has not ceased for a moment to dominate our thoughts and to inspire our action," said President Buyoya, some six weeks after the Ntega and Marangara massacres, in an hour long speech in which neither the word Hutu or Tutsi was one mentioned.<sup>4</sup>

The preoccupation of Burundi's rulers, past or present, with ideologies of social solidarity is neither hysterical nor recent. Burundi's traditional tales and legends make clear that this is a people profoundly aware of and deeply frightened by the consequences of not having those social controls. They are also a people very aware of what it means to belong to the wrong side of a dispute.

Once there was a king, a Burundian folk tale goes, who raised animals, and the animals in those days wanted nothing more than to tear one another apart. The hare dreamed one night that the king would gather

<sup>3</sup> Recorded by Centre de civilisation burundaise in 1972 at Ramyya and reprinted in Mworoha, E.; *Peuples et rois de l'Afrique des Lacs*, Nouvelles Editions Africaines, Dakar, 1977 p 174-8.

<sup>4</sup> Agence burundaise de presse, Bujumbura, October 6, 1988.

together all the animals that did not have horns and that he would kill them, while those who had horns would be saved.

Then, the king did call the animals to gather. And the hare, hearing this, warned the others, saying: "Did you know, all the animals with horns will be saved and all those who have none will be put to death!" They didn't listen. So the hare looked around and found himself some wax, which he took with him when he joined the other animals in the courtyard of the king. The hare took his wax, modelled it in the shape of horns and stuck them on his head. When the animals asked the king's prime minister why he had called them to visit the court, they were told only that they had to split into two groups, the animals without horns on one side of the vast, circular royal compound, the horned animals on the other. The horned animals were told to go home. The hare needed no further hints and joined the bulls and cows, holding his horns of wax up high, until he was out of the court and could run home. The hornless animals were put to death. And so the king put an end to the troubles among the animals.<sup>5</sup>

With the exception of myths and folk tales, however, Burundi's kings managed social conflict and tension in less direct ways. When arguments erupted on the hills over land, or wood, or pasturage, it was generally the complex exchanges of tribute and royal largesse of kings and their local war lords and agents which mitigated things. The German colonial officials who arrived at the turn of the century, and the Belgians who replaced them after World War I, looked to these same warlords and royal agents to continue maintaining peace in the mountains. District administrators and gendarmerie sent by the central government have, in independent Burundi, replaced these royal vassals, but nowadays the people of the hills tend to try to regulate their own affairs without seeking recourse from those who govern them.

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<sup>5</sup> Recorded by Centre de civilisation burundaise at Gasasa, Burundi, 1985 and printed in Université du Burundi occasional paper "Une approche a la phenomene de la ruse dans quelques contes," Bujumbura, 1986.

A goat thief, for instance, is not necessarily hauled in to the district administrator's office for a trial. Instead, the elders of the hill might well decide he should be ordered to brew some beer for the whole community.

"That way, you pay a price, but it's not too bad because you have a party," one Burundian friend explained.

"You're not too upset, neither is the victim, so life can go on without strain," he said, adding: "Out in the hills, almost any problem goes to elders, except for murder or cattle theft, when the police step in."

In the days before police, even murder could be resolved.

Francois Menard, a White Fathers' missionary, attended one such case in 1905. It was orchestrated by the chief of the hill, an elder who arranged the presentation by the murderer's family of a white sheep to the family of the victim. The animal was sacrificed and members of the family washed their hands in its blood. Then, the two families separately walked down to the banks of the river which flowed by the bottom of their hill, the murderer's family carrying a full kettle of beer, the victim's family an empty one. All the men left their spears at home. Only the murder weapon was brought down. The victim's family brought the sheep.

At the elder's command, the sheep's ear was cut off and members of both families let the blood dribble out on their hands. They then washed their hands in the river and let them drip on the body of the sheep. The murder weapon was broken in half and thrown on the ground. Beer was poured into the kettle brought by the victim's family. Everyone then took a sip. They joined voices in the *impundu*, the call of joy, and chanted: "Mureke kwicana, mureke gusinda, stop killing one another, stop quarrelling." All then marked their foreheads with chalk, to symbolize the white hair of an elder - because old men no longer have the strength to kill when they throw their spears. The rest of the beer was then shared and drunk.

In some parts of the country, cows were sacrificed instead and the ritual also involved both families feasting on its meat.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Francois Menard, *Les Burundi, moeurs et coutumes*, Beauchesne (Paris, 1918) pp 60-1.

The elders - bashiantahe for "those who plant the stick" calling a court to order by plunging a stick called intahe into the ground - win authority by virtue of their family connections.

The key point of the ceremony initiating them comes when they are handed the intahe. "Take this scepter of justice which was given by Ntare Rushatsi (Burundi's first king) to your father and your grandfather" goes the formula prescribed for this moment.

Family, however, was not enough. Elders had to be married, to know the law and customs of the country, to have the reputation of being a just man. They had to speak well.

And they had to have the consent of the other people of a hill - the initiation was a great festival, celebrated by all the people of a hill at the initiated one's compound. Any opposition to the initiation, even from a child, halted the ceremony.

The difference now, however, is that there is no royal ratification and little of the religious authority which was invested in these elders when Menard watched that ancient ritual which wipes the slate clean after a murder.

There's also little largesse left to spread on the hills.

Burundian farmers' self-sufficiency in governing their own affairs in the rugos reflects a similarly high degree of economic self-sufficiency across the Burundian countryside. They don't have to depend on a higher authority to run their communities and they don't expect much from anyone outside the hill when it comes to trying to improve their day-to-day lot.

The lucky thing is that, for now, they can afford that self-reliance.

According to the World Bank, rural Burundians feed themselves fairly well. In a confidential document, World Bank economists estimate that, through the early 1980s, Burundians ate, on average, 102 percent of the calories they need to avoid malnutrition, compared with rates that can dip below 80 percent in several of the more prosperous African countries like Kenya. People eat, on average, 78 grams of protein daily; again, a relatively large amount in the sub-Saharan Africa of the 1980s, and just about the equivalent of a hamburger and a glass of milk. However, about a third of Burundian children from ages one to three suffer from malnutrition, says

Health Minister Norbert Ngenabanyikwa. This high percentage is due to the lack of a balanced diet and it is sharply above the ten percent rate for children under eleven months - the age at which many are weaned because their mothers become pregnant.<sup>7</sup>

Deficiency diseases like kwashiorkor, the vitamin deficiency endemic to much of sub-Saharan Africa that turns children's hair red, then bloats their bellies, and finally kills them, are relatively rare. The effect of endemic malaria, yellow fever, and trypanosomiasis - sleeping sickness - are somewhat muted because the mosquitos and tsetse flies which carry these diseases do not do well in the high altitude. Bilharzia, a potentially deadly parasitical disease caused by a river fluke endemic to most of sub-Saharan Africa, is virtually non-existent in Burundi. Gastrointestinal diseases - including infant diarrhea - do take a heavy toll, however. Only 24 percent of the population has access to potable water.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has emerged as a major health problem - Burundi, like neighboring Rwanda, Zaire, and Uganda, is one of the most severely affected countries on earth. Overall, three percent of Burundi's population is believed to be infected with the virus which causes the incurable disease. Of people like prostitutes and surgical patients who belong to groups which are particularly vulnerable to the disease, which is spread by sexual intercourse and blood transfusions, nearly half are believed to be infected. Burundi does not have a particularly high rate of male homosexuality that would explain the intensity of the epidemic, U.N. doctors say.

Burundi manages to feed itself and to keep itself relatively healthy despite the fact that a per capita gross national income of about \$260 a year makes it one of the poorest nations on earth.

Laborers in the capital city, Bujumbura, are paid the equivalent of \$30 to \$35 a month. Except for a few small textile operations and a bottle-making plant, a small port on Lake Tanganyika, and the government's own public works crews, there is not much work for them.

<sup>7</sup> World Bank; *Burundi: Problemes de developpement et d'ajustement structurel*, Washington: 1988 p iii, 16-17. Also Reuters, from Bujumbura, February 28, 1989.

In the countryside, people get even less money; just about the only source of income for most comes from selling coffee. The typical coffee holding consists of a dozen or so bushes. Altogether, they exported an average of \$81 million a year worth of coffee through the first half of the 1980s peaking at \$114 million in 1986. It's been hard times since then, though. Earnings in 1987 were nearly halved to \$69 million - a squeeze still being felt the next year in northern Burundi districts like Marangara and Ntega, two of the most important coffee-producing areas of Burundi. In 1988, the country didn't do much better: it earned \$76 million from coffee. Coffee sales are not expected to reach the 1986 total until the mid-1990s, and that's assuming a production increase to 40,000 metric tons a year from about 30,000 now.<sup>8</sup>

Is it enough?

Not if Burundi is going to develop, says the World Bank. The country simply doesn't make enough money to build the hospitals and schools, buy the machines and repair the roads that it must. Burundi imported nearly \$255 million worth of goods in 1988; its imports will have to approach \$450 million by the mid-1990s if economic growth is to match population increases.

Nor are coffee exports even enough to allow Burundi to service its \$525 million foreign debt very easily.

There is, in short, a very real chance that Burundians are going to get poorer.

And, as if that were not enough, there is also a very real chance that the kind of subsistence farming that is now keeping most Burundians fed will become unsustainable before the end of the decade.

The crunch, say Burundians, is coming soon.

"When you go out in the countryside, you see people crammed up against one another, almost to the point of asphyxiation," one high-ranking Burundian official told me.

"Sometimes I wonder if my children will have a future there," he added.

<sup>8</sup> World Bank, p 27.

It is the children who miss out the most in Burundi's current near-equilibrium of food needs and food production.

Beans provide just under half of the calories and just over half the vitamins that Burundians eat, and nearly eighty percent of the protein they get. The exceptionally high population growth rate of three percent a year - forty-seven live births per 1,000 people - means many women become pregnant once a year, which in turn means most children are completely weaned when they are about a year old and must thereafter rely on the relatively low-grade protein sources of beans and vegetables.

That is why the mortality rate for children aged twelve to thirty-six months is relatively high.

But even so, the high birth rate will also add up to a more-than-doubling of Burundi's population over the next thirty years.

By 2015, Burundi will have twelve million people, the United Nations projects. In Burundi's last census in 1986, there were 4.9 million people. In the years just before World War I, the German colonial regime estimated Burundi's population at around 1.5 million.<sup>9</sup>

"The demographic problem is a very real problem," Trade and Industry Minister Bonaventure Kidwingira told me. Some Burundian officials think the combination of rapid population growth and lack of freely available land may have created the emotional pressure cooker that exploded in the Ntega and Marangara massacres.

If that is so, it is a pressure cooker that has been boiling along for more than a century. Alfred Swann, a British adventurer who visited the area in the 1890s as an anti-slavery investigator for the London Missionary Society, described a country where, from the shore of Lake Tanganyika to the tops of the highest peaks, there was scarcely a place without people.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, iii, p 16.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Swann, *Fighting the Slave Hunters of Central Africa* (Lippincott: Philadelphia, 1910) 205.

### Chapter III

#### The Great Migration

The first large movement of modern man into the Burundian hills probably came sometime between 700 and 300 BCE, as Bantu from the savannah and forest of what is now Nigeria, Cameroun, and Chad in West Africa began drifting along the margins of the rainforests of the Zaire and Ubangi river valleys, skirting by the snowcapped, equatorial Ruwenzori mountains - the legendary Mountains of the Moon - and so into Africa's great Rift Valley.

The place where they entered the valley was Burundi.

And their great migration was a great breeder of mystery, for at the end of its trail, a thousand years later, are the silent cities of stone of southern Africa - all that remain of a vanished culture - and rumors of gold and King Solomon's mines and Christian kings and vanished tribes.

"In the middle of this country is a fortress built of large and heavy stones inside and out," wrote the sixteenth-century Portuguese seafarer de Goes, describing it as "a very curious" building, made of stones that fit together like a jigsaw puzzle, needing no mortar to hold them in place.

"The king of Benameptaga keeps great state and is served on bended knees with great reverence," de Goes adds.<sup>1</sup>

The great migration moved down the Rift Valley, which cleaves Africa like a giant sword wound, from the Red Sea near Djibouti to South Africa,

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<sup>1</sup> B. Davidson, The Lost Cities of Africa, (Little Brown and Co.: Boston, 1970) 224.

thousands of miles long, almost like a highway connecting the heart of the continent with the rest of the world.

And, it seems clear now, the area around Burundi was one of the migration's first important stopping places in the valley, the place where the wandering Bantu stopped and rested and began the experiments with metalworking technology, cattle-herding, grain-farming and kingdom-making that eventually, thousands of miles to the south, produced a great and wealthy empire. Burundi was where it all started.

The Rift Valley is perhaps at its loveliest here.

Its floor is Lake Tanganyika; a narrow, sparkling, deep blue stretch of water some 400 miles long.

Its walls are mountains, some towering more than 8,000 feet above sea-level - massive, looming walls, colored deep green from the rainforest on their flanks.

Narrow margins of fertile bottomland, perfect for the unintensive farming techniques the Bantu brought with them, lie between the lake and the mountains. Strips of land just as fertile border the streams and rivers winding down to the lake from the mountains. People quickly spread up these.

This migration was among the first stages of a diffusion of people that eventually covered most of Africa south of the headwaters of the Nile - from Kenya, Uganda and Zaire on the north to Zimbabwe and the Republic of South Africa to the south.

But it was not a trek. Nor was it a conquest.

Rather, it was more in the nature of small groups of herdsmen and farmers edging their way east. They used well-crafted stone tools to cultivate their root crops and to hunt. Their search for game, their goats' need for fresh pasturage, and the fact that the thin and not particularly fertile soil of the Zaire river basin's tropical forest was quickly exhausted by farming, drove them on.

It probably took centuries to reach the Rift Valley.

And there, with their arrival, they created a crossroads.

Contact to the north, with the peoples of the Sudd, the great swamp of southern Sudan, and the Nile headwaters, flowed naturally up the linked

valley systems of the Rift and the Nile, contacts that in turn linked the Bantu of Burundi, Rwanda, eastern Zaire, and Uganda to the Egyptian and Ethiopian cultures to the north and east along the valleys of both the White and Blue Nile and their tributaries.

And that meant contact with the metal-based technology, with the cultivators of grain - mostly sorghum - and the herders of hardy long-horn cattle and sheep. It meant contact with peoples whose experience with more intensive farming techniques - like terracing from Ethiopia or irrigation from Egypt, could be applied to open up the slopes of Burundi's mountains and valleys to cultivation. It also meant contact with the highly developed political systems of two major imperial states.

The Egyptian empire dates back perhaps as far as 3,000 years before Christ - by 2,500 BCE Pharaohs were building pyramids. Just up the river Nile was Kush, the empire of northern Sudan which, around 800 BCE, had seized the Nile valley upstream of the third cataract and in 725 BCE briefly conquered the whole of Egypt under the warrior kings Kashta and his son Piankhy. The invasion of the Assyrians in 666 BCE pushed the Kushite kings back into their Sudanese heartland where their capital, Meroe, became a great metalworking center exploiting such sophisticated techniques as lost wax casting, at first of bronze but eventually of iron, a metal rarely used in Egypt. In northern Ethiopia, the Biblical land of Punt, the mountain fastness of the Queen of Sheba, another imperial state was rising. Its rulers, whose descendents claim descent from the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, made the kingdom of Axum a world power. By 300 CE it commanded the trading routes of the nearby Red Sea and had started to extend its grasp across the whole of the Ethiopian highlands and south towards Kenya and Uganda.

The empires of the Nile and the Ethiopian mountains, in short, were at the center of the known world. Geography now allowed the Bantu to tap in. Eventually, they would make connections with the Indian Ocean commercial empire of the great medieval Arab traders of Muscat and Oman; these Arab traders called the Bantu's home the land of Zanj.

"A country divided by valleys, mountains, and deserts of sand...the most distant frontier of the territory that is reached by the ships of Oman and

Siraf," wrote the Arab historian Abdul Hassan ibn Hussein ibn Ali El Mas'udi of the land of Zanj in the 10th century geography that he called "The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems".

The people there, he says, came from Kush. They were the Nubians of ancient Egypt who had ventured up the Nile to its sources, conquering the hills of Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda, and beyond.<sup>2</sup>

It's an understandable assumption, for technology and trade did move down the valley. Did people, too?

It was only the 20th-century studies of African languages and their origins that other origins for the peoples of Burundi and central Africa were first suggested. Comparative language studies; tracking common words, word-roots, and grammatical constructions, pointed to a connection with West Africa and to a great migration across the Congo river basin 3,000 years ago.

The words that linguists studied don't suggest conquest. They suggest, instead, that the Bantu brought with them a well-developed farming technology and that whatever they acquired from other cultures were acquisitions through the peaceful diffusion of techniques and goods. In Kirundi, for instance, the verbs for sowing and cultivation - imbuto and kuruma - can be traced back to Bantu word roots from western Africa, word-roots which spawned surprisingly similar terms in Nigeria, Cameroun, and Chad. So, too, can the words for iron, for ore, and for blacksmith - icuuma, ubutare, and gucura - be traced back, which suggests that even though many, if not most, smelting and blacksmithing were learned during the Great Migration, they all became something the Bantu made their own, applying techniques to their special needs and coming up with distinctively Bantu methods and products: like spear points, or igera, from yet another Bantu word-root, for instance. The words for sorghum, amasaka or urubere; for beer, urwaarwa; and for cow, nte, seem to have come from the central-Sudanic family of languages, spoken in the northern parts of Zaire and the region around Lake Chad and what is now the Central African Republic, through which the Bantu's great migration towards the Rift Valley took them, 3,000 years ago. From what is now southern Sudan came the word for

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 153.

lion: ntare.<sup>3</sup> Linguists cannot, however, trace Kirundi words to Ethiopian roots in such a way as to suggest El Mas'udi's conquest. What northern migration that did occur in East Africa appears to have happened much later: in Uganda in the 16th and 17th centuries, with the Bahima people; in Kenya during the 18th and 19th centuries, when the Masai herdsmen swept south from southern Ethiopia and the Somali deserts.

Both grain farming and metallurgy substantially enriched the people of Lake Tanganyika - and Burundi was a good place for them, especially for the latter, with red hematite ore commonly found throughout the country, tinting the ground itself a deep reddish brown. Their smelters were simple: pits two to four feet in diameter, topped by a three- to five-foot high cylindrical column of hardened earth. Charcoal and ore were thrown in, on top of the tinder: papyrus or other marsh reeds. The molten iron bubbled out through a series of tubes along the bottom of the earthen column. Blacksmiths made delicate, leaf-shaped blades for hoes, spear points, arrowheads and knives. Although archaeological work in Burundi has been limited, the remains of iron-smelting furnaces have been found and dated to sometime in the period between 700 and 100 BCE.<sup>4</sup>

Many Bantu resumed their wanderings after a spell in Burundi, moving south along Lake Tanganyika into Zambia and Zimbabwe, where they built the mysterious stone city near Fort Victoria, just off the main road from Harare to South Africa. The extensive fortifications and beehive-shaped, dry-stone buildings - one is 300 feet by 220 feet - are obviously the ruins left behind by a highly developed culture. It was a land of miners and prosperous farmers which became a legend all along the Indian Ocean shore.

