# DYNAMICS OF DISCOURSE: POWER AND POLITICS IN PRECOLONIAL RWANDA

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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# Introduction: Re-framing the Conflict between "Tutsi" and "Hutu"

This thesis examines precolonial Rwandan religion as the locus of cultural collaboration and discourse between socioeconomic classes inhabiting geographically disparate regions. I focus on the two hundred years prior to colonization, during which a strong central kingdom, ruled by a monarch and court of nobles and advisers, expanded the boundaries of the central domain to incorporate the peripheral regions. While scholarship has presented the central court as imperialistic and expansive, provoking violent revolution from oppressed outsiders, the emphasis on conflict has led to the neglect of the modes of discourse that occurred in conjunction with these movements. These modes of discourse appear clearly in the religious myths and rituals that the opposing groups utilized. To much of the world, Rwanda carries the strong connotation of ethnic conflict, which area scholarship has also emphasized. This emphasis has also served in part to reify Hutu and Tutsi as distinct and fundamentally opposed groups. This is true even for scholars like Mahmood Mamdani who see the terms "Hutu" and "Tutsi" as appropriate only in reference to what he describes as polarized political identities, eschewing any biological or cultural distinctions that previous colonial scholarship had proliferated (22). While Mamdani notes that Hutu and Tutsi fought on either side during the Nyabingi revolt, the emphasis is still on conflict, rather than the discourse that surrounded the conflict (105). Including the discourse is essential to understand the way that Rwandans—both elites and their subjects—used traditional institutions in order to shape and influence society as part of a discursive process of

power and resistance.

By discussing this conflict in the precolonial history in terms of its potential for confrontation and exchange of power, this thesis begins the process of redressing the continuous emphasis on the Tutsi-Hutu conflict. The shift Mamdani recommends, to seeing the identities as essentially political, successfully illustrates the point that "Hutu" and "Tutsi" identities have undergone continuous reconstruction over time. However, to assess these identities as political is not accurate to the period of history prior to colonization, during which time the terms referred instead to social class or status that were politically cohesive sometimes and in opposition in other contexts. Furthermore, to reduce the Tutsi-Hutu relationship to their history of conflict can equally spur a return to violence. This reductionist understanding of the groups as being in conflict was a catalyst rather than a result of the 1994 genocide; it is furthermore seen in the current ban on ethnic identity by the Tutsi-led government (Scott and Waldorf 4) that nonetheless excludes Hutu candidates from political participation at the level of government as well as civil society (Longman "Reform" 28). The exclusive emphasis on conflict has been to the detriment of the complete picture of Rwandan history and culture. This deficit in turn has led inevitably to the persistence of stereotypes that see the "Other" as being untrustworthy and essentially antagonistic to the identity that a person or group self-applies.

This introduction will address some of the ways in which scholarship has represented Tutsi and Hutu groups as being essentially in conflict, with the purpose of re-characterizing the relationship between them. The remainder of the thesis will focus on the precolonial era, in keeping with the assertion by Mamdani that polarization between

Tutsi and Hutu as political entities did not come into effect until the Social Revolution of 1959, which drew on false information proliferated during colonization. Even from that point in time, however, a view of the two groups as politically polarized should not hold as absolute. Mamdani points to efforts and opportunities for rapprochement under Juvenal Habyarimana's administration (138-142). Furthermore, many Hutu moderates and dissenters were victims of the 1994 genocide, even though the Tutsi were the official targets of the genocide (5, 267). The emphasis on precolonial history furthermore aims to reaffirm the indigeneity of both groups to Rwanda, as well as the indispensable role of both as cultural creators and political actors in ways that were collaborative as well as confrontational.

Area scholars have long held to be anachronistic the interpretation of Tutsi and Hutu as constituting separate tribes or even biologically discrete ethnicities (the view of Tutsi as "Nilotes" or "Hamites" from northeastern Africa and Hutu as "Bantu" from the south and west). Philip Gourevitch's widely read journalistic account of the genocide and its aftermath, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*, noted that there was insufficient evidence for the migration hypothesis of Tutsi and Hutu origins. He also supported the idea that Tutsi and Hutu had shared a culture and had intermarried prior to colonization. He did not, however, offer any alternative explanation for the origins of the two groups; his discussion asserts that "classes," "castes," or "ranks" are all equally applicable to the organization of society prior to colonization; he relies upon the fast occupational distinction that holds Hutu to be agriculturalists or farmers, while Tutsi were exclusively herders (47, 48). Except for the note about a shared culture and intermarriage, Gourevitch's 1998 publication reproduces

a number of very old misconceptions about the precolonial society. Although there is the suggestion that some fluidity between the groups existed as a result of the shared culture or intermarriage, Gourevitch suggests a hard division—tantamount to a caste division—in which one's identity predetermines one's occupation and status.

Scholarship over the past fifty years has done much to overturn the idea that Tutsi and Hutu were caste identities or that a hard occupational division existed. Much of the credit for the shift in the scholarly consensus goes to Jan Vansina, whose book *L'évolution du royaume Rwanda des origines à 1900* (recently updated and republished as *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya Kingdom*) looked at a long history of cultural and social processes that created distinctions of status between people all of whom inhabited the area for several hundreds of years. Vansina's work also creates new paradigms for understanding the usage of these ethnonyms in precolonial society. Mahmood Mamdani's more recent work, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, also provides insight on the history of these identities, which have undergone several periods of reconstruction since the terms' earliest usage. Mamdani offers a rigorous poststructuralist critique of colonial sources that relied on purportedly cultural or biological distinctions between groups as the determinative factors in distinguishing between different races or ethnicities. Instead, Mamdani analyzes race and ethnicity as essentially political identities (22).

Both Vansina and Mamdani sought to address the history of violence between Hutu and Tutsi—of which 19th and 20th century history provided several dramatic examples—in their respective studies. Vansina first argued for the origin of the Hutu-Tutsi distinction during the rapid expansion and centralization of the 19th century. At an

earlier phase in the history of the region, these terms had signaled the distinction of an elite category from a peasant category. Vansina points to Nyabingi and other spirit-possession revolts, beginning in 1897, as evidence that Hutu and Tutsi were absolute rather than relative categories and that a hard division existed between the two groups, already politically polarized by this date. In consequence, Vansina asserts that hostility between these groups was not a product of colonization; Europeans, he argued, merely adopted practices they found on arriving, applying court terms to the organization of society (*Antecedents* 138).

In contrast to Vansina, Mamdani works from the point of view that "Tutsi" and "Hutu" have never designated concrete social groups but have continuously undergone re-construction. This did not change until in the 1920s and '30s the Belgian administration systematically restructured Rwandan society to fit their racial views (88). Following the concrete racial division that Belgium imposed on Rwanda, Mamdani recounts a number of political changes that still had to occur before "Hutu" and "Tutsi" appear as polarized political identities, a date Mamdani sets at the Social Revolution on 1959. Mamdani specifically rejects the argument that the Nyabingi revolt reflects an example of explicit Hutu-Tutsi violence, as Vansina argued. Mamdani reasons that Hutu and Tutsi were on both sides in the conflict (105).

Neither Vansina nor Mamdani disputes the idea that violence between groups of disparate economic and geographical location occurred prior to colonialism, nor that economic exploitation against peripheral societies occurred from the center. While Vansina's analysis takes no account of relevant events occurring during or after colonization, he and Mamdani alike emphasize the Nyabingi revolt as a crucial example

in terms of categorizing the kind of conflict occurring within Rwanda. While Vansina sees it in almost epoch-making terms, the beginning point of Tutsi-Hutu violence, Mamdani sees the Nyabingi revolt primarily as an interesting and important example of political conflict. Mamdani states: "The polarization of Hutu and Tutsi in 1959 contrasted dramatically with the presence of Hutu and Tutsi on both sides of the firing line during the Nyabingi revolt only half a century earlier" (105).

Because both scholars seek to explain violence in Rwanda, both look at instances of confrontation in terms of how they illustrate the trajectory of violence or of conflict between groups. By investigating the points of contention during the Nyabingi revolt, however, it is also possible to see the conflict in terms of how it represents cultural collaboration, even while it serves as an example of confrontation. This necessitates taking a serious look at what issues were of importance to either group, as well as what means they used to express demands and organize the cause. This is possible through analysis of the religious institutions of both the court and revolutionary movement. My approach in discussing precolonial religion as a dialectical process or collaborative process derives from methodologies in religious studies that regard myth and ritual as cultural phenomena that speak to political contingencies. To emphasize conflict but leave out the relevant elements of discourse is to miss the factors of cultural creation that occur in some social confrontations. In particular, this is true of resistance movements that oppose unjust power structures by addressing the moral, philosophical, or spiritual justifications that actors in those power structures use in legitimating oppression. The Nyabingi revolt(s) of the late 19$^{th}$ and early 20$^{th}$ centuries provide an excellent example of this kind of cultural production, the significance of which has yet to fully escape

Western prejudices, which see violence as a problem endemic to Rwanda but that have not adequately seen the significance of common points.

To properly address the topic of Nyabingi revolts as a collaborative strategy in which the peripheral group acts upon or against the center, it is first necessary to examine the relevant strategies of legitimation espoused by the central court. I have selected origin myths from the oral tradition that the court used to justify an oppressive social arrangement, while at the same time discussing these myths as arranging for fluidity and opportunities for social advancement not noted elsewhere. In the second chapter, I show that the justification of divine kingship was of active use through ritual in both distributing power across a large geographic space and for reflecting the court's view of its reciprocity with its subjects. This reciprocity, in the court's ideology existed for the good of the subjects of the kingdom: through participation in the court's economic infrastructure, wealth and prosperity would ultimately come to the subjects ("Hutu") as well as the nobility ("Tutsi").

The chapters on court myths and rituals operate on two levels: on the one hand, I have articulated and expounded upon the ideologies encoded within the relevant religious forms. On the other hand, I have sought to contrast the historical realities of central expansion and economic exploitation with the societal ideals the court attempted to project. These chapters do not aim at a vindication of court practices, religious, cultural, or economic. Instead, I have attempted to seriously examine justifications of the exercise of power as well as concessions of an elite group to its subject population. I have not attempted to overturn the scholarship indicating that the court exploited peripheral areas by returning to a court-centered functionalism. These chapters will provide the context

for the cultural values and ethics the court claimed to represent but failed to implement in practice. This in turn will establish a pretext for revolutionary action on the part of peripheral groups who, nevertheless, saw themselves as participants in the same cultural context as the central court.

The third chapter focuses on the Nyabingi revolt as a revolutionary action from the margin against the central power, which had neglected its self-ascribed obligations, increasing the depredations of marginal regions through squabbles between elite lineages in the matter of a royal succession. A revolutionary movement such as the Nyabingi spirit-possession cult could not have existed without a common core of ideals projected from the court, which actors at the periphery had contractually accepted. It is the violation of the court's public contract that then provoked a revolution in the form of the Nyabingi spirit-possession cult.

In its time, the Nyabingi cult was able to acquire a formidable amount of influence, including military potentiality (Des Forges *Defeat* 104). Animosity between the regions of Nyabingi's activity in the north and the central court was very great. Nevertheless, a revolutionary movement need not equate to a bloody civil war. The court military power, though still more formidable, was unable to completely crush the revolt without intervention on the part of Germany (Des Forges *Defeat* 107). While it is not possible to see the Nyabingi revolt in the light of a peaceful or nonviolent protest or resistance movement, it is conceivable that the revolt could have led to internal societal change, given the strength of local grievances against the court and the amount of organization and influence that the movement accrued.

Along with Mamdani, I contrast the Nyabingi revolt favorably against the

animosities of the 1959 Revolution, charged as they were with Eurocentric racial ideas of intrinsic difference between Hutu and Tutsi, as well as erroneous ideas of Tutsi as foreigners, immigrants, or an internal "Other." Yet this favorable contrast of the precolonial revolt should not suggest an atavistic return to premodern modes of discourse as a remedy for present social conflicts. The rituals and myths in this thesis function as points of discourse that allow for clear translation into a Western academic idiom that enables favorable comparison to the 1959 Revolution. This is an important point, in that the 1959 Revolution utilized Western modes of implementation, including radio and printed publications.

This thesis is heavily indebted to the theories of Bruce Lincoln on the political utility or implications—conservative as well as revolutionary—of both myth and ritual. The theories that I have applied in this thesis are those Lincoln sets forth in *Discourse and the Construction of Society.* Lincoln begins by discussing myth and ritual as vehicles that contain the taxonomies necessary to order society according to a preferred vision. Lincoln defines taxonomies as follows:

> For the most part taxonomies are regarded—and announce themselves—as systems of classifying the phenomenal world, systems through which otherwise indiscriminate data can be organized in a form wherein they become knowable....Taxonomy is thus not only an epistemological instrument (a means for organizing information), but it is also (as it comes to organize the organizers) an instrument for the construction of society. And to the extent that taxonomies are socially determined, hegemonic taxonomies will tend to reproduce the same hierarchic system of which they are themselves the product. Within any society, nonetheless, there exist countertaxonomic discourses as well...: Alternative models whereby members of subordinate strata and others marginalized under the existing social order are able to agitate for the deconstruction of that order and the reconstruction of society on a novel pattern (7,8).

For Lincoln, the taxonomies that myths and ritual encode and legitimate also have an ideological orientation, based on who is propagating a taxonomy and what the interest of that person or persons is. Lincoln defines "myth" as "that small class of

stories that possess both credibility and authority....[M]yth is not just a coding device in which important information is conveyed, on the basis of which actors *can then* construct society. It is also a discursive act through which actors evoke the sentiments out of which society is actively constructed" (24).

Lincoln emphasizes the role of force and authority in his theoretical frameworks of the construction of society (3-11). The role of force plays an important part in the subject of this work. Resistance emerged in the context of an attempt at hegemonic occupation by a central authority. In this context, it is possible to radically change the discussion on violence in Rwanda's history, as this militant response was part of a political movement that sought local authority where otherwise the monopoly of violence favored centralization. Thus it is possible to argue that the Nyabingi movement utilized force as a necessary means of securing wider political rights within their marginalized sociopolitical context.

Throughout my thesis, I will demonstrate that ritual and myth played just such an organizing function in precolonial Rwandan society. Not only did the myths of origins legitimate court power (the authority of the "Tutsi" over the "Hutu" in the central or peripheral regions); this court culture also had rituals that posited a reciprocal relationship between the king and the "Hutu," whose benefactor the rituals of the court purported the king to be. Not only this, but in the rituals of spirit-possession cults such as the well- known Nyabingi cult, we see the "Hutu" making claims of legitimacy to sovereign power against the court. To do this, leaders of the cult used the very logic of the court against a monarchy that had undermined court regulations of succession. The examples I have selected show that precolonial

Rwandan religion was not static but highly contingent. Within the parameters of the oral tradition, Rwandan leaders were able to give legitimacy as needed to institutions that defined and challenged Rwandan society as a whole. I emphasize "as a whole" because while it was the rhetoric and objective of the central court to bring peripheral regions under a greater degree of influence, the evidence I provide suggests people in these regions to some degree accepted the logic of the court and used that very logic to express their own power and stage moments of resistance. I wish to show by emphasizing this wholeness of the complex and variable precolonial society that more recent colonial taxonomies do not reflect the truth when they have suggested one of the groups (of "Hutu" or "Tutsi") is "native" or "foreign" or even of being in a position of natural advantage historically through establishing a functional political body. While it is interesting to some extent that Rwandans shared certain religious symbols and practices whether Hutu or Tutsi, what is both more interesting and more meaningful is how and why actors activated or invoked certain symbols. The Nyabingi movement utilized force as it had no other means of litigating against the injustices the central court perpetrated against their region.

Of equal importance to the framework of this thesis is the conflicted nature of Rwanda's history. Scholarly histories of Rwanda tend to vindicate the group holding power at the time, thereby creating an optimistic impression of the contemporary administration. This has nonetheless tended to overlook the importance of the opposite group to the country's history and culture, almost to the extent of disregarding the exclusion of the other group from power that has tended to accompany each administration. This thesis reverses this trend in the historiography.

There must be abasis for discussing Rwandan history and culture, particularly the often-ignored precolonial history, in a way that underscores the relevance and activity of each group in creating a society. Only when scholars begin to take seriously this necessary premise for Rwandan historiography can works on Rwanda do justice to the historical context of both groups. Each chapter of the thesis examines a different institution of precolonial religion. In chapter 1, I discuss origin myths that take a court-centered view in illustrating the arrangement of society. In chapter 2, I look at the First Fruits ceremony as an important gesture by the court of the mythical reciprocity between the king and the Hutu. In chapter 3, I discuss the Nyabingi spirit-possession cults that challenged court authority on behalf of the Hutu, using the logic of court succession against a specific king. Through the discussion of these points of precolonial religion, I will show that precolonial Rwandan society was essentially plural but also demonstrated a unified culture of discursive religious practices and symbols, as demonstrated by the remarkably shared presuppositions about Rwandan society in the religious culture. Rather than a country of long-standing ethnic hatred and warfare, there was a dynamic of distinctly African religiosity wrestling with the same issues of the diversity and unity of peoples that one sees in common African religious forms of ancestor veneration and the belief in a high creator god. Incidentally, this same tension between unity and diversity comes through in spectacularly unsuccessful European forms in the racialized view of human societies. As Mamdani, Des Forges, Linden and Linden, among others, have demonstrated, it is this Eurocentric view of the local society that really drew Rwanda into a disastrous polarization.

## Methodology

This thesis takes data from precolonial Rwandan religion and applies theory to assess them as taxonomizers within sociopolitical processes. From then it becomes possible to get a sense of the sociopolitical climate within precolonial Rwanda, but more importantly how Rwandan actors saw both themselves and the "Other" within the emerging kingdom. This process has involved the selection of certain data that were indicative of the divisions that area scholarship shows to have existed in the relevant period of history. In particular, the data that I selected, along with the accompanying sociological and cultural evidence, lend support to my argument that precolonial Rwandans shared several cultural features and that these cultural ideas and self-representations were in dialogue between the center and the periphery, relevant to illustrating constructions of social hierarchy, legitimations of power, and challenges to it. The myths and rituals I discuss illustrate a dynamic society—not to be simplistically described as "cohesive" or "functional"—that was nevertheless a contested sphere between a local center of power and imperfectly incorporated people that drew from the center for their own local identity, as well as asserting local cultural features against the center. My intent has been to illustrate with this approach the lingering impact of colonial terms ("Tutsi" and "Hutu") on the view of history that persists in area scholarship, as well as to set up a groundwork for changing the discussion of ethnicity surrounding Rwanda today.

The context for discussing precolonial Rwandan culture so as to re-evaluate the interpretation of scholars of the instances that they studied is the growing awareness that

we have of the impact of colonialism on Western understanding of Rwandan history and culture. This has been a process that has continued to develop and complexify our understanding of Rwanda, as well as of the depth of the impact of colonialism. There is no sense of the negative impact of colonialism in the Catholic triumphalist histories of Rwanda produced in the 1930s, and only a growing sense of its influences in the anthropology of the 1960s and 1970s. Through this process, it has come to be established that the terms "Tutsi" and "Hutu" in their usage from independence on are a legacy of the colonial era. This creates a premise for re-examining the precolonial era as a time when these terms were not the salient political or cultural distinctions between groups that nevertheless were intermittently in conflict.

Given my distance from the subjects I study in this thesis, in terms of both time in history and place in geography, as well as my lack of first-hand familiarity with these cultural forms, it has become necessary to supplement theories for the role these myths and rituals played in Rwanda based on my reading of Rwandan precolonial society and culture. My examples have been primarily taken second-hand from academic sources, rather than from Rwandan sources, as would be more appropriate if these sources were accessible to me. To mitigate this weakness in the examples of discourse that I have used, I have strived everywhere to remain cognizant of the bias of the sources I have used. As I discuss in my literature review, this includes the tendency over time of Western sources to favor local regional perspectives over central court perspectives. There has been the growing sense that these more local voices should receive preference in terms of what communities had to say about themselves, rather than what their more powerful "rulers" had to say about them. Also, I have attempted to assess each source in

terms of its political trajectory—a prospect that has become more realizable through time, as hindsight has revealed a tendency even in scholarship to favor one side in the nominal "Tutsi"/ "Hutu" conflict over the other. The tendency that I, as an outsider to Rwandan politics, take to this study is one of representing the groups that have not had the same access to power as those in positions of leadership. This is true for the discussion of religious practices in the precolonial era, just as it is for the approach I take to Rwandan politics of the present day. It may be argued that I have not dealt sufficiently with the colonial period by not including a chapter dedicated solely to this crucial period of Rwandan history. However, I have shown throughout each chapter how the impact of colonization reformed, distorted, or otherwise forcibly changed the society for which Rwandans contended, as well as altering the taxonomies to fit Eurocentric systems.

A second trend I have attempted to mitigate is that of Western scholarship to implicitly support the contemporary power structure in Rwanda by providing naturalistic explanations as to how a given party came to power. While this aims at satisfying historical questions, the tendency of this approach is to normalize power, as though the state of affairs in the present should not be subject to criticism. My discussion of precolonial religion is critical of the legitimacy of central court claims to authority over peripheral regions, even while I discuss how court ideas served as a point of reference in certain revolutionary discourses at the periphery. Thus, precolonial Rwandan culture was profoundly contested, even as it defined simplistic boundaries that normally appear in scholarly discussions of conflict between "Hutu" and "Tutsi". In this way, my approach allows for legitimacy of "Tutsi" as well as "Hutu" politics in the present, even while contesting the application of the use of these "ethnic" terms in precolonial history. I have

included, to as great a degree as I have been able, scholarly sources from Rwandans themselves in addition to my predominantly European or Western source base. It remains true that the most readily available scholarship—which demands attention—was from Western sources, many of whom worked directly in and with Rwandans as they produced their analyses.

This question is urgent for the present, as I show in the Epilogue. The question of whether or not the moratorium on the use of the terms "Tutsi" and "Hutu" really leads to a "post-ethnic" Rwanda is profoundly disputed in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide. In the Epilogue I look primarily to online sources to determine the nature of the discourse surrounding the moratorium and the related issue of President Paul Kagame's approach to oppositional politics. My approach to understanding Rwandan politics today, and how that climate reflects on the discursive conflict between political positions is socioeconomic, political, and cultural, which is the approach that I have taken throughout the thesis. I have selected this approach primarily because these issues have seemed to me to be the most relevant to discussing and assessing changes in the way internal conflicts have emerged through time. The socioeconomic relationship between precolonial "Hutu" and "Tutsi," insofar as these terms reflected a cultural reality, is perhaps the most widely commented on distinction from that era; this is not the same as the cultural controversy surrounding kingship that emerged in the late nineteenth century and that provoked the Nyabingi revolt I discuss in chapter 3. In this context, distinctions of "Hutu" and "Tutsi" are relevant only broadly, in making the regional or economic distinctions that are still helpful, but that do not take us all the way toward understanding the entire nature of the revolutionary movements. In the same way, the moratorium on

"Hutu" and "Tutsi" and proliferation of "genocide ideology" as facets of political discourse at the present time are distinct from the socioeconomic issues of decentralization and the embracing of neoliberal market programs. I do not see it as being essential to prioritize cultural over socioeconomic issues for the precolonial and present contexts, or vice versa. Each context is recognizably different, though they share certain facets, and must be taken on its own terms. It has been relevant in either case to give time to socioeconomic considerations, as well as the relevant cultural and political, which, though not identical, are also not ultimately able to be taken in isolation.

Throughout the thesis, issues that I defined as being relevant to discussions of class and culture have not included crucial issues relevant to issues of gender, for the most part. In particular, this under-representation is present in the chapter on the Nyabingi cult, which was notable for being a hierarchy of which women were the head. This is representative of much of the scholarly work that was available to me, which has tended throughout to focus on Nyabingi as a political, regional, and class rebellion, when these sources have focused on it as a social phenomenon. I have, however, included relevant analysis of the interpretation of the gender dimension from Elizabeth Hopkins, whose emphasis in discussing the cult was as a political revolt against the central court and later against colonization. Hopkins has described the matter of women's leadership as having an unintended influence in the realm of subverting patriarchal structures of the local region. I have added to this that the importance of women's leadership in this case emerged from the local and central cultures, and thus had contextual relevance in resistance to and valorization of established forms, even while this supplied the important psychological effect that Hopkins discusses. There is the opportunity for further work in

the discussion of gender issues in this and other contexts in precolonial Rwandan studies.

Where I have given my own interpretations on elements within the Rwandan or other myths or rituals, I have gone only so far as discussing what I see as being clearly true, though it is either not self-evident, or is worth explicating for the purposes of completing the argument. Though I have not had access to first-hand sources or a knowledge of the language, the interpretations in this thesis are all justified through the evidence that I supply from the sociological and cultural data available. If my interpretations are incorrect, it remains for evidence to demonstrate that they are so.

## Literature Review: A Shift in Focus from the Center to the Periphery, and a Growing Awareness of the Impact of Colonization

This chapter provides a brief overview of the developments in Rwanda scholarship provided by scholars who relied on oral sources. Rwandan historiography has seen two major trends. It has witnessed a movement away from court-centered histories in favor of regional analyses. Secondly, scholarship by Westerners has tended to support the established power structure in the country, from colonization. The works tended to locate the polarization of ethnic groups during the precolonial kingdom, under the Tutsi leadership. Since the 1994 takeover by the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) that effectively put an end to the genocide, research has usually supported Tutsi leadership, citing colonization as the origin of polarization. In terms of periodization, Rwandan historiography has wrestled with the cultural rupture with the past that colonialism caused. This gradual movement toward a regional focus, more correctly reflects the power distribution in the country prior to the nineteenth century. The early scholarship (early to mid-twentieth century) created the impression of a strong central kingdom with a victorious army and adept leadership of the Tutsi court, later scholarship began to dismantle the picture of a hypercompetent central court. Scholarship that came afterward took this a step further by emphasizing the local history of peripheral regions that exerted considerable autonomy. These regions came to receive treatment as independent from the court itself and interesting in their own right. I contend that this scholarship has exploded a simplistic, hierarchic dichotomy for Hutu and Tutsi ethnicities that colonialism and Eurocentric racial taxonomies introduced. The scholarly work on the precolonial era thus sets up a basis for discussing Rwandan society in that time as

dynamic and socially constructed.

In the course of this literature review, I will discuss how the histories of Rwanda have represented Rwandan religion. Scholarly histories of Rwandan religion have focused on Christianity; in the pre-independence era, this meant projecting Christian antecedents onto the past, as a way of justifying European influence over the religion of the country. Beginning with the work of Jacques Maquet, in the 1950s, histories of precolonial religion took on a functional approach that cut the ties between scholarship on Rwandan religion and missionary interests, yet did little to challenge the court-centered status quo. In this model, the divine king was the apex of a religious power structure, with ancestor-veneration serving to unite the kingdom culturally from the top of the hierarchy down. Jan Vansina's groundbreaking work with Rwandan oral history reflected disparities of power and conflicts between the center and the margin, thus creating a basis for a dynamic and sociopolitical approach to divine kingship, ancestor-veneration, and spirit-possession cults. Scholars who would carry on this approach to Rwandan religious history include David Newbury, Iris Berger, and Alison Des Forges, among others. The poststructuralist critique of Rwandan historiography becomes predominant following the 1994 genocide and Tutsi ascendancy. This approach enables Mahmood Mamdani and Timothy Longman to look at Christianity as a catalyst for re-organizing Rwandan society according to a Eurocentric model. Earlier works by Alison Des Forges and Ian and Jane Linden serve as essential precursors to these studies. There has been less work on precolonial religion in the years since the genocide than there was before. One sees how the conceptualizations about Rwandan religion have also served to support contemporary power structures. With this literature review and the remainder of

the thesis, I suggest that looking into Rwanda's precolonial religion is a necessary corrective to approaches that support the claims to power of one group at the expense of the other. Precolonial Rwandan religion was a shared culture of symbols that both supported and challenged a complex and diversified power structure.