Too magnificent, the first European explorers thought, to be African.

One German explorer who saw the ruins of Great Zimbabwe in 1872 figured that the largest building was a copy of the Queen of Sheba's palace from the 10th century BCE. Another large building at the site - a hilltop

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Ehret, "Linguistic evidence regarding Bantu origins," *Transafrican Journal of History*, (London: 1972) 1-9.

<sup>4</sup> E. Van Grunderbeek, E. Roche, and H. Doutrelepont, "L'age du fer ancien au Rwanda et au Burundi," *Journal des africanistes*, (Paris: 1982) 5-58.

structure that was probably a fort - was a copy of King Solomon's temple, he said. The British, who eventually seized control of their territory, talked about the Land of Ophir, and many a new arrival searched through Great Zimbabwe and the other stone ruins of the country for the gold treasure they knew was there.

It was a myth that died hard, although even by 1905, British archaeologists were writing that the ruins were clearly African in nature and had probably been built by the Bantu people sometime after 1000 CE.

The romantic imaginations that at first talked of King Solomon's Mines and the land of Prester John - the Christian King of the East in medieval European legend - were disappointed. But some soon became entranced with the other mysteries of African migration: with the similarities of irrigation and terracing techniques from the Red Sea to Mozambique, with Uganda's massive earthworks and its proud kings, with the abandoned ruins of stone cities in Kenya and the ancient roads which run from nowhere to nowhere in that country. Obviously people had been on the move.

Although some, of course, stayed put.

The steady emigration of Bantu from Burundi to the south, towards the copper-mining country of what is now southern Zaire's Shaba province and the tough towns of Zambia's Copper Belt, appears to have dried up by about the first century CE.

Over the years, Burundians' way of life changed only slightly. The basic foods were sorghum and beans. Sometime around the 10th or 11th centuries, the hills may have started getting more crowded, as some of the Bantu from Shaba and Zambia apparently started wandering north along the Rift Valley and Lake Tanganyika. Burundi and Rwanda just to the north seem to be about as far north as this migration got.

Possibly by the 1400s, banana cultivation started, either spreading down the Rift Valley from Ethiopia, possible as warrior-clans from the southern mountains of that country moved into Uganda and Rwanda. But historians say the plant could also have arrived from the Indian Ocean coast, brought there by the Indonesian seafarers who settled Madagascar between the 10th and the 12th-centuries. Bananas became the staple in Uganda, to the north of Burundi, and were a popular basic food in the lowlands by Lake

Tanganyika, but it probably took many more centuries before the mountain folk started growing it, finding their cooler hills favored grains and grazing. It was only the active efforts by the kings and the managers of their lands in the 1800s that made bananas a common food plant.

The kings and their lands managers also commanded a much more extensive cultivation of beans, as well as the corn, potatoes, and manioc which came from the Americas a few centuries after banana cultivation started - most likely brought by the Portuguese from Brazil to the Kongo kingdom at the Atlantic Ocean mouth of the River Congo. All had the major advantage over sorghum of shorter growing seasons, which meant it was possible to have more than one harvest a year.<sup>5</sup>

It was a subsistence economy, but the basic produce grown was varied enough - and each type regionalized enough - to encourage some trade on the hills and between neighbors.

Eventually, Burundian farmers would routinely produce surpluses. Specialists in ironworking, pottery, and leather-making emerged.

The wealth, such as it was, that the artisans and farmers of Burundi's lush countryside produced soon attracted men who made their living by force of arms. And the wealth that the emerging warlords of Burundi commanded was not generated just from local exchanges. Besides produce and foodstuffs, safe from the flatlands at the head of Lake Tanganyika and in the southern mountains became an important trade good. Iron was also traded, as well as small amounts of palm oil.

Trade was however, mainly limited to the neighboring areas of what is now Zaire, Rwanda, and Tanzania, although eventually tiny amounts of such relatively high-value items as shells and pearls and precious stones from the rich coasts of East Africa, a fully integrated component of the Arab trading empire of the Indian Ocean, did reach Burundi.

They probably did not arrive directly from the coast, but were rather items which had been traded to some of the tiny kingdoms and villages of what is now central Tanzania and from there into Burundi.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Pierre Chretien, "L'age de fer et l'histoire du peuplement" in Mworoha, Emile (ed.) *Histoire du Burundi*, Hatier, Paris, 1987, p 90.

Trade goods - mostly salt and iron - were carried by porters from Burundi onto the central Tanzanian steeps. From there, probably after at least a couple of intermediary exchanges, Burundian iron made it to the Indian Ocean coast.

Traders from India and the Maldiv Islands there would buy the iron - it was a major trade and the iron from central Africa was in very big demand, wrote the Arab scholar Abu Abdallah Mohammed ben Mohammed in a 12th century geography written for the Norman kings of Sicily.

And that central African iron became the steel with which the swordsmiths of Damascus worked, making weapons of a legendary sharpness and durability that has yet to be bettered.<sup>6</sup>

But the cost of portage was too high to justify taking less valuable and bulkier Burundian products to wealthy Indian Ocean towns of Dar es Salaam, Tanga or Kwale - to say nothing of the fabulous Indian Ocean island of Zanzibar, where the sultan himself lived.

"In the old days, there were a few Abyangayanga," chief Bagorikunda told Belgian colonial official Georges Smets back before the Second World War, when asked about the traders who used to come on the lengthy, difficult route from central Tanzania.

The Abyangayanga traders brought salt; imiringa, which are copper rings; inyerere, which are wire bracelets; and ibirezi, which are shell necklaces, Bagorikunda said. The people would look for something in their huts to sell, swapping goats, sheep, and sometimes even cows for the traders' goods.<sup>7</sup>

Distance and cost, meanwhile, also kept Burundi from becoming a particularly important part of the trade network based in the cities of Zimbabwe and the Zairian copper belt to the south, below the southern end of Lake Tanganyika. Trade here was mainly limited to a swap of Burundian palm oil and salt for copper products - mostly jewelry.

And the cost and inaccessibility of Burundi helped isolate the country from one of East Africa's most important trades: in slaves.

<sup>6</sup> Davidson, p 165.

<sup>7</sup> Smets papers, vol 1, p 5, cited in Thibon, C.; "Economie et societe au XIXieme Siecle", *Histoire du Burundi*, 1987, p 183.

So did the legendary ferocity of the hill people.

"A self-respecting Burundian never shows himself in public without a lance; without it, he would feel undressed. Even the youngest boys are already carrying lances. As a general rule, one carries at the same time bow and lance, the lance in one hand, and bow and two or three arrows in the other," wrote Hans Meyer, a nineteenth-century German explorer.<sup>8</sup>

Slavers from the coast went deep into the interior, and it took something special to dissuade them, for they were brutal men.

In 1871, the explorer David Livingstone ran into three heavily armed slave-hunters just to the west of Burundi, in the Zairian mountains across lake Tanganyika.

Livingstone scolded them for bringing guns into the crowded marketplace and, thinking they were sufficiently well-warned, headed back to the hut where he was staying. But moments later, one of the slavers started haggling with a shopkeeper about a bird and grabbed hold of it. Two guns went off in the middle of the crowd. Slaughter had begun. The crowds dashed off from the place, threw down their wares in confusions and ran. At the same time, Livingstone said, other slavers started firing on a crowd of women, washing clothing at the riverside. Men and women, wounded by the gunfire, piled into the canoes pulled up on the riverbank; others leapt into the water screaming in terror. Livingstone described a long line of heads bobbing in the river, swimming desperately towards an island a mile away. They fought a fierce current - Livingstone said that if they had headed towards the far shore of the river, even though much more distant than the island, some might have escaped. "As it was, the heads above the water showed the long lines of those that would inevitable perish," he wrote later.

The slavers fired shot after shot on the helpless, dying people. Some sank quietly beneath the brown water, others cried out in pain, throwing their hands skyward, as if appealing to God for help, before they, too drowned, Livingstone said. One woman refused to be taken on board a rescuer's canoe, not recognizing a fellow villager and fearing instead she was about to be taken into slavery. "She preferred the chance of life by swimming, to the

<sup>8</sup> Hans Mayer, *Die Burundi*, Spamer, Hamburg, 1916, 50.

lot of a slave," Livingstone said.<sup>9</sup>

To repulse such slavers took a well-organized military. And Burundian warlords created the necessary military organization: armed protection was, in fact, what Burundi's feudal lords offered the people and the provision of it was, as far as Burundian farmers were concerned, worth the price they paid in tribute and occasional compelled labor.

The result was the emergence of an essentially feudal society by about the 14th or 15th century - not all that much later than in western Europe. Hills which were once governed by the consensus of their inhabitants or by appeal to elders, now came under chiefs who were free of the day-to-day drudgery of the fields. Local chiefs became small warlords. Some built alliances with other chiefs, some sought ways of assuring the chiefdom for their sons.

The key was the clan.

Families and lineages - the most basic, the imiryango, being the group of men and their living fathers and grandfathers who could claim a common ancestor five generations or so back - were the framework upon which Burundian society and economic activity were organized. A lineage would, typically, specialize: some were herders, some were bee-keepers, others blacksmiths, but most were farmers. They paid tribute to their overlords on that basis.

Beyond these lineage groupings of third, second, and first cousins stood the clan: a group of still essentially related people, but whose relations were distant enough to allow marriage within the group.

It was as the system was taking shape that a new people began drifting into the Rift Valley. Sometime in the 15th and 16th century, it now seems clear, nomadic herders from the Horn of Africa - Somali tribesmen from its stark deserts and Galla from the hills of southern Ethiopia - began sweeping into parts of East Africa. They pushed into Kenya, where they remain the dominant population of the north and east to this day; some swung to the west and into Uganda. The European explorers, traders, and settlers of the late 19th century witnessed the tail-end of a similar movement, of the fierce,

<sup>9</sup> David Livingstone, *The Last Diaries of David Livingstone in Central Africa*, (Vol. 2 Waller, London, 1974) 135.

red-clothed Masai people, who took over Kenya's Rift Valley region and much of the prairie and steeper land of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. It resulted in the dispossession of the Kikuyu people, who were crowded into the rich, hilly farm country around Mount Kenya, to the east of the Rift, and who had to contend for land with other tribes in what would become the so-called "White Highlands" to the west. And the pressures and conflict over land on either side of the valley mounted and became a major contributor to the bloody Mau Mau rebellion of the 1950s.

The Masai were content to take the land for their herds but the nomads who came to Uganda 300 years earlier had a different goal.

They conquered the native Bairu people, exacting tribute of food and forcing the conquered farmers to labor for them. The Bairu could no longer own cattle, they could not marry their conquerors, they became subject to a caste system that kept farmers on the land, craftsmen following their fathers' paths, and the products of all pouring into the conquerors' palaces.

These people, the Bahima, were still running things in the western Uganda kingdom of Bunyoro when the British arrived in the second half of the 19th century.

Because these herders from the north had herds of cattle to protect - and because they were not adverse to rustling to increase their herds - they were good warriors. They had few other skills. It was from these people, many historians hold, that the Tutsi come.

"Primarily by the institutionalized exchange of cattle for services and dues, Batutsi have been able to gather a much higher proportion of consumer goods. They do no manual work and have leisure to cultivate eloquence, poetry, refined manners, and the subtle art of being witty," said the French historian J. J. Maquet in the 1950s. As for the Hutu, "on poor soil, with technologically primitive implements, it is necessary to work hard to secure the surplus production required by the Batutsi...the great social influence of Batutsi has given opportunities for the arbitrary exercise of power, so that there are many insecurities in a Mufutu's life. But exploitation has been kept within limits set by the wisdom and interests of the Batutsi."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Maquet, J.J., "The Kingdom of Ruanda" in Forde, Dayll (ed) *African Worlds*, OUP,

In Rwanda, there had already been a small kingdom - it was founded by the Banyiginya clan in the 12th century, some 200 years before the Nilotic Bahima had even arrived in Uganda, just to the north. It was Rwanda's Banyiginyan kings, claiming descent from a heavenly ancestor, who, tradition holds, introduced cattle-herding and the drumming-cult which would become a key element of both Rwandan and Burundian notions of a divine royalty. It was as the Nilotic peoples arrived and established themselves in Uganda and drifted southward to Rwanda that the Rwandan kingdom began expanding from its base at the lush volcanic slopes of which today form the Ugandan-Rwandan border into central and southern hills as the kings sent their Ibisumizi warriors campaigning. To hold their conquests, the Rwandan kings established an elaborate series of counter-balancing castes, including so-called chiefs of cattle, land chiefs, and war chiefs.<sup>11</sup>

These Tutsi overlords were very much like the Bahima warriors who conquered much of western Uganda at around this time, in the 14th century, moving into the Rift Valley from southern Ethiopia and the Sudan. Historians have tracked them from the kingdoms of the Lake Victoria shore, like Buganda, to the proud rulers of Toro by the Mountains of the Moon, and on south to Rwanda, where the trail seems to peter out. The Bahima caste system worked very much like medieval Europe's guilds, with seven categories of craftsmen and a class of exclusively Bahima courtiers who lived on the tribute of goods and labor provided by the indigenous farmers. It broke down in Uganda a few centuries after the Bahima kingdoms arose.<sup>12</sup>

Did the castes and tiny principalities emerging in Burundi at this time have a tribal or racial basis?

They clearly had a family and clan basis. But Burundian clans and lineages are what anthropologists call exogenous. Marriages were often made outside the clan to cement political alliances, even with the sons and daughters of indigenous farmers.<sup>13</sup> It seems to suggest that the Bantu

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London, 1954, p 175.

<sup>11</sup> Herve Bourges and Claude Wanthier, *Les 50 Afriques*, vol ii (Paris, 1979) 188.

<sup>12</sup> Davidson, 235-237.

farmers of Burundi and Rwanda had power and influence, too. And it suggests that, perhaps, the notion of a straightforward serf-to-overload relationship does not quite capture the real bases of the traditional patterns of life in that part of the Rift Valley.

It is clear that the clan-based structure of society allowed for an increasingly elaborate social organization: for the call-up of young men, for instance, to make war. They encouraged the creation of political alliances and allowed related peoples to act in concert in looking after their interests. And this gave clans and their leaders power, power which, as Burundi evolved from an unrelated grouping of tiny feudal enclaves into a kingdom, had to be recognized by its would-be rulers.

The kings of Burundi learned to do so. By the 19th century they had evolved an elaborate system of rewards and responsibilities to be allotted to various influential lineages and clans. In their courts, membership in the two main orders of priests was reserved for only two clans, one clan for each order; to become one of the king's cooks - sensitive positions, for Burundian kings had a big fear of poisoning and sorcery - was an ambition that only the members of two other, well-trusted clans were allowed to entertain. The doctors, fortune-tellers, and rainmakers consulted by the king were also positions reserved for specific lineages or clans - mostly Hutu, according to Emile Mworoha, a history professor at the University of Burundi.<sup>14</sup>

There is an interesting word clue about castes and tribes from the Kirundi language: the generic term for Hutu and Tutsi, as categories of humankind, is *ubwoko*. It is also used to describe the category of Twa, or Pygmy, people as well as the Ganwa, or royal family and court. It is also the term used to refer to categories of rock, of plants, of trees, and of animals. It does not seem to mean tribe, or family, or rank.

But Burundian legend does not talk of conquest or of raiders from the north - not for some centuries, until well after the establishment of the kingdom. And then, so the legends say, the raiders were soldiers of the

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire de l'Afrique noire*, (Paris, Hatier: 1972) 307.

<sup>14</sup> Mworoha, E. "L'Organisation politique sous le regne de Mwezi Gisabo" in *Histoire du Burundi*, 1987, pp 207-222.

Rwandan king, and were eventually repulsed.

If there were no conquest, then how did Burundi's two main peoples learn to hate each other?

If they were taught to do so by the men who ruled the mountain, then what manner of men were they and how did they rule?

Their kingdom was founded 300 years ago.

By a man named Ntare - the lion.

## Chapter IV

### The Lion and His Sons

The lion - the name is appropriate, somehow, for the man who laid the foundation for one of the largest states in precolonial Africa, a nation that resisted conquest and colonization by Europe until the early years of this century and was one of the last bits of Africa to lose its independence.

Sometime towards the end of the 1600s or the start of the 1700s, Ntare created a kingdom which covered most of what is now the Republic of Burundi. Only the northern flatlands along the Imbo river at the head of Lake Tanganyika and the northeastern provinces eluded his grasp - the northeastern frontier of his realm probably ran along the Buyongwe river, beyond which lie the modern Burundian districts of Marangara and Ntega.

But in the heartland of Burundi, the steep mountains and hills just beyond the towering ridges lining Lake Tanganyika, Ntare forged a unified state which has never since been broken up.

Some stories say he came from afar, from another country.

But most of the stories about him say he came from the southern part of Burundi, in the hills near the point geographers say is the southernmost source of the Nile, the same hills which are home for the republic's current president, Pierre Buyoya, and the man he overthrew in 1987, Jean-Baptiste Bagaza.

The area is called Bututsi - the Land of the Tutsi.

Could the secret of Burundi's bloody ethnic hatred lie in its still-mysterious creation, with a man known now exclusively through legends and

stories told around the cooking fires and sorghum-beer pots of mountain farmers?

He was, say the majority of legends and stories collected by University of Burundi researchers, the son of a warlord named Jabwe, who one stormy night sought shelter from the thunder and lightning in what he thought was a deserted compound on one of the hills controlled by his brother, Nsoro.

There Jabwe found, sheltering in a hut all on her own, one of his brother's wives.

And while the storm raged, they found comfort in one another's arms.

Nine months later, Ntare was born.

He wasn't called the lion, not at first. He just seemed an insignificant boy.

Nsoro seems to have known nothing of the child's parentage. But soon after Ntare's birth, Jabwe asked that the child come to visit. He never sent Ntare back. Instead, the young prince was taken to the isolated hill of Ruhongore, perched on a point of a ridge commanding the meeting place of two deep valleys, at the farthest northern end of Jabwe's land, as far as possible from Nsoro's territory.

He tended cattle, like any Burundian boy.

But he was not like just any boy.

And the time in which he lived was not an ordinary time: for his father and his father's brother, the man who thought he was Ntare's father, were intriguing against one another. Was it over the boy? Or was it for the whole of the territory that their father once controlled, and split between his two sons on his own death? The stories are not clear.

But most agree that eventually Jabwe had to send his son off far to the east, to the land where his sister lived, the wife of a king named Ruhaga, who ruled a large stretch of hills and steepes of Buha, a land lying just beyond the vast marshes of the Maragarazi river, which today forms the boundary between Burundi and Tanzania.

It was time for war between the man who was Ntare's father and the man who only thought he was. The armies clashed in the marshes of Gitanga, where Nsoro, the cuckolded brother, was defeated and either died or disappeared in the depths of the swamp. He was never to be seen again.

But Ntare remained with his aunt, who guarded the secret of his birth closely. He remained a herdsman and his aunt gave him the name Cambarantama - the wearer of sheepskin - to throw off those who thought he, too, should be a warlord.

It should have worked; the bastard boy in sheep's clothing should have lived and died in obscurity. But the times would not let him: times of hardship and of trouble, times of prophesy and dreaming, too.

Dreams and prophecies and tales of heroes swept the hills and consoled a people troubled by war and by a drought so severe that stories are still told about it.