At this point, it is necessary for me to acknowledge that I do not speak French, which is the language in which many key scholarly publications on Rwanda were first printed. In some cases, French is the only medium in which these sources exist. The earliest histories, including those of Alexis Kagame and Louis de Lacger, and later works by Marcel d'Hertefelt, were thus unavailable to me; I have had to discuss their reputation and influence using second-hand sources.

Written histories of Rwanda first appeared as written texts while the country was under Belgian control, in the 1930s. These histories portrayed Rwanda as a country whose past served as a local Old Testament, and whose future appeared as a golden age with the coming of European rulers and the missions of the Catholic Church. Linden and Linden (1977) identify the earliest written histories with the ideology of colonial rule along with its racist presuppositions, derived primarily from minor evolutionary sociologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Linden and Linden 1). Many such works were collaborations with Christian doctrine, attempting to reconcile apparent discrepancies between church histories and the findings of science. These early histories include, on the Europeans' side, Pages' *Un Royaume hamite au centre de l'Afrique* (1933) and de Lacger's *Le Ruanda* (1939). Both men were Catholic clergy. These works promoted the role of Catholicism in elevating the status of Rwandans, whose potential for development and progress the white men linked to the Caucasian origins of the Tutsi. In

the same vein, although coming from the perspective of the Rwandan elite, were the publications of Alexis Kagame, a Catholic cleric who came from a family of court historians. Kagame's aim was to support the role of the Catholic Church in the further development of the country, as well as to celebrate the power and longevity of the Tutsi court. This included supporting the claims of European anthropology that the Tutsi originated as a superior stock from a different region of Africa (usually identified with Ethiopia). This allegedly made the Tutsi armies victorious over the "Bantu" natives, the Tutsi government comprehensively functional as well as sufficiently benevolent to create amicable relations between the rulers and the ruled. Kagame's work marks the earliest history in support of a Rwandan nationalism embracing Western influence (Linden and Linden 5). While the compromise between court and Catholic politics has traditionally dominated the discussion of Kagame's scholarship in Western sources, including prominently Jan Vansina and Ian and Jane Linden, Kagame's importance in preserving the oral tradition for later study is very great. Rose-Marie Mukarutabana has stated that Kagame remains "the undisputed leader in Rwandan Studies," producing a quantity of work including both aristocratic as well as popular forms of oral literature, which served as the basis for later studies. Mukarutabana asserts that the Rwandan oral literature remains largely unexplored in area scholarship ("Introduction" pg. 16).

The earliest histories on Rwanda by Western academics contributed to dismantling the triumphalist picture of the earlier church histories. The works that I focus on here are Jean-Jacques Maquet's *Le Système des relations sociales dans le Rwanda ancien* (1954), Jan Vansina's *L'évolution du royaume rwanda des origines à 1900* (1961), and Marcel d'Hertefelt's *Les clans du Rwanda ancien: éléments*

*d'ethnosociologie et d'ethnohistoire* (1971). Beginning with Vansina, each work built on what had come before to push Rwanda historiography in the direction of a regional focus, rather than a court-centered focus. Maquet set out to establish that Rwanda existed as a cohesive, stratified society prior to colonial intervention. Maquet gave what was for the time the definitive exploration of the system of cattle clientship that was the basis for the economy of the precolonial kingdom. On the basis of the occupational stereotypes (in which Tutsi function as herders of cattle and Hutu as agriculturalists), Maquet envisioned a harmonious but unequal system with ethnic distinctions representing caste differences.

Jan Vansina reconstructed precolonial Rwandan history from oral tradition in a way that radically challenged the previous histories (including Maquet's), all of which left the court-centered model of history basically intact. Vansina shortened the longevity of the court by several hundred years by challenging the historicity of several monarchs with actions contained in court myth. He further questioned the superiority of the central armies by arguing that in many cases conquests came as the result of favorable circumstances, beyond their own or their adversaries' control. He also demonstrated that the inequalities of the precolonial system were not functional and harmonious to the extent that Kagame and Maquet had earlier asserted. Vansina's work was the result of political circumstances of his time. His book's publication in 1961 came right in the middle of Rwanda's social revolution, in which representatives of Hutu ethnicity came to power by majority vote (C. Newbury *Cohesion*, xiii). Hence, Vansina reconstructed a version of Rwandan history contrary to Tutsi court histories to demonstrate that the Hutu's social revolution had considerable historical justification. In doing so, Vansina repeatedly asserted, in his work, that Hutu and Tutsi had become politically polarized

identities prior to colonialism. Vansina's emphasis has overwhelmingly on military action in the country to the purpose of expanding court power and centralizing authority into the hands of the nobility.

The work of Marcel d'Hertefelt offers further corrective by emphasizing cohesion and fluidity across ethnic boundaries that previous historians had always portrayed as closed (Linden and Linden, 6). De Lacger's work had also demonstrated the existence of social mobility prior to colonialism that upended the myth of precolonial "castes" (Linden and Linden 6; C. Newbury *Cohesion* 12, 13). Instead of cattle clientship, which Vansina demonstrated to be oppressive to poorer classes of farmers, d'Hertefelt emphasized multi-ethnic clans as creating regional stability and cohesion, as well as a shared kinship identity. Finding that Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa all shared a clan identity led d'Hertefelt to draw his conclusions that Hutu and Tutsi were in fact class identities that carried with them the sense of social mobility (Linden and Linden 6). From this premise, it became possible to discard the idea that Hutu and Tutsi had separate origins or were radically distinct groups before colonization.

In his discussion of Rwandan historiography, David Newbury has argued that the these works greatly influenced Rwandan scholarship by removing the focus from the court and encouraging a broadening of ethnography to focus on regional traditions and histories. The works in this vein of research include, according to Newbury, studies by Helen Codere, Claudine Vidal, Jim Freedman, and Pierre Gravel, in addition to the works of David and Catharine Newbury ("Kivu" 45). Along with this de-emphasis on court tradition, scholarship emerging in the 1970s was acutely conscious of the collaboration of court and colonial power and of its influence over the early histories. Alison Des Forges'

*Defeat is the Only Bad News* and Ian and Jane Linden's *Church and Revolution in Rwanda* were among the foremost from this era of scholarship in attempting to trace the effects of this alliance. The image they portray of the kingship of Musinga, the last non-Christian king of Rwanda, was one of steady increase over a period of roughly three decades (ca. 1900-1930) of colonial control over Rwandan political life.

Following two revolutions in the 1960s, the subject of recurring violence became the object of study. Works by Rene Lemarchand and Jean-Pierre Chretien sought to dispel misconceptions about the "tribal" nature of area violence in the Great Lakes Region, including the genocide of Hutus by Tutsis in Burundi in the early 1970s. As Lemarchand states in *Burundi*, "Not atavistic hatreds, but something closer to what Benedict Anderson calls 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991) lie behind the litany of horrors chronicled by the media" (xii). Beginning in the 1970s, scholarship has come increasingly to recognize the constructed nature of Hutu and Tutsi identities and their recent origin. This has drawn attention, in turn, to the role of the central court and their colonial collaborators in creating and imposing these designations on the population. The groundwork done in the 1970s and 80s has informed the scholarship that in recent years has sought to make sense of the violence of 1994, as Rwanda moves beyond the genocide. Key to this new understanding has been the re-definition of ethnicity contained in these works. Their formation in the precolonial kingdom through the expansion and centralization of the court and their conversion into caste identities under colonialism must serve as the basis for any historical understanding of Hutu and Tutsi.

The study of the precolonial era, including precolonial religion, enjoyed an era of relative dominance in the 1970s and '80s. Works by David and Catherine Newbury, Iris

Berger, Jim Freedman, and Elizabeth Hopkins took into account the dynamics of power, cohesion, and resistance as they employed religious symbols and justification from the broader cultural context. David Newbury saw rituals of divine kingship as methods whereby the court justified its power over bordering regions as a necessary religious sanction to the prosperity of those regions ("Kingship"). Jim Freedman saw the reclaiming of local history at work in the litanies of the Nyabingi spirit-possession cults (170, 171), while Elizabeth Hopkins noted the promise of liberation from Tutsi leadership the cult offered Hutu (275). The work of these scholars has furthered a complex, differentiated, and dynamic view of precolonial religiosity as function of sociopolitical realities.

Following 1994, scholarship has discussed genocidal violence in its international context. This research looks both at the colonial history of the country and the inattention of Western countries in the United Nations and the United States to warnings that violence was imminent or under way in the country. Peter Uvin (*Aiding Violence*, 1998) argues that the aid of Western countries did not lead to development, as the resources provided supported discriminatory institutions and ultimately supported the regime that perpetrated the genocide. Mahmood Mamdani (*When Victims Become Killers*, 2001) has assessed the events of the genocide as a product of colonial shaping of national identities, with Tutsi as "settlers" and Hutu as "natives." Timothy Longman (*Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, 2010) has examined the continued connection between Christian churches and the Rwandan establishment and the role of churches and clergy in helping to orchestrate the genocide. During this most recent period, work on precolonial religion has become scarce, as discussion of the precolonial legacy of Christianity and Indirect

Rule has become more prominent.

In *The Debris of Ham*, Aimable Twagilimana has made inroads to discussing postcolonial conflicts between Hutu and Tutsi in a regional context. In particular, Twagilimana emphasizes the revolution of 1973 that began the Second Republic as a regional conflict between factions both typically designated as Hutu. Twagilimana has shown that in this revolution, the movement by the north against the south was a reprisal of precolonial regional antagonism, even as it took its particular political context from the influences of colonization, in particular the Hamitic Hypothesis. Both Tutsi and Hutu comprised the political body of the south that suffered defeat in this revolution. Twagilimana's work stands as an important point of departure for future scholarship to continue to problematize the standard Western concept of Rwanda's internal conflicts as primarily between "Hutu" and "Tutsi." Former Speaker of the Rwandan Parliament and author of *God Sleeps in Rwanda* Joseph Sebarenzi is a Tutsi and critic of the RPF administration who has spoken in defense of imprisoned presidential candidate Victoire Ingabire Umuhosa, a Hutu. President Kagame personally insisted on Sebarenzi's resignation when he refused to comply to a bill Kagame wanted to pass ("Justice" 346). Sebarenzi parallels Twagilimana's view about not hardening postcolonial conflicts into simple dichotomies of "Hutu" against "Tutsi." Sebarenzi states, "The truth is that Rwanda is run by an inner circle of Tutsi led by President Kagame," ("Justice" 348).

Future scholarship in Rwanda must continue to nuance the understanding of ethnicity that has emerged as the result of the last five decades of scholarship, and scholars should seek to employ nuanced definitions of Hutu and Tutsi in public discourse. It is also necessary for Rwanda scholarship to continue to assess Rwanda in its

international context. Isolating the country as an academic topic will lead to its isolation in the sphere of politics as well. Today, Rwandan power involves the suppression of criticism of the government (Straus, Waldorf 4). By opening the topic of ethnicity for discussion, the chance for vindication of oppositional politics becomes more likely. In this thesis, I have tried to contribute to this process by discussing Hutu and Tutsi identities in their precolonial context and to connect the interaction between divine kingship and spirit-possession movements to Rwanda's present struggle to maintain self-determinacy as it receives widening international attention. I conclude by calling for renewed work in the area of the precolonial religion, as my own thesis seeks to show how religious institutions and practices reflect a commonality of symbols that actors used to reinforce or challenge the status quo; the conflicts themselves are equaled by the shared religious ideation that invoked sentiment and motivated action.

# Chapter 1: Kigwa's Three Sons: Court Construction of Precolonial Society

In this chapter, I demonstrate that the original identities of "Hutu" and "Tutsi" developed in direct response to an emerging elite culture. In effect, "Tutsi" were court members, its representatives, or those who otherwise belonged to families that exemplified the elite culture of the central court. "Hutu" referred to geographical or political outsiders and servants. In the precolonial kingdom, the dichotomy between these identities was seen in regard to military participation, to geographical residence, and to material wealth, which carried with it the understanding of inclusion in central court politics. These three dichotomies by which Hutu and Tutsi were distinguished are, of course, not identical. Nor were identities of Hutu and Tutsi rigidly fixed according to any uniform standard for differentiating them. The difference between Hutu and Tutsi was neither racial, nor tribal, as some have asserted; in addition to the geographical and political contexts, the distinction in terms designated merit based on the norms set by the central court, especially focusing on values of self-mastery and responsibility, interpreted as a potential for leadership. The physical stereotypes according to which Tutsi came to mean tall and thin while Hutu came to mean broad and of medium height, were soft generalizations in the precolonial kingdom (Maquet *Inequality* 145, 146). During the colonial period, the physical stereotypes of the Tutsi came to signify, according to Western anthropological taxonomies, the Caucasian racial element that the Tutsi supposedly carried. The physical stereotype of the Hutu was supposed to have signified their Bantu or "true negro" racial essence. This change effectively recast Rwandan physical stereotypes in the biological hierarchy prescribed by European race theory. I

will demonstrate the difference between the functioning of the taxonomies in Rwandan mythology from those of European mythology by drawing a contrast between relevant Rwandan and European myths.

The royal myths of Rwanda record the actions of the original king, Kigwa, who descended to earth from heaven at a time in Rwanda's earliest history. Mukarutabana notes that the kings belonging to the earliest time period in the genealogies

> are not really individualzed rulers, but symbolic names descriptive of the successive development processes of the first two great periods of Mankind's early history. The mythological accounts for these two periods is therefore pretty much reduced to the story of the founders of these dynasties ("The Royal Myths" pg. 3).

Mahmood Mamdani cites the following myths as a representation of how Rwandans thought of Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa; Mamdani draws these from sources published from court informants in the early twentieth century. Thus, the effect of the myths is to place the three social categories in differing proximity to kingship, which Kigwa represents in the first myth. The divine aspect of the monarch appears as the god Imana in the second. The first myth runs as follows:

> Kigwa's three sons—Gatwa, Gahutu, and Gatutsi—were said to be deprived of a social faculty. One day Gatutsi, the firstborn, suggested that they go to *Imana* (God) and ask for a social faculty. Gatutsi went first, and Imana offered him the faculty of anger. When Gahutu arrived, Imana let him know that only the faculty of disobedience and labor was left, and Gahutu agreed to accept it. Gatwa was the last to arrive and was offered the only remaining faculty, gluttony, which he gladly embraced (79).

The second myth runs as follows:

> To test the ability of his three sons—Gatwa, Gahutu, and Gatutsi—Kigwa carried out an experiment. Entrusting each of his sons with a calabash filled with milk, he told them to watch over it for a night. The morning after, Gatwa was found to have drunk all the milk, and Gahutu to have spilled his; only Gatutsi had kept his milk intact. So, the king entrusted Gatutsi to command the glutton serf Gatwa and the clumsy peasant Gahutu (80).

Mamdani outlined the above court myths to illustrate their obvious usage in legitimating a social hierarchy within the kingdom. Mahmood Mamdani elsewhere discusses the myth in Kigwa and the progenitors of the royal Abanyaginya and Abega clans descend to

Rwanda from heaven. This myth suggests yet another degree of stratification, by which the foremost royal clans were held to have been superior to ordinary Tutsi (79). Maquet has also noted that a number of myths from Rwandan traditions discuss the original coming of the Tutsi to Rwanda, which tends to lend credibility to the theory that social stratification proceeded in some relationship from migration (Maquet "Kingdom" 174). Nigel Eltringham maintains that the descent-from-heaven myths also maintain clan and royal authority, rather than any such hard divisions as race or ethnicity (" 'Invaders' " 432).

Mamdani furthermore draws comparison between these myths and the biblical myth of the Noahic curse of Ham. Mamdani paraphrases the biblical myth as follows:

> The account in Genesis tells of Ham's contempt for his father [Noah], whom he saw drunk and lying naked in a stupor. While Noah's other sons covered their father's nakedness, averting their eyes so as not to witness his shame, Ham did not look away. Noah blessed the descendants of Shem and Japhet, but cursed those of Ham. While Genesis says nothing about the descendants of Ham being black, the claim that they were cursed by being black first appeared in the oral traditions of the Jews when these were recorded in the sixth-century Babylonian Talmud; that same myth depicts Ham as a sinful man and his progeny as degenerates (80).

Mamdani adds that this myth persisted in its racialized form through the Middle Ages and ultimately served as a justification of the Atlantic slave trade in the early modern period (81).[1] Mamdani puts a positive spin on the myths I have cited above when he states that, "Both [the Rwandan and the biblical myths] identify social differences as differences between those whose ancestors were brothers, thus the differences continue to be within a single humanity" (81). Mamdani contrasts this portrayal favorably in comparison with

[1]Contrary to Mamdani's view, David M. Whitford has argued that the Noahic curse did not have a racial or physical connotation among early or medieval Jews or Christians. Instead, the myth justified serfdom in medieval European society and expanded to include African enslavement in early modern times. This interpretation then endured to eventually justify racial segregation in America in the twentieth century (Whitford 1, 2).

the later Hamitic hypotheses that credited the descendants of Ham, as Caucasians, with bringing civilization to Africa (83). Mamdani's reasoning is that earlier versions of the myth at least included Africans and Europeans within the same human family, whereas later Hamitic hypotheses imply that Africans are subhuman or radically distinct from Caucasians. In these formulations, only Caucasians could have brought civilization to Africa, because only Caucasians had the capacity for civilization.

Mamdani's characterization of African as opposed to the European myths assumes two things about them. On the one hand, Mamdani recognizes, obviously, that the myths were not byproducts of innocent speculation, but they were the products of deliberate social construction whose impact was calculable and intentional. Thus he bases his judgment of the myths on their appreciable difference in intent, measurable by the kind of separation they posit between the archetypal personages. Of course, the difference in what I have called intent of the myth—meaning here, in how the archetypes differ from one another in their comparative level of humanness—is a moot question, since what matters is not how myths represent people in society comparatively against other myths, but how those in power use myths to then treat those whom myths claim to represent. As Russell McCutcheon succinctly states:

> Scholars of religion in particular study the way groups manipulate such focusing devices as discourses on origins, endtimes, and nonobvious beings. Or, to put it another way, myths and rituals are mechanisms whereby groups exercise and manage what Smith terms an 'economy of signification.' As scholars, we therefore examine the many narrative, behavioral, and institutional devices groups employ to represent and contest differing conceptions of themselves—and to allocate access to resources based on those conceptions (15, 16).

The contrast Mamdani draws between the ways in which the above myths portray the origins of the archetypal characters touches directly upon what McCutcheon has stated above. The origin myths intentionally constructed society in a way that would then

determine the allocation of resources and the division of labor according to a hierarchy.

A goal of scholars of religious studies has been to illuminate the ways in which myths are able to put everyday signifiers to work in the way that McCutcheon describes. The first such view of the use of physical symbols or descriptors as they appear in myth comes from Emile Durkheim, who stated:

> A sensation, an image is always attached to a definite object or to a collection of such objects, and expresses the momentary state of a particular consciousness. It is essentially individual and subjective. Besides, we are free to do as we like with representations that originate in this way. Of course, when our sensations are immediate, they impose themselves on us in fact. But by rights we are their masters, free to conceive of them otherwise and to picture them in a different order from the one in which they were produced. Nothing binds us to them as long as considerations of another kind do not intervene. So we have two sorts of knowledge that are like opposite poles of intelligence. Under these conditions, to reduce reason to experience is to conjure it away, for the universality and necessity that characterize it are reduced to pure appearance, illusions that can be practically useful but correspond to nothing in things themselves (15, 16).

Durkheim's quote here is relevant because it deals with the process of the formation of archetypes based on existing evidence that one who hears a myth can confirm through personal experience. Durkheim speaks of a "sensation" or "image;" he emphasizes the subjectivity of the experiential image, yet myths such as the ones cited above gain credibility by representing something self-evident as part of a larger non-obvious (and essentially fictitious) system of causation. When he says, "...by rights we are their masters, free to conceive of them otherwise and to picture them in a different order from the one in which they were produced," Durkheim shows how subjective sensations and images become codified as something else, incorporated into a prescription for society in such a way as to make the social structure appear natural or inescapable. This refers to the archetypes or symbols such as the characters in the above myths, which purport to explain not only why the world is the way it is, but why it must remain so. A groundwork for exploitation emerges within this context. As Lincoln puts it, "Myth...'has

the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal....'" (5). Thus, myth constructs society in such a way that replaces subjectively or otherwise value-laden signifiers with taxonomic value according to a social hierarchy, thereby creating a leverage for social control.

The second of Mamdani's assumptions, and the one with which I am in disagreement, is that the myths cited above—one from Rwanda's oral tradition (the sons of Kigwa), one biblical (the Curse of Noah), one emerging in the modern era with the European Enlightenment (the Hamitic hypotheses)—functioned to construct society in the same kind of way. Without venturing from a conceptualization of myth that allows us to classify the three above together in one sense—a sense in which, to quote Geertz, we see myths employ symbols "to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations...by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence," with the purpose of organizing society—I argue that a qualitative difference exists between the Rwandan traditional myths and the European myths that Mamdani has not acknowledged (90). The difference between the European and Rwandan myths centers on how the two myths taxonomize the members of the societies they purport to represent, as well as the medium the separate mythologies utilize to express the relevant distinctions.

Bruce Lincoln defines "taxonomizers" as components of myth, of which "each one establishes the basis for an act of discrimination through which all members of a given class are assigned to one of two [or more] subclasses: those who possess the trait or property in question and those who do not" (133). Lincoln goes on to say that such taxonomizers serve as the basis for "the logical structure whereby social hierarchies are recorded...."(133) When we look to the aforementioned myths for their taxonomizers, or

their bases for classifying people into different groups, we find that the myths have serious differences in their classificatory agendas.

I propose first to discuss the European myths, not as separate entities, but as part of the same taxonomy of races, in which Europeans sought to establish themselves as superior to and natural masters of the Africans. Neither the biblical myth of the Noahic curse nor the pseudo-scientific myth of Hamitic migrations credits Africans with the innate ability to govern themselves or to build civilizations. The emergence of the second category, the Hamitic migration theories, was a stopgap reworking of earlier Noahic versions that Europeans used to account for the accumulation of vast amounts of data contradicting the assumption that blacks were unable to civilize. If the Hamitic theories accord more credit to Africans than did the Noahic curse myths, this was a matter of answering for data that was not refutable; it does not reflect a change in intent on the part of European taxonomizers. The alterations they made were in fact nakedly self-serving: Caucasians explained the growth of civilizations in Africa by theorizing that some Cauasians (whom they called "Hamites") must have intermarried with Africans at a time in the distant past (Mamdani 82, 83).[2]

The taxonomizer in the myth changes from one to the next, with the biblical myth (in its European manifestation) reflecting the taxonomic criterion of Christianity as the prerequisite for civilization. Anthropological theory that emphasized races as fixed according to a natural hierarchy tended to be more pessimistic about the possibility of creating material equality among races, since they assumed non-white races could not

[2] While I have divided "Noahic curse" myths from "Hamitic migration" hypotheses, these categories are not without overlap. However, many or most anthropologists who had recourse to myths of Hamitic migration did not believe in the authority of the Bible as literal history.

properly manage the responsibilities attendant on possessing material wealth.[3] The first taxonomy, since it used myths found in the Christian and Hebrew Bible, deals with the Christian theological question of guilt or innocence and the ability of the person to overcome the guilt of sin through the mediation of the Christian religion. The second taxonomy, often implicitly, looks to the criterion of an innate capacity or fitness that belonged to the Enlightenment mindset as the difficult-to-ascertain ability of human beings to master themselves and the natural world. To take just one example, this mindset appears in the words of the nineteenth century anthropologist Sir William Lawrence:

> The different progress of various nations in general civilization, and in the culture of the arts and sciences, the different characteristics and degree of excellence in their literary productions, their varied forms of government, and many other considerations, convince us beyond the possibility of doubt, that the races of mankind are no less characterised by diversity of mental endowments, than by...differences of...body structure....(Gossett 56)

The unequal endowment of humanity's innate capacities then led, according to Social Darwinist thinking common in the late nineteenth century, to allegedly evolutionary processes of natural selection, "a struggle between individual members of a society, between members of classes of a society, between different nations, and between different races. This conflict...was nature's indispensable method for producing superior men, superior nations and superior races" (Gossett 145).

Having analyzed the meanings and assumptions of European myths, I will now

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[3] For an example of this distinct contrast, one can look to John Hanning Speke's *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* and Arthur de Gobineau's *The Inequality of Human Races*. While both reflect the Eurocentric attitudes regarding race, Speke's conviction that through European leadership and, especially, Christianity, the difference could be overcome is markedly different from de Gobineau's view that only white Europeans possessed the capacity for civilization. Although de Gobineau accepted the Noahic curse as history, he did not see Christianity as offering a hope for the betterment of non-Europeans. Mamdani's exposition of the myths does reflect a distinction between biblically derived versions and pseudo-anthropological versions; yet the distinction is reducible to one of cultural as opposed to biological essentialism. The Rwanda myths do not reflect this kind of essentialist distinction between Tutsi and Hutu.

examine the ways in which the Rwandan myths functioned. Then I will discuss the significant differences between the European myths and the Rwandan court myths that taxonomized Rwandans into three groups of people. I argue that the way in which the Rwandan myths functioned within Rwandan society differs from the way in which the European myths functioned in that society. The Rwandan taxonomizers in the origin myths present a hierarchy of social merits that identify self-mastery and responsibility as valued traits for purposes of leadership and elevated status. The European myths, on the other hand, invoke supposedly inherent racial qualities. On a first reading, the Rwandan myths appear to share the language of the European Hamitic myths, that present social faculties as a function of biological essence—the idea that the origin or identity (the characters are eponyms of the three social groups in the country) of the three sons of Kigwa are determinative of their abilities and status almost suggests itself. However, I will argue that Westerners who attempt to read these myths will approach them in a way that is different from how Rwandans in the precolonial kingdom would have heard them. The Rwandan court myths are similar to the European myths in that they propose hierarchical representations of society based upon taxonomic principles that are as fictitious as the narratives in which they are embedded. In my view, that is where the similarities between the two end. I will make the case for a distinct difference on the grounds that the court myths differed both in the intent of those who framed them and in the reception of those who heard.

Perhaps the easiest place to begin expounding the difference between the European and Rwandan court myths is in the taxonomizers themselves. I have stated above that the court myths offered a hierarchical status scheme based upon merits of self-

mastery and responsibility, whereas other criteria served as the primary taxonomic indicator for the European. To reiterate what I stated in the early pages of this chapter, the function of myths is to take subjective, experiential data and turn them into meaningful symbols, which then function within holistic systems to structure society. The truth of the myths appears to be self-evident to the taxonomizers, which are, or appear to be, empirically verifiable. The Rwandan court myths differ from the European myths in that the taxonomizers in these myths are personality or character traits, not physical features. The two court myths purport to describe the same three groups of people, and the two myths are directly related. So I propose reading across the myths to ascertain the claims that these myths make about specific character traits and their function within society.