There was at this time a particularly popular prophecy - or rumor - that spread across Burundi that told of a godlike hero who crossed the Lake from the forests of Zaire, a hero named Kiranga who could command the spirits, who was, perhaps, the king of the spirits.

There was, as well, prophecy - or rumor - of a hero who would take charge and end the chaos which prevailed in Nsoro's land, following his disappearance after his war with his brother Jabwe.

Rumors of raiders from the north poised to attack swept the hills as well. Hutu farmers from Rwanda, farmers from the area which is now Marangara and Ntega, began drifting into Burundi.

Dreams and prophesy worried Ruhaga, the lord of the land where Ntare hid. And they all seemed to involve the boy in sheep's clothing. The king started watching this boy closely.

Ntare, says one storyteller from Bututsi in a 1984 tape recording, played kibuguzo, a traditional game, with his uncle. And always won. Ruhaga complained that the child obsessed him. That worried Ntare's aunt, who warned the young prince-in-hiding: "Do not play any more with him, or, if you play with him, try to play badly".

Others were watching him, too.

Two magicians, shamans with power to see into the future - and to see beyond appearances to truths, no matter how well hidden - had snuck into Ruhaga's land from the hills that Nsoro once ruled, where drought and wild animals ravaged farmers' plots, where once-carefully tended hillsides of sorghum were overgrown, where all now went hungry.

They crossed the ridges at the eastern end of Bututsi, trekked down the gentle valley of the Musasa river, one day, two days, three days until the trackless marshes of the Maragarazi stretched ahead and the massive ridge called Nkoma loomed above them to the left, the capital, some legends say, of an ancient kingdom whose traces have completely vanished from the Earth.

The magicians hesitated, considering which way to turn.

They crossed the marshes.

"We come to get he who will save the country. A child who is found now at his aunt's in Buha, he can restore the country," the magicians said, according to Bututsi legend.

They came to Ruhaga's compound and met the lord's wife there, Ntare's aunt.

And when they came, she knew her nephew's exile was ending soon, despite all her efforts to hid the boy, efforts to protect him, efforts to play her own role in the tangled politics and family antagonisms of southern Burundi, efforts of a woman who had seen one brother war upon and obliterate the other, all for the sake of a realm that she, too, must have dreamed of ruling.

"Is it he you seek?" she asked the magicians.

And they said yes.

But Ntare wasn't there. It was not always safe to be a pretender to a realm when you live in another ruler's compound.

Ntare's aunt led the two magicians to the rear courtyard, where the magicians were bid to rest. They slept there and stayed a long time, too, the legend says, until Ntare's aunt managed to convince her husband that they carried a prophecy of utmost importance.

Ruhaga was reluctant to hear them. He would only listen to their story when hidden from their view - perhaps fearing what the mission of the man the magicians sought portended for him.

"Oh, these Burundians, they have troubled my dreams, they captured me," the warlord moaned. "Truly, they have tormented me."

He wanted only that the magicians return to their homes and leave him in peace.

They wanted only the young man who, their dreams and omen reading

suggested, would save their country.

But where was Ntare?

No one seemed to know. And the magicians were forced to turn back, back again across the Maragarazi, back to the foot of the looming ridge called Nkoma, chased there by Ruhaga's warriors. The warlord was angered when the magicians with their troubling predictions would not leave his court, perhaps fearing that the unhappy fate of drought, hunger, and lawlessness suffered in Burundi would spread to his own hills ordered his warriors to arms. Then, too, he may well have suspected that Burundi's troubles, the chaos there and the weakness of its people, could be an opportunity for him.

So, he sent his warriors after them.

The magicians fled.

This time when they reached Nkoma, the magicians turned and started climbing, past the jungle-like ravine and sheer cliffs of what European explorers would eventually name the Faille des Allemands, finally arriving at the 6,500-foot high peaks of the ridge.

On one, they discovered a giant poisonous snake, Inkoma, hidden in a termite mound and guarding a shining rock. On that rock, was Ntare.

The magicians sacrificed a bullock, wrapped its skin around Inkoma's home.

Inkoma struck at the skin. Again and again.

The huge noise echoed across the hills.

The Buhan warriors, terrified, turned tail and fled.

And miles away, back at land Nsoro once ruled, and miles beyond that, back at the land of his true father, Jabwe, the people knew a new king had come.<sup>1</sup>

Inkoma's blind and furious striking at the skin set off other echoes, too. Drumming is a key element of traditional Burundian religion, evoking awe and terror and joy in equal measures.

The word for drum in Kirundi, *ingoma*, is the same as the word for kingdom. It can also mean god's eye.

<sup>1</sup> adopted from Vansina, Jan; *La legende du passe*, Musee royale de l'Afrique centrale, Tervuren, 1972, p 74-79 and Coupey, A; *Texte rundi No. 7, Aequatoria XXI*, 3, p 81-97.

Drums, some of which are the size of a man, are the source of power, the source of mystery. Troupes of drummers have called Burundians to worship and war for centuries, and the mixture of religion and social obligation which is the basis of the music of the drums precisely parallels the role of the Burundian king.

For Ntare and his successors were priests as much as rulers. Mwami, the Kirundi word for king, shares a common, proto-Bantu root with the verb kuaama, which means to be fertile.<sup>2</sup>

The same booming royal drum which echoed off the mountaintop to proclaim him king also frightened off an army of would-be invaders that saved Ntare's country. Now it was time to grab his kingdom.

The first challenge was his father, Jabwe. The warriors Jabwe sent to meet Ntare were all slain - the legend says by Ntare alone.

Ntare's quest took him beyond his father's land, took him all over the southern part of Burundi, along a path which went from one holy site to another - a circle of fig trees here, a sacred tree there, a grove of the great umurama trees from which Burundi's drums are made - a path which followed the path of the drummers who every year went from seeding ritual to seeding ritual across the hills, when their drums called upon God to assure a healthy crop of sorghum. Some of these places had been associated with local warlords like his father, Jabwe, as well.

In his stately, devout procession across his country, visiting each of these sacred places, Ntare united an ancient farming ritual, which was one of the most important annual celebrations by Burundian men of their gods, with his own, emerging kingship. The former herdsboy mastered the magic of the grain and the King became, in effect, the provider, the spiritual guarantor, of the staple food of the people. He eventually assumed the same role of provider for the animals that were the ultimate measure of wealth.

Some stories say he taught the people of Burundi how to smelt ore and forge iron - although, in fact, these were skills acquired centuries before. Others say Ntare brought the magic of sorghum seed festival to Burundi, that

<sup>2</sup> Chretien, Jean-Pierre; "La Fondation du Royaume" in Mworoha, *Histoire du Burundi*, 1987, p 185.

he created the spirit cult which defeated the witches of the hills, that he made the law which governed Burundi ever afterwards.

The places he stopped each became in turn sacred sites in a royal cult which gave him and his descendents legitimacy. Many eventually became the shrines - and tombs - of the future kings of Burundi.

And somewhere in the hills, he met Kiranga, the spirit commander, the spirit king: Kiranga, who was a go-between for man and god, Imana, the one to whom one would pray for help to cure an illness or if one sought divine favor.<sup>3</sup>

Sorcerers were powerless, once Kiranga's aid was invoked.

His worship involved possession by spirits, what Burundians called then and call now the ancestor sickness, intezi. Much sorghum beer was drunk and is drunk today when it is time to celebrate the cult of kubandwa - the spirits. There are chants and dances and talk in a language that the common run of men cannot understand. The initiated ones, ibishegu, of the cult are baptized by immersion in water.

The cult created links among the people of each close-knit hill and cut across any conflicts of clan or family, of land use or property disputes - it became, in effect, a sort of social glue. And by Kiranga's ability to defeat sorcery, the spiritualist religion helped turn Burundians towards accepting a system of law that was not based on magic and revenge but that did, by assigning responsibility and liability for actions, provide an efficient way of resolving conflicts and preventing them from escalating into the sort of feuds that can tear a small community apart.

When Kiranga's worshippers celebrated the kubandwa rite at a chief's place, both Tutsi and Hutu believers could attend. When a Hutu celebrated, a Tutsi could go, the old woman Maria Nkororo told the Belgian colonial official Georges Smets in 1935.

"Kiranga is for all, he alternates his work between Tutsi. Hutu," she said.<sup>4</sup>

He has a political role, as well - Kiranga is the brother of the king.

<sup>3</sup> Ntahombaye, P.; "La langue et la culture" in Mworoha, *Histoire du Burundi*, 1987, pp 195-99.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p 185.

With Kiranga at his side, Ntare won control of Nsoro's lands and Jabwe's, too.

Ntare, however, was not satisfied with winning control of his southern Burundi homeland alone, for his key accomplishment in creating his dynasty was in assuring it command over much of the northern part of the country as well. He did it in much the same way as he won the south; by following the path of the drummers at the sorghum festival in a campaign which involved no fighting but which, according to legends, inspired a profound religious revival.

That rejuvenation of Burundian religion through the spirit cult of Kiranga and coming in tandem with Ntare's bid for political power allowed the king to assume the role of spiritual intermediary over the country's food staple. And this became the foundation upon which Ntare's "Ganwa" dynasty was founded, and was the basis from which that dynasty ruled into the early years of the 20th century.

I am, said the 19th-century king Mwezi Gisabo in a poem of self-praise, the one who sows the seeds and makes sorghum ripen.<sup>5</sup>

The royal visits continued even after Ntare won his kingdom. Ntare and his descendents moved around the country regularly, from one huge thatched palace to the other, the giant dome-like structures and dozens of outbuildings sheltering a court of several hundreds of people.

The king's own palace was a giant, circular building, several dozen yards in diameter with a conical roof extending just about to the ground. His courtiers entered through an even larger circular compound, a corral which sheltered his cattle at night, passing by dozens of tiny huts snug against the outside wall which sheltered the royal herdsboys. At the far end of the corral was a gate to a second compound, the inyubakwa, for the king's milking cows. Here, too, was the altar where the king would sacrifice to god or the spirits. The palace itself was in the middle of this compound, courtiers stooped to enter it through a tiny doorway. But encompassing the palace and milking-cow compound was a third, larger compound, which adjoined the first corral. In this third compound, the ikigo, were houses for those princes allowed to

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p 204.

reside at court, as well as huts for the king's servants and close advisors, the abanyarurimbi. The royal granaries were also located in this compound. A few yards away was yet another walled compound of huts for the royal guard, the intore.

It was a close-knit group at the court. The king's advisors were typically men like Bireme, who had been herders of his cattle in their youth, although Bireme was unusual in being a real outsider. Most of these boys came from the families of influential elders in the provinces or were the sons of the managers of the king's estates across the country. Some were Hutu, others Tutsi, although the milkers of the king's cows, the umukamui, could be from only a handful of Tutsi families, the banyaruguru, or those with influence up above. The milkers had to be young men with no physical blemishes or moral flaws. Because milk was used in religious ceremonies, these were positions of great honor.

Much of the king's day-to-day political activity was centered on the ururimbi, the lawcourt which resolved clashes between chiefs, heard appeals of the most serious sorcery and murder cases, and disputes over grazing and trade.

The amabanga, or keepers of secrets, were a tiny priestly group drawn from a single clan, some of whom were always at court but who also tended the shrines, sacred trees, and major religious sites around the country. Some would supply drums or sacred food used in the religious ceremonies performed by the king. They often had domains of their own, one of which covered nearly 80 square miles around Nkoma.

There was a separate court cult centered on the royal drum, Karyenda. The drum was tended by a virgin girl, the Mukakaryenda, who would always be from the Bashubi, a Hutu clan. Yet another lineage, the Basengo, provided drummers for the drum Rukinzo, Great Shield, which the king took with him wherever he went, along with the drum-bearing bull Muhubura. Still another extended-family group provided the priestess, Jururyikagongo, who tended the sacred python Bihiribigonzi at the Kagongo shrine in the high mountains behind Bujumbura. And another clan took care of the sacred bull Semasaka, Father of Sorghum.

The specialized magicians and fortune-tellers, bapfumo, some of whom

worked with wands and others with animal entrails, as well as the royal doctors and the rainmakers, *abavurati*, also had jobs reserved for their own clans or lineages. Most were Hutu, as were the cooks and personal attendants of the king. These high-trusted women came from the Hutu of the Bahazna or Bashubi lineages.

The royal compounds - 13 for Ntare Rushatsi, ten more founded by this son, grandson, and great-grandson and another 40 by Burundi's most fierce warrior-king, his empire-building great-great-grandson, Ntare Rugamba - allowed the king to command tribute from all across the country.<sup>6</sup>

It was probably not a particularly heavy burden - the people of Burundi couldn't generate enough riches for that. Christian Thibon, of the University of Pau, estimates that payments in kind and in forced labor to the king or the managers of his domain probably accounted for the equivalent of about five percent of farmer's income.<sup>7</sup>

Legally, the king and in some cases his princely sons, brothers, and cousins, owned all the land and herds of cattle in Burundi. Families paid tribute according to their specialities - craftsmen in their products. The families and lineages basically thought of as cultivators, the *abirimizi*, paid in produce. Each lineage of herders, or the *aborozi*, gave a cow a year. Gifts were also expected when seeking favors, new land, or pasturage rights, for instance.

Milk cows went direct to the king's court, led there by patrols of royal guards. So did salt from the southern highlands and Imbo plains, and the highly prized baskets that were the speciality of people of the shores of Lake Tanganyika. Porters from southern hills near the passes for the central Tanzanian steepes gave luxury items, pearls, and shells.

Each royal compound was managed by a *mwishikira* - typically, the son of an elder in or near a royal domain, but sometimes the child of quite humble farmers.

The king also eventually ratified home-grown leaders of the hills as chiefs

<sup>6</sup> Mwohoro, Emile; "L'organisation politique sous le regne de Mwezi Gisabo" in *Histoire du Burundi*, pp 209-216.

<sup>7</sup> Thibon, Christophe.; "Economie et Societe au XIXth seicle" in *Histoire du Burundi*, p 173.

- some Hutu, some Tutsi. In many cases, the position of chief would eventually be reserved for a particular family. But not always. The king's favor could easily be withdrawn, and playing family politics allowed him to keep potential rivals from building up power bases.<sup>8</sup> In Rwanda, on the other hand, the king tried to play off potential rivals through a complex system of Land, Cattle, and Military Chiefs, each controlling a major means of generating wealth or power. These chief-ships were much more in the nature of hereditary positions.

Eventually, some of the most powerful of these chiefs, as well as the princes who became overlords of large regions of Burundi in the 19th century, gained powers like to the king's: they could tax, make legal decisions and, in some cases, assume the religious function of ridding a population of a sorcerer.

With a population of probably under two million, each *mwishikira* of the early 19th century's 60-plus royal palaces or compounds oversaw on average no more than 32,000 people. In some cases, the compounds were no more than a couple of miles apart. The most isolated, Muroro, located on what is now the Tanzanian border, was 25 miles from its nearest neighbors. In addition, of course, were the king's sanctioned chiefs and the princes: the top of the ladder in the Burundian social structure was never very far from the mass of the people.

From these royal establishments, the *mwishikira* would issue commands for labor on the king's plots and orders for planting and harvesting. To them, the people would come with their tribute and to receive the largesse of their ruler.

Each *mwishikira* became a manager of farm production and of land settlement. They maintained order, imposed law, and played a key role in containing clan and family feuds. They were responsible for the colonization of newly conquered lands - making sure those territories filled up with Burundians to secure the king's rule.

The peasants presented themselves at the royal compound and the *mwishikira* granted them properties, said the old man Bugabo in an interview

<sup>8</sup> Mwohoro, 1987, pp 220-222.

with University of Burundi history professor Emile Mworoha.

The peasants would ask for a place to build a hut or plant a field and the mwishikira would ask: "What will you do for me?", Bugabo said.

"All that you ask," was, said Bugabo, the usual reply.

And when they were given land, they became "children of the compound", Bugabo said.

They got more than land, too, said Bugabo.

The exchange of cattle, besides creating social links and cementing political alliances on a hill, had another effect as well. When epidemics of cattle disease hit, farmers were commanded to send healthy animals to the king and he would, once the disease had exhausted itself, then send the animals back to the hills, where each mwishikira would distribute them among his clients.

In a land which would soon have the problem of having too many people, instead of too few, and where cattle were wealth, the mwishikira had control over two potent breeders of trouble in the hills. He could become a new source of tension within a community and his actions could, in effect, create a new caste of peasants who were materially better off than their neighbors.

The mwishikira gave the people the bulls they ate or traded, the cows they relied upon for milk, Bugabo said.<sup>9</sup>

For, once a peasant became a protegee of a mwishikira, his position often improved significantly, notably through the gift of cattle or of tools. On the other hand, many a mwishikira imposed onerous demands for forced labor on his own plots.

Sorghum only comes with protection, Amasaka aba ku masabo, goes one Burundian proverb - but, goes another, equally common saying: amasabo aguma nk'arnabuye, protection is heavy as a stone.

The exchange of protection, patronage, and land for what were, effectively, tax payments made the monarchy self-supporting. The colonization role played by the mwishikira also became important when the Burundian kings eventually started to get ideas of conquest and expansion. The system became even more important in the 19th century as rising

<sup>9</sup> Thibon, p 184.

population pressure demanded changes in farm techniques that could have been difficult for a society governed by tradition to make.

The king, who as all Burundians knew was in intimate contact with God and the spirits, would pick the most auspicious date for sowing, the muganuro, as part of his religious responsibility of convoking the annual rituals which preceded the main rains and his temporal task of maintaining a calendar based on lunar months and keeping it from getting out of step with the annual cycle of rain and dry seasons. Every December, acting on advice from the abaganuza, or sorghum-rite priests, based high up on the Nkoma ridge, the king would inaugurate the sowing season with a secretive night-time ceremony, a ritualistic meal of sorghum porridge, honey and sorghum beer and cooked plantains, the sorghum coming from all over Burundi, sent to the royal court in carefully wrapped packets called isugi - the same word used for a cow with calf and often used to symbolize purity.

Dates for sowing would vary from region to region and would be communicated through the king's agents across the country. The king and the managers of his domains ordered the construction of terracing and anti-erosion earthworks on the hills as well as the irrigation systems of the northwestern bottomlands at the head of Lake Tanganyika. Their carefully considered instructions for the sowing imposed a crop rotation system where none had existed before. They commanded the planting of beans, cassava and, especially along the lake, of bananas. These nontraditional plants, mainly imported along the tenuous trade routes which linked Burundi to the Indian Ocean coast and the Zairian forest, helped farmers through the country's occasional droughts and opened up new, drier and higher-altitude lands for exploitation. Perennials like the banana also provided a year-round source of food.<sup>10</sup>

The bashumba, or young unmarried men, who came under the direct protection of each mwishikira, often living in his compound, became an important source of farm labor during the 19th century, as a rising population forced ever-more intensive cultivation - farming techniques that resemble nothing so much as gardening. It meant males taking on tasks that had, by

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, pp 172-175.

tradition, been jobs for women. The king's agents used this highly dependent class - the same which in times of war comprised the army - to break through that barrier.

The feudal system solidified under Ntare's son, Mwezi, the Full Moon, who became king after his death; and Mwezi's son, Mutaga, High Moon, who followed him.

It was a good system for war. And there were wars to come.