The myths take the dimmest view of the Twa. The role that this archetypal character plays in the two myths is simple and easy to interpret. Gatwa, as the last of the three brothers to approach Imana, receives the last and least desirable social faculty, gluttony. When Imana puts Gatwa's social faculty to the test, Gatwa predictably drinks the entire calabash of milk. The principle at work comes through clearly. Of the social faculties, Gatwa's is the most self-serving and represents a failure even to maintain basic self-control. Hence, Gatwa has the lowest position in the social hierarchy. In the time period this thesis addresses—roughly speaking the end of the 18$^{th}$ to the early 20$^{th}$ century—Twa represented around 1% of the total population. This led to some marginalization of this group, although Twa who demonstrated competency could fulfill virtually any function within Rwandan society. In exceptional circumstances, a Twa could even become a patron with his own cattle (Vansina *Antecedents* 48). Late in the

history of the kingdom, a Twa leader became one of the most feared leaders of several revolutionary movements that rose up in opposition to court power; needless to say, this is an accomplishment that would require self-discipline as well as a considerable talent for command (Des Forges *Defeat* 104). Twa could even distinguish themselves at court at various times in the roles of officials, musicians/entertainers, or guards (Vansina *Antecedents* 69, 75, 102; Des Forges *Defeat* 84, 237). Thus, even for the group given the lowest regard in the myth, exceptions were recognized and allowed, even at court. Of course, those Twa who benefited in the cases of these exceptions would be the most likely to possess the faculties of self-discipline and leadership prized in the myth. This makes it very likely that precolonial Rwandans interpreted the myth as touching on social values, rather than as describing fixed or inherited traits.

The treatment of the characters identified as Hutu and Tutsi in the myth further suggest a taxonomy of society with a parochial emphasis on values as opposed to a taxonomy of inherent traits. To Gahutu, Imana accords the social faculties of disobedience and labor. Of course, the myth is not trying to say that disobedience is superior to gluttony, thus placing Gahutu on a higher rung of the ladder than Gatwa. When Imana gives a calabash of milk to Gahutu, he demonstrates his lack of self-discipline and competence by spilling the calabash. This same lack of competency is what prevents Gahutu from receiving a commission of leadership from Imana. Although Gatutsi, according to the myth, receives a faculty of anger, we might interpret this to be a reference to Gatutsi's capacity for command. After all, anger is a necessary component for leaders to have, within measure, to use with insubordination, with enemies of the people whom he represents, or with work that those under his charge have done poorly.

Cross-referencing the two myths, we can read the faculty of anger in this light, because we see that it is Gatutsi who has the self-discipline to properly safeguard the calabash of milk with which Imana has entrusted him. Gatutsi's capacity for self-command is what impels Imana to entrust this son of Kigwa with leadership over his brothers.

To support my interpretation of these court myths, I discuss Rwandan society during the era of centralization and expansion, an historical period lasting from the beginning of the eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth centuries. This discussion focuses on how Hutu and Tutsi identities emerged in contrast to one another. While the Twa represent a third group, they are a very small percentage of the overall population of the country. Thus, Twa ethnic grievances have not emerged as a major element in Rwandan politics. The Twa population, for example, was not stereotyped in the role of either patron or client, as Hutu and Tutsi were, although Twa have historically received the stereotype of being hunters and foragers (Des Forges *Defeat* 4).

The contrasting identities of Hutu and Tutsi developed in Rwanda in the context of centralization and expansion of the precolonial kingdom. The terms first came into use at court, and through court expansion became widespread throughout the kingdom. In court terminology, “Hutu” and “Tutsi” were conceived of as reciprocal and hierarchical (Vansina *Antecedents* 134-139). The sense of the command relationship between Gatutsi and the other two sons of Kigwa is a partial representation of this relationship between the two groups, but the economic structure of the kingdom carried mutual obligations. Through the reciprocity purported to exist through cattle clientship, Hutu and Tutsi were mutually dependent in a cohesive social structure in which Tutsi were lords or patrons and Hutu were their tenants, who worked in exchange for the use of

cattle and for protection (Mamdani 64-66). This normative model of society increasingly did not reflect the plight of the Hutu farmers in the country, a problem that came to a head in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as I will demonstrate in chapter 3.

Because the taxonomy contained in these myths represented a kind of social construction, the myths themselves are actively engaged in the procedures of boundary maintenance that delineate those of elite status from those of common status. The discussion of ethnic boundaries introduced by Fredrik Barth becomes relevant in this context "on the anomalous persons who *change* their ethnic identity: a discovery procedure aiming to lay bare the processes involved in the reproduction of ethnic groups" (6). Although the distinction between Hutu and Tutsi was originally one of class rather than one of ethnicity, Barth's work nevertheless helps to identify the nature of the differentiation between groups as Rwandans originally conceived them. Rene Lemarchand has further illustrated the importance of class in the distinction between groups in Rwandas neighbor to the south, Burundi. Lemarchand has discussed the procedures of *kihutura* and *gutahira*, Kirundi words meaning roughly social promotion or demotion, respectively. *Kihutura* was the name given to the phenomenon whereby a Hutu became Tutsi; although the reverse occurring was rare, *gutahira* designates the fall of a member of the princely class to Tutsi status (8).

The terms Hutu and Tutsi had hierarchical relevance in regard to the armies of the central kingdom. I have chosen to discuss this topic first for three main reasons. The first is that the spread of military activity in the precolonial country was arguably the most important facet of life, both for the purposes of expansion and for the purposes of

social cohesion. Vansina states:

> Armies existed to wage war. This banal truth must be underlined because the historiography has so much stressed their sociopolitical role as the institution that organized the population in peacetime that the fact that armies were tools of war tends to get overlooked. And from the reign of Rujugira [beginning ca. 1770] onward the country was almost continually in a state of war (*Antecedents* 75).

However, I have chosen to emphasize the armies' function in providing Rwandans with a common identity that would last through the colonial conquest. It is also through the forcible unification of disparate regions that the terminology of Hutu and Tutsi became as widespread as it did. The second reason I emphasize the armies is that in this context the two terms came for the first time to describe definite groups of people according to their social functions: combatants were Tutsi and non-combatants, including spies, cattle rustlers, and menials, were Hutu (Vansina *Antecedents* 73-79; 134, 135). Here one can see the way in which the identification of the terms with social faculties played out in social situations. Anger and self-discipline, the two characteristics of Tutsi according to the court myths, are easy to associate with the combatants in the army. Meanwhile, labor fell to the Hutu, whose subordinate position received a justification in that military norms demand self-command the Hutu did not allegedly possess. This example demonstrates a functional hierarchy based on the assertion that there is an ethical or character difference that justifies the established hierarchy. The potential for members to pass between statuses within this system also receives justification from the same ethical basis.

The third reason I emphasize the military is that the activity of the armies and their usage by the court directly created the other two contexts in which I discuss Hutu and Tutsi as classifications in Rwanda. These two contexts are class status and geographical habitation. Given the prevalence of military activity that Vansina asserts, as well as its role in acquiring wealth supporting the central court, one can conclude that

these activities created the context whereby court representatives established the differences between elites and servants as well as the disparities in wealth that existed over geographical distance between the center and the periphery. The virtues set forth in the mythology set the standard for behavioral norms and expectations for both elites and non-elites and to some extent permitted transmission across the boundaries between them.

The acquisition and redistribution of the wealth of the region were the primary methods in which the central court became established as the material and political elite. Because other natural resources were scarce, material wealth was manifested primarily in cattle. Through the exertion of military power, the king was able to acquire the cattle of other leaders in the region, then to redistribute them among powerful lords in return for loyalty, and to create official herds for himself, his ritualists, and his armies (Vansina *Antecedents* 67, 68). This had the effect of expanding the boundaries of the kingdom, whose institutions included the armies themselves. The division of armies into Tutsi and Hutu had the effect of spreading the functional sense of these terms throughout the country and creating the occupational stereotypes of Tutsi as herders and Hutu as farmers (Vansina *Antecedents* 135). Meanwhile, the concentration of cattle wealth at court allowed for the beginnings of a rich and complex culture at court, in which elites expressed their status through luxury commodities (Vansina *Antecedents* 81-85, 157). Army commanders became prominent at court while their distant armies represented central control; thus, these commanders replaced the local chiefs as the authority figures in these peripheral regions (Vansina *Antecedents* 78). Those who frequented court life imitated the king, who enjoyed the foremost status as the Rwandan ideal in terms of

attire, manners, language, and, as in the case of Mazimpaka, physical beauty (Vansina *Antecedents* 84).

The usage of the term "Hutu" to denote foreigners also dates to the period of expansion by the central kingdom. Expansion occurred from the regions south of the Nyabarongo River to the east, north, and west. Expansion to the south did occur, although the central court found that serious campaigns of expansion could go no further than the border of Burundi. Vansina states that to the north and west, all persons came to be "Hutu" in the court nomenclature, while to the east and south, the court customarily assumed that persons of both Hutu and Tutsi status resided *(Antecedents* 135). With the expansion of central power and the culture of prosperity exemplified at court, those who faced integration at the coming of central armies had one of two reactions. Some fled to regions that lay beyond the reach of the central kingdom; others embraced the court culture and sought to achieve some of the material success that it offered by accepting the standards and expectations that it set forth. Others accepted court power as a new reality rather than risk losing everything through resistance (Vansina *Antecedents* 71).

As expansion and centralization progressed, the court usage of the term "Hutu" in the sense of foreigners extended to persons living especially in the regions of Gisaka to the east, Kinyaga to the west, and Ndorwa to the north. This brought the terminology of "Hutu" and "Tutsi" as designations of status into wider usage. It then also became possible for individuals within the system possessing the endowments of wealth, competency, or connection to negotiate court definitions to their advantage. The myths that Mamdani cited showed that the gradation between these identities was conceived by the court as a function of personal merit, such as self-discipline and the capacity for

leadership or warfare.

In regard to Rwandan scholarship, I argue that this model of the precolonial kingdom provides an extremely relevant basis for changing the discussion surrounding Hutu and Tutsi as historic identities. These were designations of status relative to a historical, court-centered norm or ideal. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate that the central court of the precolonial kingdom did acknowledge disparities in wealth and in geographical space existing between the Tutsi central court and the Hutu peoples of border regions. While this disparity received acknowledgment from the court in ritual and ideological symbolism, the economic and political realities of the expanding kingdom precluded the possibility of giving actual representation to Hutu leadership. For this reason, revolutionary movements emerged to contest expansion as well as to assert a claim to the very kingship that was symbolic of central authority.

## Chapter 2: The Nyabarongo River: The King as Ritual Mediator

In this chapter, I focus on the ideology of divine kingship as a conservative basis for social cohesion and economic prosperity. The ideology of divine kingship primarily served to legitimate the hierarchy and the centralization that was occurring in Rwanda in the two centuries prior to colonialism. At the same time, the ritual performance of kingship demonstrated the court's recognition of a reciprocity between the court and its subjects, across economic and geographical disparities. In one of his primary ritual functions, the king physically served as a mediator for this geographical disparity. Understanding what the identities of Tutsi and Hutu mean and how that meaning has changed over time is vital to understanding the origins of Rwandan politics. I argue with Jan Vansina that these terms originated in the context of pre-colonial centralization and then came to include the occupational connotations with which they would later be identified. However, at no time until the 1930s, by the direct action of the Belgian administration, did the terms Hutu and Tutsi have the connotation of fixed races of people with biological, essential attributes (Longman *Christianity* 65). With the use of oral tradition, the Nyiginya court[4] were able to masterfully invoke myth and construct ritual to legitimate the king's authority within, and beyond the borders of, the kingdom. Some degree of sensitivity to the kingdom's social conditions and problems helped

[4] "Nyiginya" refers to the dynastic family that controlled the court for most of Rwanda's history. In this paper "Nyiginya court" and "Rwandan royal court" are interchangeable, until the colonial period.

inform their actions.

The terms Hutu and Tutsi came into being in reference to geographical location as well as class or status. Rwanda's emergence into nationhood began in earnest almost two centuries prior to colonialism, with the expansion of a strong central kingdom that developed a pronounced hierarchical structure by the end of the nineteenth century (Vansina *Antecedents* 67). However, the borders of the emerging central kingdom did not include all of the surrounding territories and political bodies that would come to be a part of the nation during colonialism. People of these regions retained a degree of autonomy in spite of ongoing efforts by the central kingdom to incorporate them. The peoples of the surrounding regions first appear in a collective entity as the cultural "Other" in relationship to the central kingdom.[5] It is in the context of this identification between the ruling class and the "Other" that the terms "Hutu" and "Tutsi" emerge.

Thus centralization provides the basis for the usage of the terms "Tutsi" and "Hutu" prior to colonization; the terms developed in tandem with the growth of the kingdom and are of comparatively recent origin (Vansina *Antecedents* 234). To look at the distinction as primordial is a major error that Westerners frequently make when trying to understand Rwandan history. When the term "Tutsi" probably originated in reference to people who herded cattle, only later to assume its connotations of elite status at court, the term "Hutu" came into use as a pejorative. The word could have a number of different meanings; most commonly it identified one who was a servant or social inferior.

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[5] Catharine and David Newbury have taken major strides toward re-conceptualizing precolonial Rwanda as a loosely knit cluster of imperfectly incorporated kingdoms or political bodies around an expanding central kingdom. See *The Cohesion of Oppression* and *The Land Beyond the Mists: Essays on Identity and Authority in Precolonial Congo and Rwanda* for more discussion of precolonial realities. Together, the Newburys have demonstrated that a complete picture of the precolonial peoples demands taking each region on its own terms.

Alternately, it could refer to a rustic peasant removed from the society emerging around the kingdom, in a similar sense to the archaic English terms "boor" or "villain" (Vansina *Antecedents* 271). The pejorative would have applied to persons of subject status living within the kingdom as well as nobles and subjects in the surrounding regions. When the terms were first in use in distinction from one another, the difference became hierarchical. It is debatable that the division took on the nature of an ethnic division prior to colonialism, through Tutsi patterns of other-avoidance; however, it is not at all possible to claim that the division carried the baggage of scientific European race theory until colonialism (Vansina *Antecedents* 134).[6]

"Tutsi" was self-applied by elites and rulers of the court, whose power derived from their economic control of cattle. Conversely, "Hutu" referred to outsiders, comprised of two general categories of people: the subjects in the central kingdom, and all people of the surrounding kingdoms, subjects and rulers alike, whom the central kingdom were interested in incorporating. To identify as a Tutsi, one needed to be of the ruling class, which normally meant serving as an official in or from the central kingdom, not one of the surrounding smaller kingdoms. Furthermore, it is unlikely that people in the kingdoms outside the central kingdom would have used the term "Hutu" at all in reference to themselves, perhaps through most of the colonial period (C. Newbury *Cohesion* 10, 11).

The expanding central kingdom acquired a large amount of political power through its marshaling of resources. One major institution that enabled it to do this was

[6] See also Mamdani 101: "[D]uring the founding period of the state of Rwanda...Tutsi was most likely an ethnic identity. Hutu...was never an ethnic identity; it was rather constructed as a transethnic identity of subjects."

the system of clientship that is probably the best-known feature of the pre-colonial economy. The usage of the constructed identities of Hutu and Tutsi and the economic disparity between them hardened to some degree, though not completely, around the institution of *uburetwa*, a form of patronage in which a Tutsi noble requisitioned labor from Hutu who inhabited the noble's lands (Vansina *Antecedents* 134). This form of clientship emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. While Jan Vansina saw the development of *uburetwa* as splitting Rwandan society into polarized and fixed ethnic identities through growing class inequalities before colonialism (Vansina *Antecedents* 134), Western sources during the earlier part of the colonial period indicate that these identities still depended on context, rather than on birth. They also suggest that the division was not fixed, but had strong connotations of status and occupation, with the Tutsi generally occupying the upper status and controlling the use of cattle. Hutu were lower class and generally practiced agriculture, although many herded cattle as well, if only through their obligations as clients of the Tutsi patrons. In 1922, Leon Classe, Vicar Apostolic of the Catholic White Fathers for most of the colonial period, wrote:

> It should be noted that the term 'Tuutsi' often refers not to origin (descent) but to social condition, or wealth, especially as regards cattle: whoever is a chief, or who is rich will often be referred to as Tuutsi. Frequently also, because of their manner or their language...the inhabitants of the provinces of Central Rwanda...are referred to as Tuutsi (C. Newbury *Cohesion* 12).

As late as 1939, it was still possible for the historian Louis de Lacger to explain the terminology of Hutu and Tutsi as qualifiers or accepted discourse with reference to social status or class rather than as fixed racial identities. According to Lacger, a Hutu could become Tutsi through acquiring wealth and economic power, while a Tutsi could become Hutu through losing them (C. Newbury *Cohesion* 12). Considering the fact that Belgian administrators would turn Hutu and Tutsi into stratified ethnic identities as a matter of

policy on the basis of the racial argument, these statements may come as a surprise. This is especially true since they date to within less than ten years of the policy to implement ethnic identification cards.

One common way that scholars have interpreted the difference between Tutsi and Hutu, especially in the mid-twentieth century, was to say that they were caste identities in a feudal society. This is what is known as the "functionalist" view of Rwanda's pre-colonial history. This feudal model depended heavily on the institution of clientship. For much of the twentieth century, the scholarly orthodoxy was that clientship institutions served to unite society vertically, across lines of socioeconomic inequality. The most representative work in portraying this view of pre-colonial Rwanda has been Jean-Jacques Maquet's *The Premise of Inequality in Rwanda,* first published in the 1950s. The interpretation of the two groups as castes is a major change from the European writers who described the groups in terms of class status in the 1920s and 1930s, seen above in the writings of Classe and Lacger.

In *The Cohesion of Oppression*, Catharine Newbury challenged Maquet's model of Rwandan society. Newbury stated that Hutu and Tutsi cannot have been castes on the grounds that economic specialization was not as clear-cut as scholars since Maquet had thought. She also cited Classe and Lacger to show that the terms were situational, and one person could be both Hutu and Tutsi during the course of a single lifetime. Additionally, Newbury made the important observation that, in contrast to cultures that employ a caste system, Rwandans had no religious ideology to sanction the Tutsi-Hutu distinction (11). On the one hand, this argument from Newbury is debatable on the grounds of the myths I discuss in the previous chapter. On the other hand, I would

contest the assertion purely on the grounds that Rwandans did not recognize the Western dichotomy between sacred and secular spheres; any institution or component of society that required explanation would receive what Westerners could see as a religious explanation (Mamdani 79, 80). However, Newbury is also partially correct, because to think of pre-colonial Rwandan religion as a uniform set of doctrines for all to accept is equally inaccurate. While the institution of divine kingship represented an assertion of a unilateral religious prerogative on the part of the monarch, local regional religious movements rose up to challenge this assertion. One such resistance movement will be the subject of chapter 3. Ancestor-veneration was another means by which local power organized and asserted itself.

I contend that political entities in Rwanda both before and during colonialism shared a religious culture, and that this culture provided the basis for social action through religious discourse. Bruce Lincoln's argument for the instrumentality of the past uses the example of ancestral invocations in societies organized around the clan. This is directly relevant to Rwandan society, which observed a system of ancestor-veneration prior to colonialism. Lincoln observes that, by selectively invoking ancestors either shared or not in the case of quarrels between lineages, societies may draw on sentiments to mobilize inter-lineage opposition or appeasement (20).

Lincoln has provided examples in which myths (which he defines as a narrative possessing both credibility and authority, thus including ancestor-invocation, among other variations) legitimate both conservative as well as revolutionary programs (25, 45-50). Both conservative, hierarchical motivations, representing the royal court of the central kingdom, as well as dispersed revolutionary motivations (especially in the

prophetic movements of the northern region) appear in the information that currently is available on the precolonial and colonial religion of Rwanda. Culture is thus a comprehensible phenomenon that one can approach through sociopolitical referents. However, a major element that I will discuss with this thesis will be the failure to adequately interpret culture on the part of the Europeans during the colonial period. My goal is to explain, how, in this situation, sociopolitical referents were misinterpreted and, as a result of this misinterpretation, how a society with serious internal conflicts came into being. In doing so, I will show how, in keeping with Lincoln's ideas, elites make use of myth to shape and alter societies.

I begin my analysis of the religious culture of Rwanda by describing the institution of the *mwami* or king. The office of the king was mythically associated with the hierarchy of the central kingdom; the most well-known economic referent of this hierarchy is the institution of clientship. The Kinyarwanda terms *ubuhake* and *uburetwa* designate two forms of clientship. Rwanda scholarship historically has focused on *ubuhake.* While Mamdani maintains that a degree of reciprocity between patrons and clients existed under this system (66), both he and Newbury assert that *ubuhake* was in reality a system that reflected growing exploitation of patrons over clients (Newbury 73, Mamdani 65); by comparison, *uburetwa* begins at a later period in history and is still more exploitative (Mamdani 66). I also claim that the king's role of unifying the central kingdom with its neighbors involved a ritual mediation of space that came into effect in a recasting of the ideology of divine kingship near the end of the eighteenth century. In the process, it will be necessary for me to discuss the ritual function of the Nyabarongo River, as well as the ritual opposition of regions north and south of this river. Some

discussion of certain political and cultural differences between regions of north and south will also become necessary.

The case for discussing Rwanda's precolonial monarchy as an example of divine kingship comes directly out of Rwanda's oral tradition. Prior to his coronation, the king was a member of the Tutsi nobility, residing at a royal court in the center of the country. After taking the throne, the traditions accorded him a higher status. As Jan Vansina wrote:

> The essence of the royal quality is expressed in the saying that "the king, he is God" in which "God" translates as "*imana.*" This word refers to the essence of life or of fecundity. This essence manifests itself in all sorts of things, including objects used for a divination of which the result was favorable. Such objects are kept as material proof of *imana nziza*, "a favorable fate." In the abstract "*imana*" now refers to a being who is the creator or God (Vansina *Antecedents* 83)

This status of the precolonial monarch found in the oral tradition makes it necessary to contextualize the Rwandan monarch in the larger phenomenon of divine kingship found through much of precolonial Africa and similar to other institutions throughout the world. In *The Golden Bough*, James Frazer first remarked on this institution as being essentially founded in the equivalence between the monarch and the prosperity of the kingdom. Divine kingship, according to Frazer, was an office similar to that of a magician or priest, in that it linked prosperity to the correct practice of ritual formulae (100, 105, 106). Frazer's divine kings endured a severe loss of personal autonomy; the demands of the rituals were so taxing that the king oftentimes was constrained to performing the duties of office and nothing more. If the guaranteed prosperity did not appear, the king must undergo punishment or death. In Frazer's model, the fortuitous succession from one king to the next was only assured through the practice of regicide, as only regicide guaranteed that the soul of the king could be appropriately retained and transmitted by ritualists to a

vigorous successor (320, 321).

The Rwandan king was in the position of being personally constrained by a litany of rituals like those Frazer described. Although Frazer's illustrative language tends to caricature divine kings as total weaklings, the Rwandan kings similarly had little political power to match their theoretically immense mystical and ritual importance (Vansina *Antecedents* 94)[7]. While Vansina and Maquet, among others, agree that the Rwandan king was identified with prosperity, there is no record that the Rwandan king underwent the ritual of regicide as hypothesized by Frazer among, for example, the Shilluk of the Sudan.

We can get a clear picture of the reason for the absence of a ritual of regicide by taking into account E.E. Evans-Pritchard's view of the Shilluk ritual. As discussed by Benjamin Ray, Evans-Pritchard viewed regicide as necessitated by the existence of factional competition. When the king became too closely associated with the interests of one faction over the other, thus threatening the universality of the office, regicide presented the pretext for eliminating the king and restoring balance by installing a new king. While Ray himself acknowledges a lack of evidence to support Evans-Pritchard's view, Ray endorses this argument in that it roots kingship in the domain of politics, rather than in mystical doctrine (Ray 121). This nuance is of value as we return again to Rwanda; while ritual regicide such as Frazer described was unknown, the occasional

[7] The scholarship on Rwandan kingship thus underwent a significance change in direction after Jacques Maquet asserted the absolutism of the king in *The Premise of Inequality in Ruanda,* 1961. In *Civilizations of Black Africa* (1972), however, Maquet does give the suggestion of the ritual constraints of divine kingship: "The king is identified with his kingdom so closely that if his strength declines his country becomes weak; that is why he cannot survive the onset of old age; he lives in ritual isolation which as far as possible prevents contacts with the profane, he cannot eat in public, often during audiences he is protected by a curtain from the public gaze...." (Maquet *Civilizations* 130). There is no suggestion by Vansina that Rwandan monarchs underwent the ritual of regicide.

coup d'etat or civil war did tend to emerge from the conflict between court interests. One such coup occurring late in the nineteenth century sparked several resistance movements among subjects of the central court who did not have any means of representation at court. This episode in Rwanda's history forms part of the discussion in chapter 3 of this essay. The coup subsequent resistance movements demonstrate the imbalance in representation in Rwanda at the time.

In *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship in Buganda*, Ray offers further challenges to the idea that divine kingship pertained to all African societies. Although John Roscoe, a student of Frazer and early scholar on Buganda, attributed many elements of Frazer's theory to Bugandan kingship, Roscoe was incorrect in many instances. The Bugandan king was not an incarnate deity and did not become one after death; the king did not embody a cosmic life force and did not suffer ritual execution in old age. Although, as Ray says, the gods and royal ancestors were "metaphysically the same," the royal ancestors were inferior to other gods representative of war or other elements of Bugandan society. If the term "god" had any application to the king, Ray states, it is as a matter of social status rather than as a means of identifying the king with a high god. The gods served the state of Buganda, according to Ray, and the king served the gods and their cult (41-49). Ray's critiques of Roscoe suggest several applications to Rwanda's situation as well. In Rwanda too, the king did not have autonomous authority but was subject in many regards to the court's professional ritualists. Vansina's depiction of the king as divine depends upon the identity in terms used to name the high god—Imana—and to identify the essence of fecundity, *imana*, that the king ritually influenced. In keeping with Vansina's interpretation, I have retained "divine" in reference to the king, yet both

Evans-Pritchard's and Ray's critiques should remove the connotation that Frazer and Roscoe projected onto African monarchs.

In Kinyarwanda, Rwanda's primary language, the word for king is *mwami*. At the time Europeans came to the country, the term included the connotation of divinity, with a sense that the sovereign rightfully owned all lands and cattle within the kingdom (Maquet 90, 91). Scholars today say that this absolute authority was invested theoretically and through myth and ritual, rather than as a matter of actual practice (Maquet 124, 125). In some cases the actual control of the king over elites may have been very weak (Vansina *Antecedents* 140).

From Mukarutabana's study of Rwada's oral literature, it becomes evident that the king claimed the foremost mythic and ritual importance in the religious culture of the kingdom. Mukarutabana states,

> The term *Ubucurabwenge* may be translated as the forging of intelligence, or mind. This document lists the genealogy of the Kings of Rwanda…. The genealogical list *Ubucurabwenge* is, as it were, the backbone of the whole Rwanda wisdom literature, around which the other three documents [myth, poetry,and rituals] are structured" ("Introduction" pg. 4).

According to myth and ritual, the king was identified both with the land itself and with Imana, the high god. Through performance of certain rituals, the power of the king assured the prosperity of the kingdom (Vansina *Antecedents* 38, 39). Accompanying the king at court were special ritualists (called *abiiru* in Kinyarwanda) who performed the vital function of providing continuous mythical and ritual legitimation for the king and the government according to the needs of the political moment (Vansina *Antecedents* 38, 39; Des Forges *Defeat* 7). The presence of these ritualists enabled the king to make use of legitimizing narratives. The growth in the ritual and mythic importance of the king occurred as the central kingdom was becoming more powerful. Jan Vansina first

submitted the possibility that a coup in the late eighteenth century not only greatly expanded the mythical importance of the king but also laid a number of new ritual restrictions on the performance of his office (Vansina *Antecedents* 90-95). This same period in Rwanda's history saw the seizure of major amounts of land and cattle from chiefs who had until that time been independent of the central court (Vansina *Antecedents* 68-73).