Mutaga, like the rulers of modern Burundi, worried about his northern frontier, where cattle raiding across the Kanyaru river had intensified at the same time that a powerful king had emerged in southern Rwanda. The Rwandan king sent warriors to camps all along the Kanyaru and Mutaga decided to move his capital north, to the hill of Nkanda.

Whether it was Mutaga who invaded Rwanda or the Rwandan king Cyrima Rujugira who swept into Burundi depends on who is telling the tale. But Burundian and Rwandan accounts agree that Mutaga was killed in the decisive battle which determined, for ever afterwards, that the Kanyaru river would be boundary.

And when Mutaga died, according to a tale still current in the hills, the Rwandans gathered round his body to see. They asked one another if it could really be the King of Burundi lying there. Some said yes. But the warriors hesitated.

For the power of the king was not to be underestimated and so, the story goes, the warriors called a former Burundian prime minister, Sentama, who had long before angered Mutaga and fled from his wrath to find shelter in Rwanda.

The Rwandan warriors brought Sentama to the battlefield and asked: "We know that you were once a servant of Mutaga. Is this corpse him?" Sentama cried "Oh yes, comrades, it is him." And then he drew his sword, plunged it into his own stomach and fell, dying, upon the body of his king.<sup>11</sup>

The king's body, say the Burundian stories, was taken back over the river from Rwanda and entombed on a hill commanding one of the main passes

<sup>11</sup> Nkurikiyimfura, Jean-Nepomucene; "La Mort de Mutaga", in Mworoha, *Histoire du Burundi*, p 141.

into Burundi from Rwanda, above the valley where today Route Nationale 1 runs. And from this tomb, called Inganza, the Place of Triumph, his power has, even after his death, guaranteed the border.

Sacrifice is a recurring theme in the tales of Burundi's kings. Mutaga's son, Mwambutsa Mbariza, who after years of intrigue finally triumphed over a family regency, died as his father did: to save the country. Mwambutsa set fire to a brother's house to revenge the brother's attempt on his life. But the fire raged out of control, threatening the whole countryside. All the cows died, "the hills themselves burst into flame," goes one story. The people searched for someone who could put out the fire. They found none. In desperation, they consulted a powerful diviner, who went to the king and said: "Mwambutsa son of Mutaga there is no other way, it all depends on you." Mwambutsa knew he had to pay the price for the devastation he had so thoughtlessly caused. He drank a potion and died. And only then was the fire extinguished.<sup>12</sup>

Along with sacrifice, war and magic and pride are other themes of Burundian kingship.

The 19th century king Ntare Rugamba - the Brave Lion - waged war on all his neighbors. Twice he sent his lancers and archers against Rwanda, without success. But his armies swept up along Lake Tanganyika far into what is now the Pygmy and gold country of eastern Zaire. To the south and east, where his conquests took in the kingdom of Buha, where his namesake, the first Ntare, spent his youthful exile.

"Ntare, by his magic means, arrived carried by the wind. He drew an arrow. Ruhaga (the king of Buha) also was carried by the wind; the arrow followed him. He descended into the river, the arrow descended. He crossed, the arrow followed him everywhere, high and low, even in caves, and it found Ruhaga in his home where it finished by catching him in the hallway," goes one legend, as reported by the Belgian priest Bernard Zuure in his 1932 book *L'ame du Murundi*.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Vansina, Jan; "La Mort de Mwambutsa premier", in Mworoha, *Histoire du Burundi*, 1987, p 142.

<sup>13</sup> Zuure, Bernard; *L'ame du Murundi*, Beauchesne, Paris, 1932, p 286.

Then came the burning of the compounds and the taking of the cattle. There were few prisoners in a Burundian war.

Ntare probably never commanded more than 4,000 warriors but he more than doubled the size of his kingdom. The young men of his hills, who studied war from the age of 14, were skilled archers and lancers: they were declared men on proving they could hit a tree from a distance of about 100 yards with their arrows. The sons of chiefs and of his mistresses became the royal guard, the *intore*, each guardsman painted red and white, with a headdress of banana-tree fiber and skirts of antelope skin.

The fighting was always bloody, the old man Mpabonye told the French professor Jean-Pierre Chretien back in 1971, when asked about how all the king's men made war.

Warriors, he said, dressed only in a skin: serval or antelope. "You marched light!" he added, and wounded warriors pulled out the arrows that had struck them. "That was valor," the old man said. "The valor of a warrior."<sup>14</sup>

They were a proud people and their pride could even, at times, become their weapon.

Ntare taunted a neighboring king, Nsoro Nyabarega, who thought trenches and earthworks could protect his country, saying he would send moles after him. Go to sky, said Ntare, and the Burundian king would send lightning. Hide among the women, and even there he wouldn't be safe. "Go, Nyabarega," taunted the king, "you are an animal."<sup>15</sup>

Ntare's neighbor went.

That was how, the stories say, the Lion won control over the northern provinces where today lie Marangara and Ntega.

And, they say, from his exile on a tiny island in one of the arms of Lake Cohoha, in the gently rolling hills on what is now the Rwanda-Burundi border, Nsoro Nyabarega promised his revenge. Hustled out on the pirogue to cross, he turned and threatened to come back - when the last of Ntare's

<sup>14</sup> Chretien, Jean-Pierre; "Recit de Mpabonye" in Mworoha, *Histoire du Burundi*, 1987, p 161.

<sup>15</sup> Vansina, 1972, p 177.

descendents had died, "after years equal to the hairs on your cows."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Gahama, Joseph; "Le regne de Ntare Rugamba" in Mworoha, *Histoire du Burundi*, 1987, 146.

## Chapter V

### The Children of Ham

In 1896, the Italian army had a shock. Troops of the Ethiopian emperor defeated it - smashed one of the most modern of European armies - at the battle of Adowa.

Primitive Africans weren't supposed to do that.

But as more and more Europeans began exploring Africa in the second half of the 19th century, they discovered that its history and people and cultures weren't quite as simple or straightforward as they had thought. It was a baffling challenge to assumptions learned during 400 years of owning Black slaves - that so-called peculiar institution which had only ended in the United States in 1865 and which continued in Brazil until the 1880s.

The answer to their dilemma was clear: some Africans weren't really African.

Victorian-era Europeans weren't the first to seize on this idea. In the Hellenistic classic *The Romance of Alexander the Great* by Pseudo Callisthenes, Queen Candace of Ethiopia tells the Macedonian conqueror to not be misled by the color of her people's skins, for in their souls, she said, Ethiopians "are lighter than the white men" in Alexander's entourage.<sup>1</sup>

"It must always be asked, apropos of each civilized trait in Africa, if it does not come from outside, that is to say, from Asia," argued Franz

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudo Callisthenes; *The Romance of Alexander the Great*, Wolohokian, Albert, translator, Columbia University Press, New York, 1969, p 132.

Stuhlmann, a senior German colonial official in Deutsche Ostafrika, the sprawling pre-World War I empire which comprised the Tanganyika mainland of modern-day Tanzania as well as Burundi and Rwanda.<sup>2</sup>

Anthropologists of the time saw Germanic traits in the proud Fang people of West Africa while the Zulu, whose fierce and able warriors nearly managed to block British settlement in South Africa, were thought to have the features of the people of ancient Sumer, whose sophisticated urban civilization flourished in the Mesopotamian region of Iraq thousands of years before the Greeks and Romans. The Galla of southern Ethiopia were believed to be descendants of an invasion of warriors from far-off Gaul, in modern-day France.<sup>3</sup>

Legends of King Solomon's Mines, of the gold of the Land of Ophir and of the lost Tribes of Israel swirled through this speculation, making a heady brew. Scholars were fascinated by the medieval European legends of Prester John, the Christian King of the East, whose 12th century "letters" to his fellow Christian Emperors of the West, Frederick Barbarossa and Manuel of Byzantium, were translated and republished in the late 19th century. According to the various versions of these letters, Prester John's kingdom was in Africa and most probably in Ethiopia, which has had its own distinctive Christian church since 400 CE. He was "king of kings and lord of lords" with more than 100,000 horsemen at his command, who would march into battle behind 13 giant crosses of gem-encrusted gold. At his table, made of emerald and amethyst, he played host to seven vassal kings, 52 dukes, 365 counts. Beyond one river at the far edges of his realm, from the waters from which one can pick out precious stones of all varieties, were ten Jewish tribes who were his servants and who paid him tribute.<sup>4</sup>

Scholars also uncovered Eldred the Danite, whose 9th century writings talked of tribes which "possess much gold, silver, and precious

<sup>2</sup> Stuhlmann, Franz; *Handwerk und industrie in Ostafrika*, Spamer, Hamburg, 1910, p 77.

<sup>3</sup> Chretien, Jean-Pierre; "Hutu et Tutsi au Rwanda et Burundi" in Amselle, Jean-Loup and M'Bokolo, Elikia; *Au coeur d'ethnie. ethnies, tribalisme et etat en Afrique*, Decouverte, Paris, 1985, p 132.

<sup>4</sup> Silverberg, Robert; *The Realm of Prester John*, Doubleday, New York, 1972, pp 41-45.

stones", who living "sow and reap and have all sorts of gardens with all kinds of fruit and cereals, namely beans, melons, gourds, onions, garlic, wheat, and barley; and the seed grows a hundredfold. They have faith, they know the Law."<sup>5</sup>

Scholars began thinking of the Bible's Ethiopians and the wealthy people of the Land of Punt - and they began thinking of the Africans of Ethiopia as children of Noah's son, Ham.

It was right in Genesis. In Genesis 10:6 and 7, Ham's progeny include the great African empire of Kush and of Sheba, too - whose queen would later love King Solomon and found the Ethiopian Empire (1 Kings 10:1-13).

There was more: in Genesis 9:21-25, Ham and his children were cursed: "And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brethren without. And Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward and they saw not their father's nakedness. And Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren."

Yet it was an ambivalent curse. For an Ethiopian was among the first converts of the Christian Apostles: "Behold," said The Acts, 9:27-39, "a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem to worship...And Philip said, 'If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest be baptized.' And the Ethiopian replied that he believed, and was baptized 'and he went on his way rejoicing."

When the European scholars added it together, they came up with the notion of an elite race. An elite race with Biblical connections, for not only were they descended from Ham, but, in the view of 19th century Europe, the best of them were also Christian - the Ethiopian Empire which crushed those Italian troops at Adowa. German philologists - those who study the evolution and linkages between languages - quickly uncovered linguistic

<sup>5</sup> Neubauer, Adolph; "Where are the 10 Tribes?"; *Jewish Quarterly Review*, London, 1889, pp 100-112.

connections between the Amharic spoken by Ethiopia's emperor and Kirundi and Hebrew.

"The civilizations of Africa are the civilizations of the Hamites, its history the record of these people and their interaction with the two more primitive African stocks, the Negro and the Bushman," wrote the highly respected expert on African anthropology Charles Seligman in a 1930 text which circulated widely amongst colonial officials throughout Africa.<sup>6</sup>

"The Hamitic cradle-land is generally agreed to be Asiatic," Seligman continued,<sup>7</sup> before proceeding to the conclusion that in places like Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda "the incoming Hamites were pastoral Caucasians - arriving wave after wave - better armed as well as quicker witted than the dark, agricultural Africans."<sup>8</sup>

An elite race - but not too elite.

For Ham was cursed. And the Bible itself suggested a subservient position for Africans: did not Zephaniah 3:10 note that "from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering"?

The title Prester John himself assumed was derived from presbyter, or priest, as a token of humility and a recognition of a power even greater than his, or so his reconstructed medieval letters said.

It was an inspiring sentiment for the missionary priests who began venturing into the Burundian hills from the turn-of-the-century. To priests like Father A. Pages, it suggested that the battle to win African souls was winnable - Pages argued that the Tutsi, as a Hamitic people, were Ethiopian monophysites who had lost their culture but who were nevertheless naturally receptive to Christian teaching and, in fact, a chosen people of God.<sup>9</sup>

Nobody had any doubts that the Tutsi were children of Ham, either.

<sup>6</sup> Seligman, Charles; *The Races of Africa*, Thornton Butterworth, London, 1930, p 69.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, page 98.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, page 158.

<sup>9</sup> Chretien, 1985, p 138.

It took the Germans five years to defeat the spear-armed intore, the royal guard of King Mwezi Gisabo, after all. And British explorer Richard Burton had already described Mwezi as an almost legendary man, a ruler who commanded many warriors and terrorized his neighbors, having been told just that when he and John Speke met those neighbors during their 1858 exploration of what are now the Tanzanian and Zairian shores of Lake Tanganyika while they searched for the source of the Nile.

Shortly after Mwezi Gisabo's 1893 agreement to a German protectorate, the hard battle for Burundi still fresh in his mind, the Duke of Mecklenburg arrived for a visit. Of the Tutsi, he wrote "they possess that same graceful indolence of gait which is peculiar to Oriental peoples...unmistakable evidences of a foreign strain are betrayed in their high foreheads, the curve of their nostrils, and the fine oval shape of their faces."<sup>10</sup>

Pierre Rijcksmans, the first civilian governor of Burundi named by the Belgians after the First World War, compared the Tutsi to the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II, writing in a Rwanda journal published for expatriates in the colony.<sup>11</sup>

The explorer Hans Meyer agreed, describing the Tutsi as men of "superior intelligence, calmness, smartness, racial pride, solidarity, and political talent."<sup>12</sup>

The significance was clear. And colonial officials, both German and, after the First World War, Belgian, acted upon it. The Tutsi, being people who seemed to look more like them, were clearly people who were more fitted to rule.

"They are called the Tutsi. In reality, they are Hamites...They represent about a tenth of the population and they form in reality a race of lords," said Jules Simon Sasserath, a doctor who served for years in the

<sup>10</sup> Louis, William; *Ruanda-Urundi 1884-1919*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1963, pp 119-120.

<sup>11</sup> Chretien, 1985, p 136.

<sup>12</sup> Meyer, p 163.

Belgian League of Nations Mandate of Ruanda-Urundi, which united both Burundi and Rwanda.<sup>13</sup>

Johannes-Michael M. Van der Burgt, a Dutch priest sent to Burundi by the White Fathers in 1896, thought he could trace the Burundian dynasty back to a man named Ruhinda, the hero-founder of the Ugandan kingdom of Nkore and half-a-dozen neighbors along the western shore of Lake Victoria and the Kagera valley of western Uganda.

His key clue, outlined in the French-Kirundi dictionary he published in 1903, was the name of the king of Buha in whose court Ntare Rushatsi was sheltered as a child. That king, whose name is usually rendered as Ruhaga by the modern researchers of the Centre de civilisation burundaise, was the same man as Ruhinda, Van der Burgt argued.

Moreover, he said, place names like Gatara, now a large hamlet just off Route nationale 1, the main road north to Rwanda, hark back to even more ancient roots: a powerful and mysterious people called the Bacwezi who ruled the empire of Kitara.<sup>14</sup>

These were supposed to be people of the Nile who had swept into Uganda, and beyond, as conquerors. They were, say the Bunyoro people of western Uganda, men who went where no man had ever gone before, whose faces could not be seen because to look upon the burning brightness of their eyes was like gazing at the Sun;<sup>15</sup> they were, said the turn-of-the-century British governor of Uganda, Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston, a "half-Caucasian" group whose descendents were the obvious choice to help the Europeans govern the dark heart of Africa.<sup>16</sup>

They were, in any event, the people whom the Europeans who came to Burundi favored.

<sup>13</sup> Sasserath, Jules Simon; *Le Ruanda-Urundi, au pays des Hamites, un etrange royaume feodal au coeur de l'Afrique*, Editions Germinals, Brussels, 1948, p 27.

<sup>14</sup> Van der Burgt, Johannes Michael M.; *Dictionnaire francais-kirundi*, Societe Illustration Catholique, Bois le duc, 1903, pp 179-83.

<sup>15</sup> Davidson, page 17.

<sup>16</sup> Johnston, Sir Harry Hamilton; *The Uganda Protectorate*, Hutchinson and Co, London, 1902, p 588.

The Europeans arrived at a critical time for Burundi and the atypical situation they found then - just as much as the fevered stew of Biblical speculation and legends of gold and purportedly scientific racialism they learned in Europe - may well have shaped their subsequent views about the people and the country.

Oscar Baumann, an Austrian explorer, was the first European to cross the whole of Burundi, spending nearly two months in the country in an 1892 trip that took him through modern-day Marangara, across the escarpment high above Lake Tanganyika to the site of what is now Bujumbura but which was then just a tiny village. From there, he struck off west and south, down through the heart of the Bututsi region.

He had a real surprise, too, when he arrived in Burundi, a country he described as terra incognita; there, he said, the compass was his only guide.

"Enormous crowds came from all sides...they grabbed provisions and furnishings from their huts, the fields were ravaged in minutes. Whole herds of cattle were driven and some torn literally in pieces by my delirious entourage. The enormous amounts of pombe (sorghum beer) often found in villages did not make things any calmer...As I approached, people would fling themselves literally under the feet of my mule, crying 'gansa mwami' (triumph to the king)," he wrote later.<sup>17</sup>

The Burundi people, said Baumann, were ruled by a dynasty which traces its roots to the Moon - the royal title, he said, is mwesi, which means moon. In fact, however, he was confusing the king's proper name, Mwezi with the title "king", which in Kirundi is Mwami. It was not his only misapprehension about the country of the moon: for Baumann reported that the "latest Mwesi", Makisavo or pale-face, had disappeared years before, although his soul was supposedly on the moon and expected to return. It was fortuitous, Baumann said, for when a European came, unheralded, from the east, the Burundi "saw in him their awaited master, the Mwesi Makisavo."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Baumann, Oscar; *Durch massailand zur Nilquelle*, D. Reimer, Berlin, 1894, p 86.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pp 80-86.

Actually the king was Mwezi Gisabo, or Light of the Moon, and in 1892, he was very much alive, living, in fact at one of his capitals - probably Mbuye, in the old heartland of Ntare Rushatsi. He was alive, but having a very bad year indeed.

The king had not vanished, but the Burundians who saw in him the guarantee of good harvests and healthy times might well have thought so.

"According to the Warundi, after the peaceful reign of the last Ntare, the country was constantly afflicted by different calamities under King Kisabo," wrote the Dutch priest Van Der Burgt, adding: "This was a series of misfortunes: revolts by chiefs against the king and amongst each other (ivityero) plus, after 1890 especially, locusts (inzige), famine (inzara), the arrival of the pulex penetrans (imvunza), the (cattle) epidemic of 1892 (akaryama), smallpox (akaranda, ikituta) a contagious sickness, a type of syphilis (ivinyoro), drought (hari cyumo), etc. Taken together, these calamities, so say the Warundi, not only decimated but took half the population."<sup>19</sup>

A severe drought hit Burundi between 1889 and 1891. There was a massive outbreak of smallpox in 1892, which spread up the lakeshore from Ujiji, the Sultan of Zanzibar's trading post on Lake Tanganyika where the American explorer Henry Stanley presumed upon Dr. Livingstone, and where there had been regular epidemics since 1880. The first colonial administrators estimated that as many as one in three people died. Rinderpest swept through the herds of cattle that same year: some stories say half of all cattle died, keeling over in the pasturelands and left untended for the packs of hyena which invaded the country. A particularly noxious insect, *sarcophylla penetrans*, which was carried to Africa on ships arriving from South America, spread up the Congo River basin from the Atlantic coast to arrive in Burundi at this time - its bites were deep and easily infected, causing more deaths. Locusts arrived in 1892 and returned several times until 1897. The drought of the early part of the decade caused the waters of Lake Tanganyika to recede by as much as ten yards, creating marshy breeding

<sup>19</sup> Van der Burgt, p 287-288.

grounds for malaria mosquitos. The disease had a devastating effect on a population which had never before had to build up a tolerance.