The rituals of divine kingship were essentially conservative in ideology and function. They mediated "outer" space on behalf of the central kingdom and regularized the passage of history within a cycle of regnal monarchic names. Developments in the ideology of divine kingship that Vansina dates to the latter part of the eighteenth century included the cycle of regnal names, along with a set of ritual obligations. The basis of the cycle of regnal names was that history is cyclical; the unity and prosperity of the kingdom were its objectives. This ritual ideology attempted to bring about the desired prosperity by assuring continuity with a ritualization of a past that had already seen the growth of material wealth and political influence (Vansina *Antecedents* 92).

One can look at the ideology of divine kingship as a mythic parallel to the functionalist approach to the economic institution of clientship. By ritually linking the king to Imana, court tradition legitimated the king's authority by linking him to prosperity. Since the king was mystically identified with the land, it became necessary, according to the court's system, for all people to acknowledge the king's authority. Thus, through his office, the king's existence was good for the land and the people. This ideology parallels the argument by Maquet that the institution of clientship created an unproblematic social cohesion prior to colonialism by linking Hutu and Tutsi through a

"premise" that people in the country were functionally unequal. The invocation of Imana provided legitimation for the strong central kingship, since pre-colonial Rwanda had a monotheistic religious culture. The primary religious practice of common people was the veneration of ancestors, who also had power to bring prosperity or harm, depending on whether or not their descendants faithfully venerated them (Vansina *Antecedents* 30, 31; Maquet 87, 88). To provide a larger geographical cohesion, the court invoked Imana; in a sense, he was the ancestor of all in his role as creator god. Although Imana usually did not interact with people directly, he was believed to be able to influence prosperity (Adekunle 29); hence the divine kingship first conveyed the sense of Rwanda as a unity of formerly dispersed clans and kingdoms with access to divine prosperity through obedience to the king.

This is not to say that in practice the Rwandan kingdom achieved the full expectation of prosperity and unity through the ideology of divine kingship. Real fragmentation did exist within the kingdom, and this was in part because of the exploitation of the court alongside the ruling class's sense of its subjects' and neighbors' inferiority to them. This is the hierarchical structure that the kingship ideology intended to preserve. However, the ritual and mythic nature of the king, identified as he was with prosperity through the invocation of Imana, provides a sense of the court's awareness of a mutual or shared interest or a reciprocity of prosperity between itself and the lower classes and weaker outlying kingdoms. The ritualists who constructed the ideology of the divine king clearly sensed that the nature of the ruler should be the embodiment of the welfare of the entire kingdom and its people, although in practice this ideology condoned

the hierarchy.

The literature on Rwandan history and culture before colonialism offers other examples of the awareness of the obligation of king and court to its people, or its would-be people. While these examples maintain the ritual and mythic pre-eminence of the king, they also find ways of diminishing the king in proximity to the subjects of the central kingdom, or the peoples of border kingdoms. David Newbury elucidates one ritual that provides for the ceremonial reduction of the king for the sake of the unity and prosperity of society. In the *umuganura*, or First Fruits ceremony, the king plays the role of mediator between different groups across ritually opposed realms of geography. Newbury notes that the First Fruits ceremony emerged in the period following major expansions of the kingdom under the leadership of the king Rwabugiri (D. Newbury "Kingship" 233).[8] Rwabugiri ruled Rwanda during most of the second half of the nineteenth century; he was the last king who ruled Rwanda for any substantial period of time without the interference of Europeans. Rwabugiri campaigned continuously and as a result acquired many lands and brought many people under the rule of the central kingdom (D. Newbury "Campaigns" 130). The legitimacy of the central kingdom in its authority of recently (imperfectly) conquered peoples is a major concern of the ritual that Newbury describes. The First Fruits ceremony profoundly reflects the rapid growth that the kingdom had recently undergone, in terms of both space and number of subjects; the

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[8] Vansina argues that the *umuganura* began in the 17th century under king Ndori, whom he believes to have founded the Nyiginya kingdom; nevertheless, he concedes the ritual underwent major changes in the nineteenth century. The manifestation of the ritual Newbury describes must be from this later date, because the ritual diminution of the king reflects developments that followed the recasting of the ideology of kingship in the late eighteenth century. Furthermore, the institutional developments following Rwabugiri brought major changes to the major royal rituals, of which the First Fruits ceremony was among the foremost. Thus, it is necessary to interpret the ritual as portrayed by d'Hertefelt and Coupez in the light of these changes under Rwabugiri.

consequent widening of the obligations of the monarch comes through in the ceremony as equally profound.

The First Fruits ceremony sought to promote the unity of the kingdom through the mediation of the opposing domains in the kingdom through the figure of the king. The first such pairing of opposite domains is in the dichotomic relationship between the lands north and south of the Nyabarongo River.

The Nyabarongo River formed a natural division between the northern and southern regions of the kingdom, with the capital and heart of the Nyiginya kingdom lying to the south of the river. The central kingdom never completely incorporated the north. The distance and geographical features of the north, including the river and mountainous terrain, made this an extremely difficult proposition; although scholars often have spoken broadly of the people of the northern regions as "Hutu," their own preference was to affiliate themselves with the region they inhabited: "people of Rukiga," "...Ndorwa," etc. (Vansina *Antecedents* 138, 139).[9] It is this political cleavage that gave the Nyabarongo River its unique ritual function. David Newbury's assessment of the river as dividing the kingdom into the essences of "Nature" and "Society" is compelling. I do not entirely agree with this conceptualization, however. While the geographical distinction in the ritual surely held deliberate implications for the peoples inhabiting either side, evidence does not suggest that Rwandans of the central kingdom viewed groups as essentially representative of the concept of "Nature" as opposed to "Society," or vice versa (D. Newbury "Kingship" 235). To me, the First Fruits ritual appears to

[9] In *Defeat is the Only Bad News* (ca. 1972), Alison Des Forges confirms the preferred regional nomenclature in a footnote, yet uses the court-inspired distinction of "Hutu" and "Tutsi" through most of her work. This is a testament to how influential court sources would become on the Western scholarly writing.

address the geographic and class distinctions that were potentially problematic to this kingdom.

The ritual mediation of space through the king's physical location was an important concept in the Rwandan ideology of kingship. As in the First Fruits ceremony, the Nyabarongo River provided the most important geographical barrier, as well as ritual demarcation of the kingdom into opposing northern and southern realms. The river marked an important political division as well; although the lands immediately north of the river belonged to the court, further north the regions of Ndorwa and Rukiga gave the kings who tried to incorporate them much trouble. Because of this political cleavage, the issue would have arisen as to where the king ought to locate his court. South of the river was the heart of the kingdom, with most of the king's subjects; clientship was a regular part of life and he ruled more comfortably. North of the river, there were fewer who willingly acknowledged the authority of the king, and a person's lineage held more importance than a person's patron. Without direct intervention from the king, the people living in these regions were more likely to resist attempts at controlling them or even mount an outright rebellion. One king, Ndabarasa, spent the majority of his reign with his armies in the region of Ndorwa; possibly the extended silence from these regions until the end of Rwabugiri's reign late in the nineteenth century began at this time. However, Ndabarasa did this at the expense of maintaining direct presence at his own court (Vansina *Antecedents* 79).

The Nyabarongo River came to take on its important ritual function following the recasting of the ideology of kingship. Under the new ideology of divine kingship, a proscription on crossing the river existed for certain kings, depending on their regnal

name. I argue that these proscriptions represent a ritual mediation of political opposition, or potential opposition, based upon geographical differences between the peoples of north and south. According to the new ideology, there were five names in all and four in a given cycle: Cyirima, Mutara, Kigeri, Mibambwe, and Yuhi. The last three names were fixed in the second through the fourth spots in the rotation. In the first spot, the names Cyirima and Mutara alternated from odd- to even-numbered cycles (Vansina *Antecedents* 92). The first king in each cycle would live south of the river until the performance of the Path of the Watering ritual, at which point, the king would cross the river and live in the north until he died. Following the reign of the first king, Kigeri and Mibambwe ruled without restraint on where they could permissibly travel or dwell. This included regions like Ndorwa or Rukiga, as exemplified by Ndabarasa, who had the regnal name Kigeri. The later king Rwabugiri, well-known for military activity, also had the regnal name Kigeri. Vansina states that the middle kings of the cycle held the ritual expectation of being "warrior" kings and travel frequently and freely (Vansina *Antecedents* 92); hence, the first and final kings of the cycle are seen to balance expansion of the kingdom with preservation of the courtly obligations of the *mwami* and the oversight of more peaceful times. The fourth name in the cycle, Yuhi, represented the closing of the cycle. To perform this closing, Yuhi lived his entire life south of the Nyabarongo river, in the heart of the kingdom. Following his death, his heir, either a Cyirima or a Mutara, would travel north at the Path of the Watering to begin the cycle again. Through the cycle, the presence of the king, which was of the utmost importance to the ideology of prosperity devised at court, could attend to the various regions of their domain proportionately.

Clearly, the ritualization of the king's movement, especially vital in proximity to

the Nyabarongo river, has implications for the identities of "Hutu" and "Tutsi," as defined by the court relative to centralization. As stated before, "Hutu" came into use as a pejorative in relationship to the self-described "Tutsi," who originally applied both identifiers to the people of the region. In this context, "Hutu" could mean either "subject" or "rustic lout." Yet the ideology of the kingship created the possibility, in theory, of Hutu becoming Tutsi. This became possible through the mitigation of the space that separated them—through the extension of court control by the traveling, or "warrior," kings—and through the general access to Imana's prosperity through the embodiment of divinity found in the king himself, enacted through his ritual functions. As seen in the observations of Lacger, Hutu did become Tutsi through acquiring wealth, as late into the colonial period as the 1930s.

The First Fruits ceremony provides another example of a ritual awareness on the part of the court of their own dependency on the Hutu for their well-being, and vice versa. In this ritual, the reciprocity between the Tutsi court and the Hutu is exhibited in the diminution of the king. In the First Fruits ceremony, the ritual proscription of passing across the Nyabarongo maintains; the king's ritual surrogates cross the river for him and transport hoes that have the king's blessing. The town that receives these hoes greets them with the applause and sound of drums, which is the proper greeting for the king himself (D. Newbury "Kingship" 240, 241). Symbolically, the implements of agriculture and the ritual surrogates of the king transport the kingly *imana* (this Kinyarwandan term can also carry the animist sense of the words *mana* or *chi*) to the faraway residents, of whom the residents of the comparatively nearby Bumbogo region symbolize the larger country. The power and authority of the king depart from him, in a sense, during this

ritual, to serve the subjects of the kingdom. The people who receive the hoes use them to sow sorghum, which they then harvest and send south to complete the ritual.

In the later stage of the ceremony, the king's identification with divinity and prosperity is maintained; a meal made from the sorghum is placed in the king's bedroom along with other ritual implements associated with fertility. The king and one of his wives engage in intercourse, as a further symbolic act of fertility, at this phase of the ritual, which takes place in his bedroom at night. Before dawn, an anonymous Hutu takes the sorghum from the house and eats it. Newbury correctly maintains that the ritual introduces the idea of the king as benefactor to the Hutu (D. Newbury "Kingship" 242, 243). In a later phase of the ceremony, the king is seated on a sheepskin, a ritual inversion of his kingly proprieties, as the king is forbidden to wear clothing made of sheepskin, while court custom maintains a taboo against eating lamb or mutton as food (D. Newbury "Kingship" 244). In this, once again, the reduction of the king from his theoretically divine status suggests a move toward the people of the country who are his subjects.

In this chapter, I have shown how the terms "Hutu" and "Tutsi" originated and functioned in the context of centralization prior to the colonial period. While the term "Tutsi" originally applied probably to those who lived from herding cattle, in the context of the increasingly powerful central court, it took on the connotation of the court elites; juxtaposed to this elite status were the people of subject or foreign status, whom they referred to in the pejorative as Hutu. While, in the central kingdom, the usage of terms would take on the connotation of occupation, the status distinction was never entirely lost. As a distinguisher of status, the terms also reflected a person's degree of wealth, so

that the terms were not fixed from birth and one could potentially move from one to the other. Meanwhile, the people of the outer kingdoms whom the court referred to as Hutu never entirely warmed to the designation, continuing to think of themselves merely as inhabitants of the region to which they belonged, Bakiga, Bandorwa, etc. Rather than exerting violent force to maintain control, rulers of the court and their ritualists constructed the ideology of divine kingship as a basis for a) the prosperity of the entire country, including their subjects in clientship relations, and b) the mediation of space between the central kingdom and the surrounding kingdoms, whom the court wished to incorporate and who could potentially take part in the form of prosperity that the divine power of Imana offered through the king. I have argued that this function of kingship is essentially conservative and can be seen to exist as a mythical corollary of the economic inequalities inherent in clientship relationships.

The connection of the rituals of divine kingship did express a desire on the part of the court to provide for the eventual prosperity of what was effectively the lower class. Yet the ritual and symbolic involvement of non-real "Hutu" actors reflected unwillingness on the part of the court to make real provision for them or to divert from the more extreme forms of clientship imposed at the end of the nineteenth century. The court's rituals showed in concrete terms how Roland Barthes described myth as "a form of metalanguage in which preexisting signs are appropriated and stripped of their original context, history, and signification only to be infused with new and mystificatory conceptual content of particular use to the bourgeoisie" (Lincoln 5).

# Chapter 3: The Ones Who Grab: Re-asserting Local Authority

In this chapter, I argue that a revolutionary spirit-possession movement that occurred in northern Rwanda in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries grew from a crisis of representation, in which local northerners sought to assert national sovereignty through the center-controlled institution of divine kingship. The basis for this argument comes from the evidence that northerners viewed themselves increasingly as members of a shared political culture with the more powerful political institutions of the south. The people of different regions wanted to challenge the central court's authority over them. This chapter of the thesis focuses on the Nyabingi spirit-possession cults that arose in the northern regions of Ndorwa and Rukiga. To contest the sovereignty of the king, this movement appealed to the cultural practice of ancestor-veneration, invoking the royal genealogies of Ndorwa's own bygone kingdom. This spirit-possession movement did not challenge the divinity of the Rwandan monarch in theory; instead, it made use of the premises of divine kingship to challenge the legitimacy of the sitting king. To accomplish this challenge to central legitimacy, the spirit-possession movement in question protested for its authority as a coherent ritual and political institution. The chapter focuses on spirit-possession or *imandwa* cults, in particular the Nyabingi cult as a political and cultural movement. This continues the efforts to discuss facets of precolonial Rwandan religion as parts of larger sociopolitical processes. While this movement often serves as an example of conflict, it also clearly

represents an instance of political and cultural discourse.