The population fell and even by the second decade of the 20th century was an estimated 20 to 40 percent below 1880 levels. In the Imbo region, which suffered a sleeping sickness epidemic in 1905, the population was down 50 percent to 150,000.

Burundians started using the word "Guhonoza", a rare coining meaning "ravaged", to describe these times. Not surprisingly, many looked on the European explorers who had started arriving in the 1890s as part of the general catastrophe. They were dubbed *ibisuka*, which means monsters. Many Burundians thought they had bewitched the country: "Smallpox came with Arabs and sleeping sickness with the Europeans" goes one saying from the lakeside village of Rumonge.<sup>20</sup>

Politically, Mwezi Gisabo had been having a hard time for at least 20 years before. The second half of the 19th century presented Burundi with a suddenly acute phase of a malaise which eventually faces many kingdoms: namely, what to do with second sons. In Burundi, where kings typically had more than half a dozen wives and where the throne did not inevitably go to a king's oldest son, this political problem was exacerbated by another typical problem of royal government: how to control your marcher lords, the military leaders who defend the border. These Batware Nkebe, who governed the Imbo plains at the head of Lake Tanganyika as well as the northeastern frontier with Rwanda and the southeastern hills bordering Buha, took on most of the judicial, military, and tax authority reserved for the king or princes elsewhere in the country. Some were Tutsi, many others, especially in the wealthy - and strategically vital - Imbo region, were Hutu.

They were obligated to pay homage to the king and most did so willingly. But the last half of the 19th century was a confusing time for vassals in Burundi, and the chiefs were torn by conflicting loyalties and exulted in their burgeoning power.

<sup>20</sup> Chretien, Jean-Pierre; "Les crises de la fin du XIXieme siecle" in Mworuha, *Histoire du Burundi*, pp 237-239.

Mwezi Gisabo was one of the sons of the great warrior king Ntare Rugamba - not his oldest, either. He took the throne as a child in 1850, under the regency of his much older half brother Prince Ndivyariye. The prince, a powerful magician and successful general, remained regent until the late 1860s when Mwezi, allying himself with some of his other older half brothers, forced the regent to flee into the southern hills, where he was killed, presumably on royal orders.<sup>21</sup>

But his princely rivals continued to trouble the young king: in the east, his older half brothers Rwashya and Birori had become powerful lords during the years of his regency, as had the sons of the regent, Prince Ndivyariye. Each had their corps of warriors - including the Bayagarimwe, or those who speak with a single voice, and the Bagarukarukamvyé, those who return when the battle rages. And each represented a military challenge that the royal guard could not necessarily count on meeting. Challenge was inevitable.

The first came from Prince Ndivyariye's sons.

Around 1870, the prince's son Bitongore joined with a rebel chief named Rwoga in the southern hills with an attack on the royal compound at Ngara, killing a sacred bull. Mwezi struck back, capturing and killing Bitongore. But the rebellion did not stop. Three of his brothers, Nasongo Sebanani, Busokoza, and Sempanzi, lords of Bweru, the hills just south of the modern district of Marangara, swore vengeance. The king scrambled to forge an alliance of loyal chiefs in the Bukuba hills to the east of Marangara, the Busoni region along the eastern shores of Lake Cohoha and the Bugafi region still further to the east. With these mainly Tutsi loyalists poised in a counter-threat against the allied princes, the rebellion crumbled. Nasongo, the oldest of the rebelling princes, and their leader, fled to Rwanda. Alone and powerless, he committed suicide in the early 1880s.

Mwezi's younger brother Busumano, who was always very close to the king, took control of the southern hills after Bitongore and Rwoga were suppressed. The king also named his brother Nangongo as overlord of the

<sup>21</sup> Mworoha, Emile; "L'Organisation politique sous le règne de Mwezi Gisabo" in Mworoha, *Histoire du Burundi*, pp 208-209.

hills just south of the Rwandan border and a few years later named his sons Mahinga and Kijogori as lords of the royal domains of the west, on the strategically important hills above the Imbo plains. Nangongo's marriages with the daughters of the powerful Hutu and Tutsi chiefs of the plains built a strong network of loyalists in the region, as did the marriages of Mwezi's nephew Rurkengereza, overlord of the southeastern mountains bordering the Kingdom of Buba.<sup>22</sup>

Conflict and chaos deepened and spread during the final decade of the 19th century heralded, in the view of many Burundians, by the total eclipse of the sun on December 22, 1889.

Explorers entering Burundi, through its northeastern corner en route for Lake Victoria saw yet another round of fighting: the Tutsi chiefs of the Buvuna region, led by a man named Coya, attacking the independent-minded princes who were supposed to be governing this critical border region on behalf of Mwezi.<sup>23</sup>

To the south, the death of Mwezi's loyalist nephew Rurkengereza, bulwark of the king's eastern border, sent his sons scrambling to forge their own alliances with the Tutsi chiefs of the southern hills. By the mid-1890s - just at the time when the first Europeans began exploring these hills, trekking across the mountains towards Tanzania - there was civil war among these brothers; Rurkengerza's sons Muzazi and Kanyandaha heading one alliance and two sons of another wife, Rushabiko and Senyamurungu, leading the other in a conflict which wore on for 20 years.

The south also saw continuing raids by the fierce Ngoni people from the southernmost reaches of Lake Tanganyika, in what is now Zambia. Explorers saw the aftermath of their 1890 attacks around the Bututsi region. They called these raiders the Tuta, a name strikingly similar to Tutsi and quite far from the Burundian name, ba-Bwibwi, for these raiders, who had first moved into the region after the 1830s expansion of the Zulu under their great king, Chaka, pushed them out of South Africa.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Chretien, 1987, pp 230-235.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p 231.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p 239.

Small wonder that the Europeans reported a land in chaos.

And a small wonder, too, that the circumstances which took them through regions where Tutsi chiefs were at war or were poised for fighting, in the southeast and northeast, led them to conclude that these Tutsi people were predominant.

Around this time, a strong and war-like king emerged in Rwanda, Kigeri Rwabugiri. He began sending his Tutsi warriors on raids across Lake Cohoha into the northeastern hills where Coya fought with the princes, before eventually launching a long if low-key war of attrition seeking control of the Imbo valley and Rusizi river which linked Lake Tanganyika with the Mountains of the Moon on the Rwandan-Ugandan-Zairian border. Cross-border raids continued in this region, and occasionally across Lake Cohoha as well, even after Mwezi and Kigeri signed the treaty of Nkanda in 1888.

The Imbo plains became important to the Rwandan and Burundian kings with the arrival of Swahili traders from the Indian Ocean coast and Arab merchants from the island of Zanzibar. The plains and the Rusizi river were a gateway for the ivory trade and the relatively unexploited elephant herds of eastern Zaire and Uganda.<sup>25</sup>

The Sultan of Zanzibar told the governors of his growing trading post at Ujiji, on Lake Tanganyika to the south of Burundi, to move north to the Rusizi and the Imbo plains.<sup>26</sup>

The Sultan's increasingly rich pickings on the shores of Lake Tanganyika began attracting other African leaders' interest. In 1884, the Banyamwezi of northwestern Tanzania, who controlled the overland trade routes of the northern Tanzanian steeps, sought to take over the growing Lake Tanganyika from the Zanzibari's tiny post at Ujiji by conquering Burundi. Their soldiers, the Ruga-ruga, led by a great chief named Mirambo, swept over the hills to attack Mwezi's easternmost and most isolated compound at Murore. But though they captured 20 men and 13

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p 229.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p 240.

women as slaves, and seized 1,700 head of cattle there, the Banyamwezi were repulsed by the loyalist chiefs of the southeastern frontier.

"The Burundi used bows and arrows. They had arrows: four arrows which they passed through fire and when the tips became red, they would fire them at Mirambo's soldiers. The arrows would penetrate and re-exit, falling on the ground...The ruga-ruga were frightened," the Banyamwezi legend goes.<sup>27</sup>

By that time, the Sultan of Zanzibar's governor at Ujiji, Mwinyi Kheri, a merchant from Dar es Salaam, had clashed several times with the Hutu and Tutsi chiefs of the Imbo plains. After Mwinyi died in 1885, the Sultan sent the Omani Arab aristocrat Mohammed bin Khalfan to Ujiji, hoping to keep the Rusizi out of the hands of the British, in their Uganda Protectorate; the Germans, who were then in Tanganyika; and Belgian King Leopold's brutal and immensely profitable trading business, based on the Congo Free State. Over the next seven years, the new Ujiji governor built a total of 24 armed posts around Lake Tanganyika and had a fleet of dhows patrolling its waters. He had sent expeditions deep into Rwanda and the Zairian forests, and in 1886 sent soldiers from Uzige over the escarpment fronting the great lake and deep into the Burundian mountains, where they attacked and burned the royal compound at Buhoro but were repelled when moving on to attack the Kiyenzi compound, in the rich, central hills. The Zanzibaris had rifles, but fired in salvos, and fierce Burundian attacks while the Zanzibar troops paused to reload their muskets saved the day for Mwezi.

But by 1890, the Zanzibaris had secure armed stations at the lakeside Burundian settlements of Nyanza, Kigwena, Rumonge, Magara (just south of modern-day Bujumbura), and Uzige. The local Hutu and Tutsi chiefs began to look at Mohammed as their suzerain and a small trade developed, exchanging cotton calico cloth - called "amerikani" - for Burundian palm oil, goats, and iron.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Kabeya, J.B.; *Mtami Mirambo*, East African Literature Bureau, Dar es Salaam, 1966, p 39.

<sup>28</sup> Chretien, 1987, pp 241-242.

Mwezi Gisabo's realm was reeling, but he retained control. His intore of just a few thousand men was able to fight off the best-armed African soldiers of all, the coastal Swahili fighters the Sultan of Zanzibar hired to protect his vast trade interests.

The Germans came next.

In 1895, Count Georg von Goetzen swept into Rwanda, in an expedition of conquest from the German strongholds along the Tanganyikan coast and the fertile highlands by Mounts Kilimanjaro and Meru. He quickly nailed down a German protectorate and three years later, sent down a German expedition against Mwezi Gisabo, in Burundi. On June 7, the king asked the German Army captain commanding the column to help him put down the rebels Maconco and Kilima in the northwest - Kilima, especially, was a worry to the king, for his popularity had surged and the local farmers believed he had magic powers. The king had already fended off similar threats, for magician-rebels in the Imbo plains had briefly seized a hamlet and chased one of Mwezi Gisabo's border-guarding warlords, prince Kijogori, into the hills, following an outbreak of rinderpest back in 1893. Although later driven into the hills of eastern Zaire this magician, or a self-proclaimed successor, re-emerged in 1898, calling himself Kilima.<sup>29</sup>

The Germans said no. Instead, they met eleven days later with Maconco.

The immediate results appear to have been inconclusive, but the Germans were encouraged enough to set up a small armed post at Bujumbura in 1899. And, in 1903, Maconco and Kilima agreed to guide a new German expedition against Mwezi Gisabo. The expedition left Bujumbura on New Year's Day that year and on February 26, captured the royal capital at Bukeye. But they missed the king. After regrouping and pushing deeper into the hills, they picked up Mwezi's trail and by April 30, the chase had been renewed. The king surrendered to the Germans on May

<sup>29</sup> Weinstein, Warren; *Historical Dictionary of Burundi*, Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, 1976, pp 2-3, p 167.

24 and agreed to a protectorate, with the Germans recognizing him as the supreme ruler under them in Burundi.<sup>30</sup>

The king died, heartbroken, five years later.

That was time enough for the Germans - and the mainly French and Dutch missionaries who quickly spread through the Burundi hills - to fall in love with the Tutsi.

White Fathers' missionary Francois Menard described the Tutsi as "European under a black skin",<sup>31</sup> while Dr. Richard Kandt, who moved to Rwanda in 1898, eventually becoming the German Resident there after spending considerable time in northeastern Burundi, was impressed by the Tutsi's "gigantic stature, the sublimity of their speech, the tasteful and unobtrusive way of their dress, their noble portraits."<sup>32</sup>

And what of the other Burundians? The Duke of Mecklenburg briefly commented that the Hutu were a people "whose ungainly figures betoken hard work and who patiently bow themselves in abject bondage to the later arrived yet ruling race, the Tutsi."<sup>33</sup>

When Mwezi Gisabo died and his son Mutaga assumed the throne, the Germans reversed their policy of recognizing the king as supreme chief of the land and set up a system of chiefdoms. Mutaga was killed by one of his brothers in 1916, and his successor's position was still further weakened. The Belgians, following their invasion of Rwanda and Burundi in 1916 and the awarding of the territory to them by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, continued the system. The League of Nations mandate in 1923 and the United Nations Trusteeship in 1946 confirmed their colonial rule and, implicitly, their system of governing the territories - which were merged with the Belgian Congo and which in so doing combined that colony's often-brutal system of indirect rule through native police and untraditional chiefs with the notion that the Tutsi were the natural rulers of Burundi and Rwanda.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p 3.

<sup>31</sup> Gahama, Joseph; *Le Burundi sous l'administration belge*, Karthala, Paris, p 275.

<sup>32</sup> Louis, p 114.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p 115.

Leopoldville, the colonial capital, near the Atlantic coast mouth of the Congo River, was a long way off and impoverished, resource-poor Burundi's situation was of little concern to colonial officials there.

There was no role for the king.

The king, said Monsignor Julien Gorju, who assumed the Vicariate of Burundi in 1922, was a mere figurehead, "really a serf...being politically the abstraction of the Hamite tribes".<sup>34</sup> He argued that the notion of a separate, royal class, one that superseded the division of Burundians into Hutu and Tutsi, was nonsense.

"The Tutsi has a history while the Ganwa (the royal clan) has none. Don't ask him, he knows nothing. In writing 'he knows nothing' we would be far from questioning if the Ganwa knows but won't say," said Gorju.

Gorju said he had talked with "a young prince...the cousin of Pierre Baranyanka, the most powerful chief of Urundi. The first communicated to the other my notes and my doubts. The secret, closely guarded, comes from there. And here is the thesis spelt out, and no more: 'Our dynasty is Hamite'."<sup>35</sup>

Baranyanka, a few years earlier, had told Smets that Ntare Rushatsi, the first king of Burundi, came from Rwanda. So coincidentally, did his own, Tutsi, family. That jibed with the notions about aristocratic, Hamite warriors invading from the north, and the Belgians actively promoted this theory at their Rwandan school for the elite African students, Astrida. In fact, the students at the school soon came up with a revealing pun: Urundi meant *une autre* (another). *Une autre Rwanda*.<sup>36</sup> Leon Classe, who later became Bishop of Rwanda, helped found Astrida - a school whose students were almost entirely Tutsi, with just nine of the 1954 enrollment of 72 students being Hutu - and saw in schools like it the hope for the future of Burundi and Rwanda.

<sup>34</sup> Gorju, Julien; *Face au royaume hamite du Rwanda, le royaume frere de Urundi*, Vromont, Brussels, 1938, p 11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp 17-18.

<sup>36</sup> Chretien, 1985, p 145.

It was to be a Tutsi future.

"The Tutsi schools must be a step ahead of the Hutu's...they prepare for the future and we will win the chiefs," Classe wrote in a 1928 pastoral letter.<sup>37</sup>

"Generally speaking, we have no chiefs who are better qualified, more intelligent, more active...and more fully accepted by the people than the Tutsi," he wrote on another occasion.<sup>38</sup>

The king's Hutu lords and advisors quickly lost what positions they had been able to maintain in the early years of colonial rule, especially after the Belgian vice governor-general for Urundi, Charles Voisin, moved in 1930 to restructure the chiefdoms and sub-chiefs network.

In 1929, 20 percent of Burundian chiefs were Hutu and 24 percent were Tutsi, with the rest being either direct or collateral relations of the current king or of his great-uncle. By 1933, only ten percent of chiefs were Hutu. There were none by 1945. Half were direct relations of the king, most of the rest were Tutsi.<sup>39</sup>

The king's prestige took a devastating blow in 1929, as well. A missionary priest, Father Pio Canonica, had been agitating for years against the December sorghum festival, the *mugaruno*, the traditional highpoint of the Burundian religious cycle, the great annual celebration of the king's divine role as nurturer and protector of the crop. The priest complained that the eight-day ceremony impeded missionaries' efforts to convert the people to Christianity and in 1929, the colonial government ruled that the festival had to be cut short, to just five days.

In 1930, King Mwambutsa married a Christian woman, Therese Kangonga, and announced he would not preside over a ceremony that December, greatly pleasing the Belgian administration and clergy. No *mugaruno* ceremonies were held again until 1959.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Cited *ibid*, p 144.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Lemarchand, Rene; *Rwanda and Burundi*, Pall Mall, London, 1970, p 73.

<sup>39</sup> Gahama, p 109.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p 359.

But tensions were on the rise. In 1912 and 1922, in what is now Ntega and Marangara, farmers rallied behind a man named Rubengebenge, who claimed he was the reincarnation of Kilima and who banned all European things, from cloth to foodstuffs to money. His call for a return to a golden age before the Europeans struck a chord and his claim that he was born during one of the mugarunos which preceded the German conquest won him legitimacy in the eyes of the northern farmers. They were accustomed to the idea that the king might not be all he seemed, after the magician-led rebellions of the 1890s. The year 1922 also saw similar uprisings and protests around Gibinga, in the eastern hills beyond the Bugafi region along what is now the far northeastern border with Tanzania. A Hutu man named Rugira started a religious revival movement in the central hills, claiming he had seen in a vision his late mother arising from the waters of a lake, with a gift of a new type of sorghum which would make the Burundian hills bloom and become rich again.<sup>41</sup>

Then came something new.

In 1934, racist politics caught up with the government. The Hutu people of Ndora, in the northwestern hills, near the main passes into Rwanda, revolted.

They had been a privileged caste under the king, in the days before the Europeans came. Their special responsibility was to tend to the royal tombs in the hills there, and their extensive, rich enclave had been governed by Hutu lords for centuries. It was, in fact, taboo for Ganwa caste princes and for most Tutsi to venture into the enclave and the Ndora Hutu's quasi-religious function as guardians of the tombs ensured them of influence and power back at the royal court. Concretely, it translated into a relatively easy-going demand from the state and its officials on the Hutu farmers of Ndora, being effectively exempted from some of the fiscal and labor demands made by royal and princely rulers in the rest of Burundi.

That changed in the 1920s, when the Belgians appointed Ganwa and Tutsi chiefs and subchiefs for the enclave. Their rule was tough and their demands on the Hutu harsh.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, pp 387-392.

In 1934, a Hutu priestess began preaching that these chiefs should be overthrown, and ordered the farmers of Ndora to drive out all the Ganwa and Tutsi who had entered the district in recent years. Some 2,500 to 3,000 Hutu rallied to the cause, in a ten-day rebellion which was eventually put down by heavily armed Belgian soldiers. Some 400 homesteads had been burnt to the ground, and an unknown number of people killed by the rebels.<sup>42</sup>

What was new was this:

For the first time, ever, in Burundian history, the dead were from just one group. They were picked because they belonged to that group, and for no other reason.

This time, they were Tutsi.

<sup>42</sup> Weinstein, p 209.

## Chapter VI

### Years of Trouble

The young Hutu men were armed with machetes and clubs, and they had rebellion on their minds as they snuck into Burundi, across the Maragarazi river and marshes on the border with Tanzania during the last week or two of April, 1972. There were several thousand and they had a plan.

After dark, on the evening of April 29, they struck.

One group quickly seized Gitega, the old royal capital in the central hills. At the same time, others hit the southern lakeshore settlements of Nyanza-Lac, just over the border from Tanzania, and Rumonge, which is halfway between the frontier and Bujumbura. By 7:30 P.M., word reached the capital.

Kim Pendelton, the political secretary at the U.S. Embassy, was among the first to hear the sketchy first reports and he knew it was serious. As he raced from the Embassy, located just off Chaussee Prince Louis Rwagasore, the steeply rising avenue which leads from central Bujumbura to the presidential palace, he took a fast swing to the main southbound road from the capital, hoping to get an indication of how serious the troubles might be. It didn't look good - cars were being stopped on the small bridge across the Kanyosha river. Pendelton hastened back to town and up the Rwagasore road to Ambassador Thomas P. Melady's one-story, flowering-shrub surrounded residence up in the Quartier Flamand, where virtually all Burundi's expatriates lived - the roadblock on the Kanyosha bridge, the two agreed, suggested that the reports of fighting and attacks on Tutsi in southern

Burundi were serious. By the morning, there were roadblocks all around the capital. There was little hard information, except the news that fighting had spread to Bururi province and rumors that part of the lakeshore south of Bujumbura was in rebel hands.<sup>1</sup>

But it seemed to be shaping up to be a guerilla campaign with a difference, a Burundian difference. Its targets were at least as much the Tutsi people as the increasingly oppressive government of Colonel Michel Micombero.

By the time the Burundian government put the rebellion down on May 6, thousands of Tutsi had been killed: the Burundian government said as many as 20,000, although diplomats said the figure probably did not exceed 1,000 to 2,000. The dead included President Micombero's brother-in-law while some sources said virtually every senior Army officer had lost at least one relative<sup>2</sup> - not entirely surprising, perhaps, because the rebel invasion was concentrated in the south and rebels quickly moved into Bururi province, the home region of Micombero and the tightly-knit circle of Army cronies who helped him run the government.

Eventually, the Burundian government would report that in coordinated attacks on the evening of April 29, a total of 10,000 men armed with poisoned machetes, bludgeons, and automatic weapons simultaneously attacked Nyanza-Lac, Rumonge, Gitega, and Cankuzo. King Ntare V, who had returned from exile the month before, was killed in the Gitega attack. The rebels also captured the Army base at Bururi, in southern Burundi. They were drugged, "in a state of acute excitement. They are convinced that their bodies have become impenetrable to the bullets," the government said. It said the rebels had had themselves marked with tatoos and ritual scars to fend off bullets and that right-wing Zairian rebels led by the charismatic Pierre Mulele were helping. Gitega "had become an entrenched camp for them...their flag had flown for at least two days over several centers of that province...these criminals fanned about among the people killing and

<sup>1</sup> Melady, Thomas P, *Burundi: The Tragic Years*, Orbis, New York, 1974, pp 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, from Bujumbura, June 11, 1972 and Melady, p 12.

massacring thousands of victims, making no distinction between men, women, children, and old people," the government said, adding that the Tutsi "were systematically massacred and often only after the most horrible unimaginable tortures."<sup>3</sup>

Burundian soldiers recaptured Gitega within two days, however, and drove the rebels out of their other settlements soon afterwards. The Army said somewhere between 3,000 and 4,600 rebels remained in the southern hills - at one point reportedly occupying the lakeshore between Nyanza-Lac and Rumonge, but by May 6, the situation seemed to diplomats to be under control.

Then the government paused.

Micombero looked drawn and tired when Ambassador Melady met with him on May 5; the president was wearing a pistol on his hip and there was a machine gun lying across his huge wooden desk.

"I implored him to avoid the natural tendency to seek revenge. History, I said, would record the reestablished political control with a minimum of violence and avoided unnecessary bloodshed," Melady recalled afterwards, adding: "He assured me that despite the horrible nature of the atrocities against the Tutsi of southern Burundi, there would not be any unnecessary bloodshed."<sup>4</sup>

But the president continued with some disturbing news, saying that he had evidence that the Hutu rebels "were preparing to kill every mother and every child of the Tutsi race."<sup>5</sup>

Five days later, the reprisals started.

It was the Hutu people's turn.

For Micombero and the Tutsi people, that seemed a logical first step - after all, Micombero had raised the stakes for his fellow Tutsi with the 1966 coup d'etat which overthrew the newly-crowned King Ntare V and brought the colonel to power. Micombero's brutal rule had started with the killing of

<sup>3</sup> Agence burundaise de presse, Bujumbura, May 17, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> Melady, p 10.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p 12.

Hutu - the gendarmes, civil servants, and politicians who had attempted a coup in October 1965 - and continued with repeated purges. As a loyalist captain in the largely Tutsi Army he won the battle against the mainly Hutu gendarmerie (security police) during the coup attempt, effectively wiping it out as an effective armed force.

The delicately wrought political balance in Burundi had already disappeared. A few months before the coup, in January 1965, the popular left-wing Hutu politician Pierre Ngendandumwe, just appointed prime minister as part of King Mwambutsa's policy of alternating this post between Hutu and Tutsi, was assassinated by a Rwandan refugee employed at the U.S. Embassy, a Tutsi named Joseph Muyenzi.<sup>6</sup> The king dissolved parliament and in the May election which followed, two-thirds of the seats were won by Hutu. But although a majority were won by the nationalist and left-wing Union pour progres national (UPRONA) party, the king named an anti-UPRONA prince, Biha, and seven Hutu ministers as his new government. His attempt to counter-balance the rising political muscle of the Hutu at the polls did not work. On October 18, after the king had just returned from holidaying in Lausanne, his trusted Hutu secretary of the gendarmerie, Antoine Serukwava, who reported directly to the palace instead of to the prime minister, launched a bid of power.

Micombero put the attempted coup down, but the king fled to Zaire and thence to Switzerland. In the days of confusion which followed, the remnants of the Hutu gendarmerie burned huts and killed hundreds of Tutsi in Muramvya province in the hills just east of Bujumbura. The captain, now colonel, reacted quickly and brutally. Thousands were arrested, hundreds disappeared. About 80 Hutu politicians and gendarmes were shot by firing squad and at least 5,000 Hutu died in the reprisals which followed.<sup>7</sup>

In September 1966, after it became clear that King Mwambutsa had no intention of returning to Burundi, his 19-year-old son Charles Ndizeye was crowned Ntare V. Micombero didn't like sharing power, even though he was

<sup>6</sup> "Une histoire complexe, parfois obscure, souvent tragique", *Le Monde*, June 29, 1977.

<sup>7</sup> Weinstein, "ethnic tension", p 55.

named prime minister. On November 28, while Ntare was on an official visit to Kinshasa, the colonel staged a coup and declared a republic.

As a Tutsi leader with, for the first time, absolute, unchecked power that the Germans and the Belgians thought his people deserved, Micombero began to think seriously about his ethnic group's position.

It was not encouraging. Comprising no more than 15 percent of the population, many Tutsi felt the dominant positions they had won during the colonial era were at risk.

Many also were afraid.

They remembered the bloody 1959 civil war in neighboring Rwanda which followed the death of King Mutara III, smashing a centuries-old monarchy and sending tens of thousands of Rwanda Tutsi fleeing - by 1965, following another outbreak of Tutsi-Hutu conflict in Rwanda, there were more than 50,000 Rwandan Tutsis in Burundi. Tens of thousands more had fled to Uganda and Tanzania.

Rwanda has been governed by Hutu ever since independence in 1962. The Rwandan Hutu angrily rejected United Nations' suggestions that they join with Burundi after independence, by a vote of more than one million to 250,000, precisely because they feared losing this power to the Tutsi.

In 1963, Rwandan Tutsis exiled in Burundi invaded Rwanda, seeking to overthrow the government. These inyenzi, or scorpions, made it to within 20 miles of the Rwandan capital, Kigali, before they were finally defeated that December. They were well armed - apparently courtesy of a joint effort of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Belgian secret service which operated between 1962 and 1965 from Kigali, Rwanda, aiming to combat subversion and left-wing movements in the region. Zaire's nearby eastern provinces remained a powder-keg through this period and neither the Americans nor the Belgians wanted another popular left-wing leader like the assassinated Patrice Lumumba to re-emerge. The U.S.-Belgian operation also backed Hutu groups in Burundi, where they were concerned because the government had in 1963 defied U.S. pressure and recognized the Peoples Republic of China.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Lemarchand, Rene; "The CIA in Africa", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, June 1976.

The Rwandan reprisals were brutal. An estimated 15,000 Tutsi died in Rwanda in the following months. The borderlands were out of control. The inyenzi and Hutu fought for months afterwards, on both sides of the border. Nobody knows for sure how many died in Burundi, but it was only in December, 1965, that Micombero, apparently with the help of Cuban advisers, managed to put down the last of them.<sup>9</sup>

In September 1969, Hutu officials and soldiers again tried a coup d'etat. There were more reprisals, mainly in Ngozi province, where Marangara district is located.

For Micombero, it was the last straw.

After the 1969 coup attempt, the increasingly autocratic colonel made defending the Tutsi people his government's top priority. He began an effort to cut the ground out from under the still-influential monarchist groups who had become the only serious opposition to his regime remaining at all active. These groups brought together those Tutsi who resented the dominance of Micombero's southern Bahima clans-group and those - whether princely Ganwa or Hutu - who saw the monarchy as the only likely check to the solidification of Tutsi power. In July, the youth wing of UPRONA, now the only legal party, said Micombero's government had become repressive and accused him of playing tribal politics.<sup>10</sup>

The half-Hutu, half-Tutsi youth organization was not the only group within UPRONA to challenge the president, but Micombero broke the back of the most threatening of these groups with the arrest in July of 10 members of an opposition faction, including its leader, an influential Tutsi politician from Bururi province, Arthemon Simbananiye. Micombero imprisoned the group's lawyer, former justice minister Etienne Ntuyankundiye, in December, and nine of the group were sentenced to death in January.

By the end of 1971, meanwhile, Micombero had also rid himself of his last two Hutu government ministers.

Now came a wild card.

<sup>9</sup> "Histoire complexe", Le Monde.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

King Ntare V arrived in Uganda in March, 1972, as the guest of the brutal Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. Amin feted the young king and, perhaps seeing a chance to gain a badly-needed local ally as his quarrels with neighboring Kenya and Tanzania intensified, lent Ntare his presidential helicopter to help him make his return to Burundi in style. The helicopter was soon sent back, the king soon sent to Gitega, where he spent the next several weeks under house arrest. Ntare died on the evening of April 29, during the rebel attack on the old royal capital. Nobody knows which side killed him.

But otherwise, by the end of the first week in May, the balance seemed clear: U.S. Ambassador Melady estimated that some 4,000 to 5,000 rebels - instead of the 10,000 suggested by the Burundian government - had been defeated. He reported that some 1,000 to 2,000 Tutsi were killed and that perhaps 3,000 rebels died.<sup>11</sup>

He also saw the first signs that things were not going to stop with that. Already, some 2,000 Hutu government workers were interned in Bujumbura. And 500 Hutu soldiers, along with two senior Hutu officers, were executed.

Micombero's anger grew.

"Mothers with babes in arms were massacred," he said in a Radio Burundi broadcast around this time.

"Children were mutilated and indescribable atrocities were committed by these bandits. Mothers-to-be were treated so horribly that it defies understanding. Peasants going peacefully about their normal business were surprised by these outlaws and savagely assassinated. Whole families were wiped out as they rested peacefully in their homes."<sup>12</sup>

By May 8, President Mobutu Seko Sese of Zaire had sent a detachment of paratroopers to help Micombero regain control, a gesture which freed Burundian soldiers stationed around the capital for other missions.

At the U.S. Embassy, Melady grew alarmed. Burundian staff had already had run-ins with police, and stories of disappearances had become common.

"We heard reports every morning trucks would leave the Army camp and

<sup>11</sup> Melady, p 12.

<sup>12</sup> Reuters, from Nairobi, May 17, 1972.

other installations for the outskirts of Bujumbura, and that hundreds of bodies would subsequently be placed in newly dug mass graves. We learned later that the pattern was being repeated throughout the country," he said. By this time, he added, it was clear that Burundian soldiers had "completed the mop up of rebels and that killings now occurring were part of an effort to eliminate an increasing number of Hutu."<sup>13</sup>

In a May 10 cable to Washington, Melady reported that strife was continuing and that the Army attacks were starting to look like a deliberate policy of wiping out the Hutu people<sup>14</sup> - "veritable genocide" in the words of Belgian Prime Minister Eyskens.<sup>15</sup> But on May 22, an Organization of African Unity mission, led by OAU secretary Diallo Telli, completed its investigation of the Burundian killings with an expression of full support for the Micombero government and a request that non-African governments mind their own business. Diplomats fumed.<sup>16</sup>

All the while, the killing continued.

Some of the 15,000 Hutu refugees who fled across Lake Tanganyika to Zaire told journalists that, during that bloody May, 400 people a day were being rounded up and beaten to death, just in the town of Gitega.<sup>17</sup>

In Bujumbura, interned Hutu were being crammed into every available prison cell - as many as 16 men to a cell, one European doctor said.

"They were getting some air at first but now they are dropping dead because they are getting nothing, not even air," he said shortly after he'd decided he had had enough and drove across the border to Zaire.<sup>18</sup>

"They are trying to annihilate all the Hutu intellectuals," said one European missionary who had followed suit.

"Any Hutu who can write his name is considered an intellectual and a

<sup>13</sup> Melady, p 15.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p 15.

<sup>15</sup> *New York Times*, May 21, 1972.

<sup>16</sup> Melady, p 25.

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, June 3, 1972.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

threat to the government," he added.<sup>19</sup>

One European businessman said six of his Burundian employees were picked up by soldiers and led off. He waited anxiously into the night for word from them. The next day, their shoes and clothing were returned to him. He never learned anything more of their fate.<sup>20</sup>

The killing got worse and worse. Not a corner of the country was unaffected.

By June 21, the U.S. Embassy was calling it selective genocide. In one cable to Washington, embassy staff reported that: "Many Hutus are being buried while still alive. Leadership elements have been slaughtered. The rest are docile and obedient. They are digging graves for themselves and are thrown in afterwards."<sup>21</sup>

The Burundian government did nothing to stop the killing. Its soldiers killed and its public statements throughout these months played to the deepest fears of the Tutsi people. The state media printed and broadcast extensive quotes from rebel pamphlets, including one purportedly urging the Hutu to "arise like one man, arm yourself with spears, knives, arrows, and clubs and kill off Tutsi wherever they be...no imprisonment, no judgement for the Tutsi. All women and children (too) to the tomb." The state media said 4,600 rebels were still loose in the hills, pillaging and killing around Nyanza-Lac and Rumonge.<sup>22</sup>

By the end of July, the United Nations estimated that 100,000 to 200,000 people had died in the slaughter.<sup>23</sup>

"We have won a reprieve but the final showdown is irreversible," one Tutsi government official commented in the middle of those months of murder.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> *New York Times*, July 29, 1972.

<sup>21</sup> *New York Times*, July 25, 1972.

<sup>22</sup> Agence burundaise de presse, June 26, 1972.

<sup>23</sup> *New York Times*, July 29, 1972.

Even into August, the killing continued, an All Africa Conference of Churches delegate reported. In an internal report, labelled "strictly confidential", senior conference official Melaka Kifle reported "school children impaled on spikes, whole villages wiped out, men being tortured and left to die slowly, captives being made to dig their own graves before they are machine-gunned down..."<sup>25</sup>

And the horror started again, one year later.

In mid-May, rumors of more Tutsi-Hutu conflict reached Tanzania, with at least 50 people reported to have died in areas near the border.<sup>26</sup> On May 14, the state-run *Daily News* in Dar es Salaam reported that four southern Burundi towns had been captured by Hutu rebels.<sup>27</sup>

The death toll quickly mounted. By early June, diplomats were estimating that more than 1,000 people had been killed, while thousands of Burundian Hutu again took flight, with more than 10,000 running to Tanzania. By now, the violence had spread from the border - refugees reported UPRONA youth wing members were hunting down Hutus on nightly patrols in Bujumbura and in the hills of central Burundi.<sup>28</sup>

"The killing in Burundi appears to be continuing...tens of thousands of people are dying and the Burundian government is either unable or unwilling to bring the killings to an end," Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere said.<sup>29</sup>

Ramon Vicenes, a missionary in Burundi's southernmost province of Makamba said that 1973 was worse than in 1972, at least in the Far South.

"I interviewed a group of Hutu who just managed to reach safely Tanzania," he wrote that June. "They told me they were running away from a program of genocide against the Hutu worse than the one last year. They said: 'Last year we managed to stay and nothing happened to us because they

<sup>24</sup> *New York Times*, June 11, 1972.

<sup>25</sup> Kifle, Melaka; "Burundi", All African Conference of Churches, Nairobi, August, 1972.

<sup>26</sup> *New York Times*, May 14, 1973.

<sup>27</sup> *New York Times*, May 15, 1973.

<sup>28</sup> *New York Times*, June 6, and June 11, 1973.

<sup>29</sup> *New York Times*, July 16, 1973.

were more interested in leaders and influential people among the Hutu population. Now...they are killing everybody.' Then they told me that a group of about 50 soldiers armed with automatic weapons and helped by 400 to 500 youngsters of the Jeunesse Revolutionnaire (the UPRONA youth wing) armed with spears and knives were systematically moving from one hill to another burning houses of the Hutu and killing any Hutu they could find. Then they told me that women and girls had their bellies opened and their breasts cut. Pregnant women had had their children taken out and left dead by their sides. Even people with physical defects were killed. This time is worse than the first time, they say. Now they want to finish off the Hutu population."<sup>30</sup>

It probably wasn't quite as bad, however. In all, about 10,000 to 20,000 Hutu died in 1973, mostly in the south.

But the scars remained.

And the lesson was not learned.

"Dear Friend," wrote Rwandan President Gregoire Kayibanda to President Micombero at the very start of those bloody months of 1972, thinking, perhaps, that his own country's tragic history of slaughter might serve as a cautionary lesson, "Dear Friend...you have had to deal with the murder of simple folk, with the murder of schoolchildren...but vengeance, what purpose does that serve? The feudalists who in our country, resolved to organize a massive and carefully orchestrated slaughter - what good did that do them?"<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *New York Times*, June 17, 1973.

<sup>31</sup> Orinfor, Kigali, June, 1972.

## Chapter VII

### Trouble in the North

Just a few hours before the killing in Ntega, in August, 1988, a team of government ministers and senior officials from the capital, looking prosperous and out-of-place in their dark, well-cut European suits, had come hastily bouncing through the settlement as part of a hurried inspection tour of the northern provinces. Their new, white Land Rovers stopped for just a few moments in the settlement's shambling three-sided dirt plaza and its thirty-odd small, mud-brick shops and huts sprawling down the side of a hill as if they had started slipping down the slope.

The officials - Tutsi, all - knew there was trouble brewing in the north, but they didn't know how bad it was.

And nobody in Ntega was telling.

The officials were, supposedly, there to promote tourism in the hard-to-reach northern provinces of Burundi, a land of deep valleys and lush hills of pine forests and tiny plots of banana, coffee, rice, and cassava. It was an odd sort of mission. There is a lovely, many-armed lake, Lake Cohoha, up on the border there and there are usually a few rooms free at the convent on its southern shore. Every once in a while, one of the diplomats or foreign aid workers from Bujumbura will make the long, all-day journey up from the capital for a weekend of bird-watching: the nuns are happy to put them up. The hotel in the provincial capital, Kirundo, makes most of its money from its beer-hall, which runs late into the night, loudly and joyously, and is popular with the officials sent up from Bujumbura to administer the province

as well as with the handful of Tutsi merchants who live in Kirundo. There has not been much tourism in the area.

In fact, the real reason officials were visiting the north on that particular Sunday was to keep an eye out for any unrest. There'd been some disturbing rumblings in the neighboring district of Marangara in Ngozi province, 16 miles away along a winding dirt track and up and over the Mutumbo ridge from Ntega, and security officials in Bujumbura were worried that it might spread.

But the government thought it had lowered the temperature in Marangara. And it was pretty sure that it had, after all, been able to contain the unrest and keep it from spreading. That was what it wanted to hear, anyway. The officials who had swept through the north on the August 14 "tourism promotion" trip were happy to confirm this.

The team that had come through Ntega reported nothing at all abnormal there.<sup>1</sup>

They hadn't heard anything, at that point, about the ambush the night before of a Tutsi soldier who was on leave visiting his family. There are few details. Burundi government investigators say they uncovered no motive for the attack on this young man. The soldier, they say, was ambushed and left for dead along the side of one of the dirt tracks of the region. But a passer-by found him and brought him into Ntega, where the Catholic mission had a small dispensary. The next day, Sunday the 14th, he was driven up the hard-packed dirt road to Kirundo hospital, a complex of small, modern brick buildings on a hill just outside of the little provincial capital, according to the official version of events.<sup>2</sup>

Rwanda Army officers patrolling the border, however, said later that the soldier had shot dead at least two Hutu neighbors that day and that he had been attacked by a mob in reprisal.

Nor did any of the local Hutu people let them in on some disturbing rumors that had been flying around throughout Burundi's northern border

<sup>1</sup> Interviews by author with government officials in Ntega and Marangara, December 1988.

<sup>2</sup> *Dossier élaboré par les publications de presse burundaise sur l'origine des événements sanglants de Ntega et Marangara* (Agence burundaise de presse), Bujumbura, 1988, p. 9.

regions.<sup>3</sup>

And with these reassurances from the officials on that northern tour, President Pierre Buyoya confidently departed on one of his rare trips out of the country on August 14 - to Brazzaville and the 25th anniversary of the Congo's independence.

Just hours before the killing started.

The fury of that eruption of violence and the speed with which it spread took the government aback. It was also caught off guard because officials had expected that any further clashes would occur in Marangara, not Ntega. Besides its proximity to that tense district, there was no reason at all to worry about Ntega, as far as Bujumbura officials knew.

But then, they had had problems all along getting a handle on the situation along the border.

The trouble in the north didn't seem like much, at first.

For the past several weeks, local officials had been noting that the farmers of the area, especially in Marangara, were upset because the new military government of President Pierre Buyoya - it took power less than a year before, in a bloodless coup d'état - was cracking down on smuggling as part of a major campaign to weed out corrupt officials, a campaign which had concentrated on the Customs Service and had already put scores of officials in prison. It was, however, a campaign which threatened a major part of the income of the farmers of northern Burundi, many of whom preferred to take their coffee beans - their only cash crop - over the nearby border to the neighboring Republic of Rwanda, where they could get better prices than the Burundian state coffee monopoly paid.<sup>4</sup>

The crackdown came at a bad time: in weeks ahead of the annual sorghum harvest. The hill farmers were trying to stretch their dwindling supplies of grain from the March corn harvest. Tempers were running hotter than usual.

Across the border, according to Burundian security officials, a group of

<sup>3</sup> Reuters, from Butare, Rwanda, August 21, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Interviews by author of diplomats and U.N. relief workers, December, 1988. The Customs crackdown was reported briefly by Agence burundaise de presse in June, 1988.

exiled dissidents was watching this situation closely. The group was called Palipehutu, the Hutu Peoples Liberation Party, and it had good connections in Burundi's northern border areas.

Good enough, for instance, to have heard the local talk that at least one of the officials who had come up to Marangara to enforce Buyoya's smuggling crackdown had a particularly overbearing manner that rubbed many of the district's farmers the wrong way.

"Local administrators seemed to be particularly insensitive," one diplomat told me afterwards.

"There were stories that as tension mounted, one was going around saying he knew the Hutus were sharpening their knives but that the Tutsis' knives would be sharper," he added.

Palipehutu made sure word got around.

"Because they nourish a detestable hate towards the Hutu, the Tutsi use obscene or hurtful language whenever they say anything about the Hutu," the dissident group said in a quickly written pamphlet which it smuggled over the border into Burundi in July and copies of which the Burundian government later released to diplomats and journalists.<sup>5</sup>

It wasn't the first Burundi security officials had heard from Palipehutu. They say that, for several weeks before the August troubles in Marangara, Palipehutu members had started slipping across the border to destroy wells and crops in a campaign to stir up ill-feeling along the border. In addition to uprooting about-to-be-harvested beans and sorghum, the raiders targeted banana trees - the year-round staple which carried Burundian farmers through the lean months between the crops of beans and corn and sorghum.

"You've seen yourselves the new crimes by them, the Tutsi, who go to the fields of Hutu which they tear up, attacking the banana groves of peasants and cutting them although it is these on which the peasants live," said a pamphlet which reached Marangara shortly afterwards.

"Is there a single Tutsi who did not kill or loot the goods of Hutu in 1965, 1969, 1972, 1973? At no moment have the Tutsi not dreamed of doing in a Hutu," said one tract, which apparently had been circulating in the area for

<sup>5</sup> *Dossier...*(ABP), 1988, p 14.

some weeks.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, it was not the first time that the Burundian government had complained that opposition groups' pamphleteering had incited ethnic violence - the same claims emerged in 1972 and 1973. The tone of the pamphlets seems similar, though that may just be a reflection of the way rhetorical Kirundi sounds in translation.

More to the point, it is unclear how significant pamphlets could be in a country with a national adult literacy rate of just 30 percent - a percentage that dips much lower in the countryside.

But the farmers of Marangara talked among themselves. And, whether fuelled by pamphlets or not, their discontent grew as the weeks went by.

Barely a couple of months after the smuggling crackdown started - on August 5, to be exact - the district administrator in Marangara asked for a detachment of police to be sent from the Brigade of Gendarmerie in Ngozi town just to try to quiet things down. The police did not, usually, have much of a presence in Marangara: there was a small post on the border a dozen miles away, as well as the main detachment in Ngozi, 30 miles away. The road connections to either place are poor: badly-rutted dirt tracks which tip precipitously down deep gorges, passable only to four-wheel-drive trucks and jeeps.

The provincial governor sent half a dozen security officials and five uniformed policemen. They crossed into the district that same afternoon.

Progress was slow. There were large groups of people gathering on the road and the police and security men stopped to try and get a feel for what the crowds were thinking.

They clashed with a gathering of about 50 farmers that evening, as they tried to force their jeep past a barricade a few miles outside of Marangara, on the main dirt track leading into the settlement. The farmers, armed with knives, spears, and stones pressed closer. Fighting started, one gendarme was hit in the leg by a spear, but the crowd dispersed when the police started firing warning shots into the air.

Through the night, groups of angry farmers took to the tracks and dirt

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p 15 and p 21.

road of the district, setting up more barricades and tearing up the little bridges of rough-hewn logs and worn planks that crossed the little valley streams of the district.

The next day, Saturday the 6th, local officials tried calling a public meeting to give the farmers of Marangara a chance to air their complaints, but few showed up. Those that did asked that the police leave the district and also demanded that the district administrator, the local judge, and a medical technician depart because they belonged to the minority Tutsi people.<sup>7</sup>

"The people wanted to have Hutu leaders in the area. They wanted nothing more to do with the Tutsi administration," recalls Dr. Rukecatabaro, who treated many of the Marangara Hutu who fled after the killing started towards the nearby Kiremba hospital, which is just to the south of the district.<sup>8</sup>

The officials said they would not leave. The police continued, carefully, to patrol the district. They picked up, they said afterwards, a surprisingly large number of Palipehutu pamphlets. And the farmers talked, angrily, among themselves.

In Bujumbura, the central government started getting worried.

President Buyoya, the stiff, somewhat didactic army tank major who seized power the previous September, had yet to face any serious challenge to his rule. But then, nobody had thought the regime of his predecessor, Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, was at risk, either - not until Buyoya and a small contingent of soldiers seized him at his home and thereby won themselves political power, that is. To the outside world, as to most Burundians, Bagaza had seemed completely secure, having held power since 1976, when he toppled Michel Micombero, whose military government was in power during the 1972 massacres. Bagaza was not particularly well-liked but he had the support, or so he thought, of the Army high command. And in Burundi, that's all that mattered.

Buyoya tried to be different.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp 5-7.

<sup>8</sup> Reuters, from Marangara, August 27, 1988.

His moves to end restrictions imposed by Bagaza on the churches of Burundi had been popular - Bagaza had banned weekday services and church schools and expelled dozens of missionaries, arguing that churchmen had been encouraging ethnic tensions. But churches, Catholic and evangelical Protestant, were perhaps the most important providers of health services and education to Burundi's country folk. Many Burundians will walk for miles on Sunday to attend church.

On the other hand, a series of economic austerity measures Buyoya launched in a bid to buoy western governments' confidence in him were far less popular with Burundians. But Buyoya felt he had little choice: donor governments had been put off by what they saw as Bagaza's radicalism and economic mismanagement, and the former president's anticlerical policy made any decision to isolate Burundi an easier one for those foreign governments which had a significant development lobby.

In short, Buyoya had far from unqualified support, but he was far from facing any generalized opposition, either.<sup>9</sup>

Still, going by what Burundian security officials say, the circulation of Palipehutu pamphlets seems to have picked up sharply after Buyoya took power, almost as if the dissidents had found new life with the change of government, security officials said. Dissidents apparently felt the new government would be unable to act decisively against them until Buyoya had consolidated his position at the head of the ruling junta.

In pamphlets distributed throughout the border region, the dissidents argued that Buyoya aimed to continue the oppression of Hutu by Tutsi.

"You know yourself that, whether it's Micombero, Bagaza, or Buyoya, they all come from the same hill and they are all Bahima (an especially influential Tutsi clan)," said one Palipehutu pamphlet. "It's this detestable race which has stolen from a huge number of the Hutu since Burundi's independence, and now all the Tutsi are getting together to exterminate the Hutu."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Political evaluations from author's interviews with diplomats, December 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Dossier (ABP), p 17.

Security officials, who said they had been finding these pamphlets for weeks, apparently did not worry about them all that much at the time. They had seen things like these pamphlets before, especially up along the border. But when news of the Marangara clashes reached Bujumbura late on August 6, the officials began worrying that angry words, whether mimeographed or just muttered, could, at last, turn into a threat against the new government. At that time, they may have been, in fact, more worried about that political challenge than they were about possibility that Hutu and Tutsi would begin killing one another - the 1972 massacres had happened 16 years earlier, after all.

Still, Buyoya wanted to move quickly to contain any trouble, for the hardliners within his military government would be eager to pounce on any perceived weakness as an excuse to take over the presidency for themselves.

Neither he nor any other senior Burundian official was oblivious to the risk of ethnic clashes, of course. But, it appears likely that to the extent Buyoya may have feared an outbreak of Hutu-Tutsi violence, he worried that it would be the Army that might provoke such clashes: it had been Tutsi soldiers who did much of the killing in 1972. He had a major struggle within the ruling Military Council for National Salvation throughout that August over his policy of moderation and of holding the Army back, diplomats said afterwards.

Both before, and especially after, the killing started, Buyoya tried to make sure the Army role remained limited.

"The hardliners were pushing for reprisals," one diplomat told me. "Buyoya was under a lot of pressure."

The Burundian Army high command, along with a significant portion of the civil service, has never believed in taking it easy when faced with civil unrest.

The reason is their fear.

The Tutsi elite of Burundi lives daily with the fear that the majority of Burundians will arise, seize power, and slaughter them. They have lived with that fear ever since they watched the Hutu do just that in neighboring Rwanda in 1959. The fear has intensified with all the subsequent tribal conflict. And their fear is all the more intense because of how the Hutu

themselves have been changed by a half-century of being taught they were inferior. The Tutsi can see Hutu resentment over this simmer, can feel it become all the more intense for the inferiority complex suffered by so many Hutu, can watch the peculiar dialectic of acceptance and denial of the false lesson of inferiority and can forecast an eventual eruption into a rage that is beyond what an individual's reason can control.

For Burundi's Tutsi, the stakes in the ethnic conflict have been increased ever since the Tutsi soldiers led by Colonel Michel Micombero overthrew the monarchy in 1966 and ended King Mwambutsa's careful policy of alternating the office of the prime minister between Hutu and Tutsi every year.

Suddenly, the Hutu's hopes of sharing power - for the first time since the Belgians took control after World War I - were smashed. All the old hatreds were rekindled.

And the Tutsi saw this.

"There are so many of them...we have to maintain control," one senior Burundian official - a Tutsi, of course - told me several weeks after the Ntega and Marangara massacres, speaking out of turn after we shared several bottles of Zairian Primus beer.

"There will be a bloodbath if we don't," he said.

There had already been bloodbaths, of course.

Awareness of them can never be suppressed.

In 1972, the death toll of 100,000 to 250,000 out of a total population at the time of just over four million means that somewhere between two and five out of every one hundred men, women, and children were killed. It means that virtually every Burundian adult knows someone who died in the slaughter.

The scars are deep.

They are probably deepest in the north. It suffered in 1972 with the rest of the country, and was also where much of the 1965-1966 fighting was concentrated.

Tensions may run higher in the north because the proportion of Hutu in northeastern Burundi is higher than elsewhere in the country - possibly as high as 90 to 95 percent, compared with a national average of about 85 percent, according to some diplomats' estimates.

## Chapter VIII

"It CAN happen again, it CAN happen again..."

Shortly after dawn on August 15, after the first night of killing, Sister Liberata, an Italian nun at the small Catholic mission in Ntega, was awakened by Tutsi families hammering at the wooden door of the church. The shops and mud-brick huts lining the settlement's market place had been looted. Some were still smoking. She let them in, knowing there was trouble to come. It arrived quickly.

The score of refuge-seekers were followed two hours later by a mob of several hundred Hutu who demanded that the nuns there surrender anyone sheltering there.

The sister refused. The crowd of angry farmers moved on, back towards the shops and out towards the surrounding hills.

But the mob - bigger now - came back the next day. This time, Sister Liberata's protests could not keep them out. And they brought with them a former employee of the mission who helped them find the hiding places of those who had sought sanctuary at the mission.

The mob found them.

Most were hacked to death. But the crowd did hand over two badly injured children to the nuns, asking them to care for them. Sister Liberata and the other nuns at the mission were also able to find and hide and care for a mother and infant who survived the rampaging attack.

But the killing, the sisters were warned, was not over. Not by half.

"They told our seminarian if you see anybody moving, ring the church bell

and we will come back to finish them off," Sister Liberata said later.<sup>1</sup>

A few hours after that warning, late on August 16, the army arrived.

The Hutu mob, with machetes, stones, and spears in hand, turned to face the machine guns of the soldiers.

The soldiers opened fire.

Scores of Hutu died on the sloping, hard-packed dirt of the Ntega market square.

"The Army had just one mission, which was to restore order," said Burundian Interior Minister Aloys Kadoyi, when asked at the end of that month, to explain the soldier's role.

But, in an ominous footnote, he added that: "No prisoners were taken during the military operation."<sup>2</sup>

The soldiers who fired on the crowd at Ntega were Tutsi - all Tutsi. The Burundian Army has been all-Tutsi since 1972. And the shooting which started at Ntega on August 16 continued for five more days. Besides the massacre at Ntega, refugees reported a similar attack when the Army arrived at the hamlet of Marangara. Rwandan soldiers said they saw helicopters patrolling the Kanyaru flush people from their hiding places in the marsh reeds. Troops on the ground would then move in and shoot them. Some said they saw bodies with hands tied behind their backs and bodies that had been chained together and then tossed in the river.<sup>3</sup> Soldiers in the helicopters themselves also fired upon people on the ground, like Evaristo, the one-legged boy I met in Kirembe hospital. The Burundi government has said none of its soldiers went into the border marshes, adding at the time that "if they exist, these bodies must be of people taken hostage and then killed by escaping rebels." It added that some of the young girls taken hostage had been raped and killed but did not say how it knew this if its forces were not in the marshes.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Reuters, from Ntega, Burundi, August 29, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Reuters, from Marangara, Burundi, August 27, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Reuters, from Kigali, Rwanda, August 25, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Agence burundaise de presse, Bujumbura, August 23, 1988.

But the soldiers were not the only killers.

Code Cisse, who was at the time the Rwandan representative of the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, estimated that as many as 1,000 people died in those first few days before the Army arrived.<sup>5</sup>

Major Nestor Daradungwe, a doctor who arrived with the first troops in the area, saw how the killing was done. He helped bury some 500 men, women, and children who lived in Ntega and on the nearby hills in two large pits, originally dug for a brickworks, just outside the hamlet.

"They were all slashed in the same fashion with a machete blow on the side of the head or a slice on the top of the skull, just above the ear...there were virtually no body wounds," Daradungwe recalls. "Ninety-nine percent of the machete blows were fatal," he said.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the pattern of settlement of the northern Burundi hills, with their scattered family groups and absence of any real population centers, and because of the isolation of Ntega and Marangara, the precise death toll of the Ntega and Marangara massacres will probably never be known.

Refugee groups have said it totals tens of thousands, while a team of United Nations investigators tracked down the names of about 2,700 people who died,<sup>7</sup> out of the 75,000 or so people who lived in the area of the two districts in which the slaughter took place.

Diplomats who made their own investigations say the government's estimate of 5,000 deaths is probably about as accurate a count as there is.<sup>8</sup>

Who did most of the killing?

Witnesses like Tharcisse Manikiraza, Gregoire Bankurukunei, and Venciane Uwimana suggest that by the time the Army detachment entered Ntega, the wave of killing had moved on to the marshes along the Kanyaru and the Rwandan border. By August 16, Manikiraza had fled his shop in

<sup>5</sup> Reuters, from Butare, Rwanda, August 21, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Reuters, from Ntega, Burundi, August 29, 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Reuters, from Mugendo, Burundi, December 25, 1988.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Mugendo, headed towards Rwanda, while Uwimana and her daughter were hiding in the marshes to the north, eventually working their way to the fringes of the nature reserve at Lake Rwhinda, just outside of Kirundo town. Bankumkunei left over the night of August 17-18. None saw the Army arrive, but besides the testimony of Rwanda soldiers on the border, refugees in Rwanda also reported attacks by soldiers on civilians in the Ntega hills.

Two days after the U.N. refugee official Cisse reported that it appeared some 1,000 people had died in Ntega before the Army intervention, Agence burundaise de presse was reporting that 5,000 had died.

The tales told by the refugees arriving by the thousands in Rwanda over those two days grew more and more horrific.

"We cannot talk about civil war because only one side is armed. It has become a massacre by the Burundi Army," Cisse said at that time.<sup>9</sup>

What had happened in the interim was the first arrival of the refugees from Marangara.

Ever since the soldiers opened fire on the crowd at Ntega on August 16, rumors and reports of the massacres had been whisperingly passed along to the south of the little hamlet, over the Kigari hill and across the Mishahanga marsh and Mukagera River into Marangara, 16 miles away.

The killing followed.

Marangara was already seething. The crackdown on smuggling was hurting the farmers, there had been much rumbling about it being a Tutsi plot. As in Ntega, there were ominous rumors about other plots in the works.

On August 17, a crowd of angry Hutu, already upset by an ongoing government crackdown on the smuggling of coffee into neighboring Rwanda, where they could get better prices for their beans, besieged the one-story stucco government office and store-house at Marangara and then swept through the market square itself and out to the countryside in search of Tutsi.

Agapit Barabwiriza, a grizzled, grey-haired Hutu tailor in the hamlet of Marangara, survived.

"I saw them coming. To one house, another...they were like animals, not people. They had grown inhuman. Animals," he told me, months afterwards.

<sup>9</sup> Reuters, from Kigali, Rwanda, August 23, 1988.

"I ran away the first night," the old tailor whispered, as he stared off across the packed-dirt market square, at the brightly cloaked women of the hills with their tiny piles of green-skinned plantain, with their baskets containing bare handfuls of corn and nuts and roots for sale - staring out, as if trying to convince himself that life had indeed returned to normal. His grandchildren, and the children of his neighbors gathered on the shady porch by his battered foot-operated sewing machine.

The Army arrived in Marangara the following day, August 18.

Antonio Kavakure saw them.

He waited and watched for his moment while the soldiers fanned out around the market square, summoning people to come out of their houses. He saw the people gather. When he was sure the soldiers' attention was fixed on them, he moved off in the other direction, behind the buildings. He took one of his six children with him.

"The soldiers opened fire on the crowd," he said. "Helicopters pursued and gunned down people who tried to escape."

Kavakure himself managed to flee through the woods, eventually ending up in Rwanda.<sup>10</sup>

But in Marangara, too, the soldiers weren't the only killers.

Therese Barangisigi, a Tutsi, lost her home on Higiro hill just outside Marangara in those first few days when some of her Hutu neighbors put it to the torch. She saw them a few days later, headed up the track towards the ruins where her family had sheltered. This time, they had their machetes ready.

She grabbed one of her five children and pushed the rest with her into the bush. Her husband should have followed.

But he has not been seen since.

She and her children eventually fled to Rwanda.<sup>11</sup>

The Marangara killing peaked from August 18, just as the Ntega district massacres were ending. In Marangara, the slaughter only ended on August

<sup>10</sup> Reuters, from Kigali, Rwanda, August 22, 1988.

<sup>11</sup> Reuters, from Marangara, Burundi, August 27, 1988.

22, the eighth day after the killing started in Ntega. It was from Marangara that most of the reports of reprisals by the Tutsi soldiers of the Burundian Army came.

The Army had arrived quickly in Marangara; detachments were already in Ntega and the provincial capital Ngozi had a small permanent garrison a short distance away on good roads, paved for about half the distance.

Joseph Nimubwona, a Tutsi, saw one Army operation. It started shortly after the Army moved into Marangara district, when his father was caught by a gang of Hutus.

The Hutu gang burned Nimubwona's house, caught his feeble, elderly father, beat him, bound him, and threw him into a stream. His body was found four days later.

But an Army helicopter came clattering over the valley just then, spotted the Hutu group fleeing the Nimubwona compound, and started chasing. It opened fire on the group as they crossed to the other side of the valley. All were killed.

Nimubwona had no problems justifying this action. He simply says: "The helicopter came to defend us."<sup>12</sup>

Most of the people who died in Marangara, said the doctors at Kiremba hospital, were Hutu.

"We admitted 76 injured people between August 18 and 25 of whom only four or five were Tutsi," said Rolf Dupre, a West German doctor working at Kiremba. Many of the injuries were from gunshots: smashed bones from large calibre, high velocity bullets were common. So was gangrene.<sup>13</sup>

"There used to be over 500 people living on this hill. Now we are only about 50," said Josephine Ntubarutaye, of Runda hill, near Marangara.

Two weeks after the massacre, she and her neighbors were still digging shallow graves for the dead.

"There are so many bodies all over this hillside, very often we bury 12 or 15 in the same grave," she said, resting for a bit in the shade, under the fronds

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

of her banana trees.<sup>14</sup>

How could it have happened?

"It is clear that the instigators of this macabre rebellion distributed drugs, money, and propagated false information among the peasants whom they incited to massacre," the Burundian government said afterwards.<sup>15</sup> It says that many of the killers had been drinking beer - both Zairian lager and potent home-brews based on banana, sorghum, or honey were easily available. Even more, the government says, were intoxicated with a drug it calls chanvre, using the Kirundi word, and which it identifies as a hallucinogen from an indigenous plant. The plant turns out to be marijuana, normally a depressant and not normally a generator of hallucinations or delusions.

The government argues that there had been a large scale infiltration of rebel leaders across the Rwandan border in the days leading up to the eruption at Ntega and that many of these rebel leaders' families had crossed into Rwanda in the days before August 14, "giving proof of a determination and precaution which excludes the idea of a spontaneous explosion of rebellion."<sup>16</sup>

Diplomats in both Bujumbura and the Rwandan capital Kigali are politely skeptical.

Clearly, there are small groups of Burundian dissidents, mainly Hutu, in exile in Rwanda, as in Belgium, France, West Germany, and Scandinavia. There are tens of thousands of Hutu in Tanzania as well as, mainly people who fled in 1972 and 1973 and who built a new life in a new country. After the great massacres, they have little incentive to return to their homeland.

But the Hutu dissidents abroad are few in number, with limited financial resources and - at least for those in Europe - out of touch. One of the results of 1972 was that Micombero's government did not leave many educated Hutu. The dead can't organize, those who escaped were far away. It has

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> *La lumiere sur les evenements de Ntega et Marangara*, Burundi government, Bujumbura, 1988, p 36.

<sup>16</sup> Agence burundaise de presse, Bujumbura, August 22, 1988.

never been easy for them to get back into Burundi from Europe and few seem to have tried. Could they have purchased arms, as the Burundian government contends, and smuggled them into the country? It seems doubtful. Customs inspection at commercial ports of entry is relatively thorough, as is passport control.

Overland smuggling is possible, but both Zaire and Rwanda have for several years pledged to cooperate with Burundi on security matters and in patrolling their frontiers. Rwanda is particularly sensitive to criticism from Burundi about sheltering rebels, recognizing that Burundi could provide a hospitable haven for those Tutsi who bear their own grudges against the Rwandan government. Neither Zaire nor Rwanda have a large domestic stock of arms and both, like Burundi, keep a careful eye out for any movement of guns into their territory. About the only places in the region where large numbers of guns and explosives are available are Uganda and Tanzania, the one because of some 20 years of civil war and the other because it has been a supply and support base for the legions of guerrillas who fought against the Rhodesian government of Ian Smith, the colonial Portuguese regime in Mozambique and who have been fighting against the apartheid government in South Africa. Sneaking weapons from Uganda across the Rwanda and into northern Burundi is possible but difficult. And, although Hutu rebels in 1972 apparently entered Burundi from Tanzania, it is a long haul from the Tanzanian border to Ntega and Marangara and no Burundian investigator has suggested any kind of link across that border.

And, in fact, the testimony of the victims of the 1988 massacres is that the first wave of killings, which were essentially by Hutu and of Tutsi, involved no firearms - even the Burundian Army doctor, Major Nestor Daradungwe, reported that the dead he found when he arrived in Ntega had almost all been killed by machete wounds to the head and that the razor-sharp, heavy blade of the normal Burundian machete was such a lethal weapon that 99 percent of those blows were fatal.

Neither did any of refugees or survivors of that week of murder report that anyone other than the Army had firearms.

But by the end of the Army intervention, bullet wounds were common.

Did the Tutsi soldiers pick up and selectively slaughter Hutu?

The answer is clear: they did.

Was the Army embarked on a state-endorsed program of Hutu genocide?

Or, a different question, was the Army out of control?

Burundian officials are adamant that the answer to both is no. Prime Minister Sibomana told me he was satisfied that the Army had acted with restraint and that casualties were kept to a minimum. He said no soldiers or officers had been arrested or tried for killing civilians. "We sent them up there to do their duty and restore calm. We are not going to put them on trial for doing that. Why should they be punished for doing their job?" he said.

Could it have been, I asked him, that in the heat of battle, anger and adrenalin combined to make soldiers a bit too quick on the trigger?

The prime minister waved this notion aside dismissively.

Were there atrocities?

Diplomats say there probably were. And the testimony of refugees suggests that soldiers were attacking Hutu farmers indiscriminately, without restraint and with deadly intent. Not only that, but that these attacks were not necessarily following on a hot pursuit of the Hutu murderers who had initiated the massacres in the first place but that many were cold-blooded and calculated. Soldiers took a deep breath and paused - not to cool off but to seek out information about who was and was not a Hutu and who therefore would or would not be on the killing list.

In contrast to 1972 and 1973, though, the killing did not spread. The Army's efforts to put down the violence in Ntega and Marangara and the reprisals by its all-Tutsi soldiers were over within six days - in 1972, the killing continued for three months. The only incident reported was the death of between two to ten people in boozey quarrel in Buyoya's home province, a brawl which broke out while Tutsi and Hutu were drinking together.<sup>17</sup>

Did the Hutu of northern Burundi sense a difference - a difference which seems, to an outsider, hard to fathom in a killing spree that was even more fierce than in 1972?

Army Commander Gaston Nteziriba, a high-flier within the security

<sup>17</sup> Reuters, from Bujumbura, August 30, 1988.

forces of the republic who was named as special commissioner for the massacre districts, thinks so. When I chatted with the imperious Tutsi officer, sharing some skewers of blackened roast goat one evening in Kirundo, he told me he believed the people of Ntega and Marangara saw the Army intervention strictly as a peace-keeping mission.

"If it had been the Army which committed the massacres, the people would not have returned, because the Army is still here," he told me.

For there is the undeniable fact that some 40,000 to 50,000 Hutu who had fled to Rwanda during the massacres had for the most part returned to Ntega and Marangara by the end of the year.

Many were too impatient to wait for United Nations officials to organize transportation by truck convoys - missing out, in fact, on the offer of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) of food, seeds, and tools to ease the burden of rebuilding their shattered lives.

Most came flooding back during the space of just a few weeks in November and December 1988.

"For every one person who came by convoy, at least ten came back entirely on their own," said Joseph Kotta, a Tanzanian U.N. official who coordinated the resettlement effort.

"Those who came in convoys were entitled to a hot meal at the refugee centers, but by the time they were back in Burundi, they were so anxious to get home that they just set off on foot," he told me. "I've never seen anything like it."

The U.N. had not expected the resettlement to begin until well into 1989.<sup>18</sup>

One key reason for the Burundian farmers' anxiety to return, of course, is that December is the time to plant the vital sorghum crop.

And, says the United Nations, "There is no doubt that (the return's) immediate cause was a 'sensitization campaign' which took place as a result of discussions between the governments concerned and UNHCR." The U.N. said that a meeting of senior Burundian, Rwandan, Zairian, and

<sup>18</sup> Reuters, from Mugendo, Burundi, December 25, 1988.

Organization of African Unity officials, chaired by UNHCR agreed to "create a situation favorable to a quick return of the Burundi nationals" and that at the meeting Burundian Interior Minister Aloys Kadoyi "offered a number of written resolutions, guaranteeing the safety of returnees and their belongings; assuring their integration in places of work and education; and stating that any refugees who had been implicated in the events at Ntega and Marangara would not be prosecuted."<sup>19</sup>

At Masheny camp, Bernardo Paganelli, an Italian health worker, said the return started after "one man went back to assess the situation in his commune and then came back to Rwanda to collect his family from the camp. He said it was quiet and peaceful there and that it was possible to live in Burundi again."<sup>20</sup>

The Rwandan Prefect of Butare province, where the U.N. refugee camps were located, played a key role in reassuring the refugees that it would be safe to return. Rwanda, which suffers from intensive overpopulation, feared it could not afford to care for the refugees. The lack of free land available meant the crowded camps the Burundians sheltered in suffered from bad drainage and a lack of shade.

"Who wants to live in the conditions we have here?" one refugee complained.

"Why am I going home now? Because I want to prepare my farm for the next harvest, because I want to get back to my own house, and find the things I left behind. If I stay in Rwanda too long, I might lose my possessions and my land," said another.<sup>21</sup>

President Buyoya played a decisive role. Just as then-President Micombero's policies in 1972 promoted genocide, Buyoya sincerely tried to keep that from happening in 1988.

"It didn't spread, that's the important thing. Buyoya has kept control. He had won out over the hardliners in the Army who wanted a repeat of 1972," said one western diplomat in Bujumbura.

<sup>19</sup> UNHCR, *Refugees*, January 1989 p 10.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, p 10.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, p 12.

In October, 1988, Buyoya formed a new "Government of National Unity" with Sibomana as Burundi's first Hutu prime minister since 1965. Ministerial positions were split evenly, twelve to twelve, between Hutu and Tutsi - the first significant Hutu cabinet appointments since 1971. However, the military junta, the so-called Council for National Salvation, which Buyoya installed after his 1987 coup d'état remained in power.

Buyoya has also been recruiting Hutu to the civil service and has boasted that he has Hutu soldiers in his bodyguard.

Following a May 1989 report by a Buyoya-appointed commission on Burundi's ethnic problems, the president pledged to give the Hutu more power - but said that should stop short of allowing them to use their 85 percent share of the population to dominate government.

"It is an insult to democracy to confuse the demographic majority with the political majority," he said in a May 13 speech.<sup>22</sup>

The commission itself called for an end to all discrimination against the Hutu in schooling, employment, and in the Army.<sup>23</sup>

Will such initiatives be enough?

"I think calm is returning, I have not registered any violence and nobody talks of revenge," said Emmanuel Mbonirema, the new administrator of Marangara district, told me.

"But for the women who are widows, for the orphans, it has been shock upon shock. It is hard for them to forget," he added, glaring at me across his crowded desk in the tin-roofed administrator's house, its front rooms piled high with building equipment and sacks of food.

I remembered the look in Venciane Uwimana's eyes, then, the look as she told me that she knew what her neighbors had been doing during that awful week in August.

"Nobody is kidding themselves that it is going to be an easy process," one western, Kigali-based diplomat, who had been involved in the return of the refugees to Burundi, told me.

<sup>22</sup> Agence burundaise de press, Bujumbura, May 13, 1989.

<sup>23</sup> *Rapport de la commission nationale chargée d'étudier la question de l'unité nationale*, Bujumbura, 1989.

Goodwill, in short, may not be enough to overcome the hatred in Burundi. For the goodwill of the Buyoya government must be weighed against an institutionalized, state-sanctioned racism which is very nearly a century old. The key to Burundi's dark secret lies in outdated anthropologists' prejudices that have been laughed into oblivion virtually everywhere else in the world.

In addition, it is the peculiar tragedy of Burundi that these notions of a racially-based system of government under the purportedly superior Tutsi provided the intellectual framework within which the first explorers and missionaries tried to make sense of the turn-of-the-century political ferment in Burundi. It appeared, to these men already predisposed to see cultural superiority in a group of Africans who looked a bit like themselves, as if a superior tribe of warriors was running the ravaged nation.

Hutu and Tutsi are NOT different peoples, they are NOT tribes. If they speak the same language, share the same culture, share the same institutions, share the same economic situation, as virtually every one of them does, then the notion of an antagonism based on tribal differences looks to be a difficult one to sustain. The ONLY basis remaining for it then becomes a purported physical basis: Tall people rule, short people are oppressed. Or, in the language of the colonial administrators and the anthropologists of the 19th and early 20th centuries: Hamites rule, Bantus are ruled. Or, in the real language that these men were speaking: The ones who look like us are superior, so they should rule. It doesn't matter about the others.

But, of course it does.

One reason why is that there really are no others. The physical distinctions, such as they are, have faded in the centuries since anthropologists think the Tutsi people arrived in Burundi. Burundians themselves say they cannot tell by looking whether a man or woman is a Tutsi or a Hutu. Outsiders, in any event, are stumped by the challenge. Exogenous lineages and clans - that is, those allowing marriage with non-members of the group - meant it was not abnormal for Tutsi to marry Hutu. There was a significant amount of intermarriage and a significant fading

away of differences.

Were the Tutsi a conquering elite? Were they part of the great sweep of Bacwezi, Bahima, Nilotic, Hamitic, herders from southern Ethiopia and Sudan?

Who cares?

The complex and still obscure history of Burundi before the colonial powers took over does not suggest a Tutsi rule. Instead, the kings of Burundi put together a highly sophisticated system of combined political power and religious authority in which key positions were shared among clans: some Tutsi, some Hutu. In addition, something that looks very much like a federal system had emerged by the 19th century, with princes, lords, and powerful local chiefs developing their own power bases. The Hutu were not left out.

It looks, in fact, like a system of checks and balances, although our lack of information about the day-to-day challenges of government and administration mean that we can't be quite sure what was being checked and what was being balanced.

It is most likely, however, that this complex system evolved to address the basic question of who gets access to wealth and to land, which in Burundi is the same thing. And it is probable that its complexity increased in response to the increasing ability of people to organize through their lineage and clan connections to try and win wealth and land. The embodiment of religious worship in the person of the king and through his officials at the court, for instance, cut the ground out from under the sorcery and belief in magic that elsewhere had become techniques people used to improve their position at the expense of others.

It was a marvelous and capable system which functioned smoothly for more than two centuries, while the people of Burundi grew richer and healthier than ever - perhaps even richer and healthier than they are now.

It was also a system in which there were no massacres.

The first ethnic massacre in Burundi came in 1934, at Ndora. It came after 30 years of deliberate German and Belgian effort to promote one sector of the population, the Tutsi.

An unknown number of Tutsi paid the price then.

Tens of thousands have paid it since.

As have hundreds of thousands of Hutu.

The killing has demanded revenge and the killing has fed killing ever since - with a ferocity perhaps all the more intense for being based on the one group's nightmarish fear of extinction and on the other's never-fading anger at its unjust subordination and oppression and its profound sense of lacking worth - something that, over nearly half a century, was drummed into the Hutu by Belgian colonialists and teachers who saw them only as dark-skinned inferiors.

Burundi has paid a price for racism.

And the final tally is not yet complete.

"It can happen again. It can happen again," said U.N. official Kotta. "More than 25 years of ethnic tension don't go away overnight."

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