In his essay on the cult of Nyabingi, Jim Freedman describes the basic ritual of Nyabingi spirit invocation as follows: The person who required the aid of Nyabingi—the name of the widely recognized "ancestor" spirit—would go to a medium (*mugirwa*) who enacted the ritual of being possessed by Nyabingi, at which point in time the inquirer could ask for advice or healing. The response of the medium included a number of cliches—although not in any fixed order or liturgy—giving reference to names of geographical locations or historical persons, genealogies, or events. The names of persons contained in the cliches were members of Nyabingi's family (Freedman 172). The illusion that the medium created with this performance, then, was that the spirit of Nyabingi, making contact with the inquirer through the body of the medium, requested supernatural assistance through the company of spirits whom she knew in life and with whom she continued to associate in the afterlife. Cliches that the mediums frequently used include the following: "Should I be lying, send me to the Bagina who have killed Murari!" was the oath that regularly concluded Nyabingi-possession rituals; the Nyabingi spirit invoked other spirits through what certainly appear to be genealogical sequences: "Gahaya *ka* Murari *wa* Nyakajunga"; other names invoked included, "Nyabunyana, the mother of Nyabingi"; "Quickly Rutindangyezi, lighting of Gahaya, son of Murari, grandson of Rubunda...."; "Nyabingi of my father, be with you, you have come by way of Mahura, you have come by Mpororo, you have passed by Ndorwa and have crossed the Nduga, Rutindangeri, son of Gahaya, be with you..." (Freedman 171, 172). By drawing on these genealogical names and geographical locations, the medium invoked the royal

and ancestral power of the old kingdom if Ndorwa.

Historical factors that precipitated the emergence of the Nyabingi cult show that this movement was a move for national representation of local interests, rather than a rebellion against kingship itself or a push for local independence. The fact that this was able to occur shows that inhabitants in the north who joined the cult had to share in a high degree the culture of the central court. This strongly suggests that the north and the center did belong to a single culture, with a boundary such as Barth described dividing the two, rather than totally separate cultures (6). The Nyabingi cult's coalescence under the leadership of Muhumusa was able to occur because of succession crises that had violated hereditary processes and installed a king who did not have a legitimate claim. Muhumusa herself came from the central kingdom; she had been a wife, as she claimed, of the Rwandan king Rwabugiri, who had died in 1895. She had been forced to flee from court in the aftermath of the coup against Rwabugiri's chosen successor. This coup had resulted in the death of Rwabugiri's appointed successor, Rutarindwa, and in the accession of Musinga, then still a child. Muhumusa had brought with her a son who was eligible to succeed Rwabugiri in place of Musinga; she built her movement as a challenge to Musinga's legitimacy (Des Forges *Defeat* 103). Muhumusa's ability to arouse local support for her movement came from the prophetic expectations that a woman named Nyabingi would return to the region to lift the oppression of the central kingdom from the local people. She had been a member of or aide to the Ndorwan royal family and possessed special powers. In addition to identifying as a wife of Rwabugiri, Muhumusa claimed to be Nyabingi herself, thus fulfilling the regional desire for a historical

charismatic leader.

The socioeconomic context of the Nyabingi and other revolutionary cults of the period was that of growing inequality and the spread and solidification of Tutsi hegemony and control. Freedman argued that the Nyabingi ritual was a means of establishing a political order independently of one that currently existed and without reference to one that had previously existed. He did not see this system as primarily existing to preserve or to protest against another political institution. The position I take contradicts Freedman's arguments on both points. I argue that the Nyabingi spirit-possession cult of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries derived its religious authority from the culture of the wider region.[10] This regional culture transcended the kingdom of Rwanda, including much of the African Great Lakes area. Elizabeth Hopkins has noted that when the Nyabingi cults first emerged in the late nineteenth century, they already had the characteristic of offering protection to Hutu against central expansion (262). Like other revolutionary movements in peripheral regions, these groups identified themselves in opposition to the central court when they saw their own labors reinforcing court prosperity while doing little to increase their own material wellbeing or political power. This happened concurrently with the introduction of harsher clientship practices that increased the demands the court placed on northerners (Vansina *Antecedents* 135, 136). While the cult remains of interest to scholarship primarily as a revolutionary movement in the context of Rwanda's late monarchical and colonial periods, its effectiveness in this role was inseparable from its ability to mobilize beliefs and spiritual

[10] Freedman also challenged the status of the Nyabingi cult as an example of the *imandwa* complex, yet his argument in part rests on the fact that Freedman did not see this cult as protesting the central court, which he said that the *imandwa* did and which I argue that Nyabingi did. See Freedman, p. 171

entities recognizable to a large region. The movement emerged as one of many *imandwa*, or spirit-possession cults that grew out of the regional practice of ancestor-veneration.

Ancestor-veneration in Rwanda predated the emergence of a powerful central kingdom. Each person was born into a lineage associated with a specific hill, often along with several other lineages. Once a lineage became too large, there would be conflict, at which point a new lineage would break away from the old one, move to a new hill, and begin its new ancestral genealogy with the oldest male (Vansina *Antecedents* 31). A sense of this kind of identity and its political utility in oral cultures appears in Bruce Lincoln's discussion of ancestor-invocation:

> [W]hen a man of lineage 1 struggles with a man of lineage 2, they invoke Ancestors 1 and 2 respectively, that is, the apical ancestors from whom they and all members of their lineages claim descent—but not more remote antecedents nor others more proximate. When the time arrives to make peace, however, they invoke Ancestor A together: the figure through whose recollection may be formed that social group in which they are reunited (20).

Since conflict resulted in the migration of the now divided lineage, lineage and geography (or hill) were thus very closely associated. One's lineage and genealogy were also of vital importance in precolonial Rwanda, since one was responsible for obtaining revenge in the event that a member of the same lineage was killed or robbed (Vansina *Antecedents* 30, 31). In this way veneration of the ancestors belonging to one's lineage created very important ties of loyalty that often preceded the loyalty to king or patron.

As centralization advanced into the late eighteenth century, a significant change in the ideology of divine kingship occurred, that greatly affected the regional practice of ancestor-veneration. This recasting of kingship ideology brought about the cycles of regnal names, described in the previous chapter; it also brought about changes in the ritual performance of kingship that many scholars since Vansina have observed as restricting the real freedom and individuality of the king for the purposes of increasing

his symbolic status (Vansina *Antecedents* 94). Along with this theoretical elevation of the king, the central court tried to make other changes to the society of the kingdom and the subjects it ruled or aspired to rule. These changes included abolishing ancestor-veneration throughout the kingdom (Vansina *Antecedents* 93). The desire to eliminate other ties of loyalty may have been the basis for this move; another reason might have been the court's desire to end the practice of interlineage vendettas. Whatever the reason for the removal of ancestor-veneration practices, the area of Rwandan culture that it most immediately affected was its history, through the elimination of local genealogies.

Although the retention of the genealogy of a lineage by the head of a family as part of that family's private oral tradition was not synonymous with ancestor-veneration, I argue that no clear distinction between the two practices existed. Instead, the one was dependent on the other. I argue that genealogies and ancestor-veneration were interrelated as the backbone of precolonial Rwandan politics, especially at the local level, and especially outside the central kingdom. Thus, the court's decision to ban ancestor-veneration—even though this ban did not last for more than forty years[11]—was an attempt to suppress local politics. The record indicates that in spite of all efforts by the court, the practice of vendettas, mandated by the ancestor cult, was continuous, so this measure by the central court probably was of limited effectiveness (Vansina *Antecedents* 95).

Bruce Lincoln's theory of ancestor invocation corresponds with a feature of Rwanda's oral genealogies: they make claims about a group's origins and explain current

[11] This is an outside estimate based again on Vansina's chronology; see Vansina, *Antecedents*, pp. 93, 213 and 216

relations between social groups. This means that genealogies in oral tradition may undergo alterations when those social relations change (Vansina *Oral Tradition* 182). The invocation that Lincoln mentions above was a vital component in the oral culture of precolonial Rwanda. Conflicts between lineages, usually resulting from the overpopulation of a shared hill, led to the breaking up and forming of new lineages (Vansina *Antecedents* 31). Such a separation also made it necessary for the two new lineages to relocate. From the point of this breaking, the family head would no longer recite the genealogy that was formerly shared as part of the now-broken original lineage; as founder of the new lineage, he became the first in the new genealogy (Vansina *Antecedents* 31). Because lineages occupied a single hill, and the breaking of a lineage meant a move away from the hill and an end to the recitation of the genealogy that had once united that lineage, I argue that genealogies were directly tied to geographical location. These genealogies manifested themselves in recitation, but they also manifested themselves in the rites of ancestor-veneration that the head of the family performed, at shrines located at the residence of the lineage.

As a historian of oral traditions, Jan Vansina has observed that an "amnesia," or loss of genealogical and historical information, occurred following the abolition of ancestor-veneration in the recasting of the ideology of kingship (Vansina *Antecedents* 95). Information concerning bad relations between lineages was encoded in these traditions, as the genealogies indicated circumstances, of varying degrees of historical accuracy, surrounding the original hostilities. The move to ban ancestor-veneration would have impoverished political information for all lineages in Rwanda and the bordering kingdoms; with another measure that was to some degree related to the ban, the

names of earlier kings of the central kingdom whom the historical annals remembered unfavorably did not become part of the four-part cycles of regnal names. Names from the oral tradition that the central court preserved in the cycles were those whom tradition remembered as bringing victory and prosperity. These became the basis for the archetypes to which each king was expected to conform, as a "warrior" king, a "cattle" king, etc. (Vansina *Antecedents* 92). The characteristics associated with each archetype grew more complex over time, with the occurrence or the invention of new historical precedents (Vansina *Antecedents* 94, 95).

The abolition of ancestor-veneration demonstrates the conflict that existed between divine kingship and local ancestor-worship in the precolonial kingdom. This conflict is important in understanding how regional *imandwa* movements came to protest central kingship in favor of local sovereignty. The ban on ancestor-worship took place during the reign of Ndabarasa, a Kigeri "warrior" king, who, as noted in the previous chapter, spent the majority of his reign north of the Nyabarongo River, in the region of Ndorwa. Ndabarasa's military activity and his ongoing presence in this region brought an end to the kingdom in this region, and I would also conclude that the elimination of ancestor-veneration and their shrines was a calculated move to rid prestigious or royal Ndorwan lineages of their key political associations. In addition to policies restricting the veneration of ancestors, the campaigns in Ndorwa eliminated the local sovereignty, an occurrence that in turn brought about the loss of the genealogies for the royal lineage of Ndorwa. Jim Freedman noted the loss of this information in his article on the language of Nyabingi-invocation; according to Freedman, the best historical information available indicates that the Nyabingi invocations preserve the names of some of these Ndorwan

kings (Freedman 173). I argue that the preservation of these names gave the Nyabingi movement a unique potency in uniting the people of the region in protest against central sovereignty; it achieved this potency through giving legitimacy back to local royal history.

The use of dynastic names in Nyabingi-invocations reflected an attitude toward kingship that was common in Africa, according to Vansina:

> In many African or Polynesian kingdoms it was held that the only true general history was dynastic history. Kingship was the expression of the whole country and the past of the royal house was that of the nation....Any connection with royalty reflects on the status of descent or local groups, especially if the anecdote recalls a service rendered to the dynasty, or even more when descent from a king is claimed (Vansina *Oral Tradition* 107).

The Nyabingi movement contested central kingship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by asserting itself and its leading spirit medium, a woman named Muhumusa, as the true representative of two dynasties: the Ndorwan royal lineage—eliminated through military conquest during the eighteenth-century reign of Ndabarasa—and the central monarchy itself, occupied at the time by Musinga. The invocation of Nyabingi made explicit reference to the kings of the earlier dynasty, thereby reasserting local royal history that the conquest had removed.

The destruction of the earlier local monarchy by the central court, and the usurpation of the central kingship by a rival clan toward the end of the nineteenth century, is another factor precipitating the rise of the Nyabingi cult and its practices. The history of the region and its incorporation into Rwanda left northerners with the sense of belonging to a political body that preceded that of the central kingdom. Hopkins has argued that the use of Ndorwan royal tradition unquestionably validated the political aspirations of the cult as well as its imposition of a new centralization to rival that of the central court (264). This identification with an earlier independent monarchy was

foregrounded for local groups in response to the socioeconomic depredations mentioned in chapter one. Freedman describes how the Nyabingi movement made use of dynastic and historical names related to the vanquished Ndorwan kingdom to make a claim for local sovereignty. The invocations that the medium of Nyabingi used included these names and expressions: "Nyabunyana, the mother of Nyabingi;" "quickly Rutindangyezi, lighting of Gahaya, son of Murari, grandson of Rubunda;" "Nyabingi of my father, be with you, you have come by way of Mahura, you have come by Mpororo, you have passed by Ndorwa and have crossed the Nduga, Rutindangeri, son of Gahaya, be with you." Sometimes the invocation took the form of a genealogy of persons in the royal family, such as Murari, Gahaya, or Nyakajunga. The session closed with a claim of the speech's authenticity and the exclamation, "Should I be lying, send me to the Bagina who have killed Murari" (Freedman 171, 172). This phrase made reference to people whom Gahindiro employed to kill the heir to the line of Ndorwan kings after the destruction of the kingdom under Ndabarasa (Freedman 178). This demonstrates that the invocations of Nyabingi tied the spirit-possession movement to a lineage of kings in Ndorwa from at least one hundred years earlier.

Taken together, the *imandwa* spirits generally emerged to supplement ancestor-veneration, creating unity across wider regional bases than those of immediate lineage and hill (Linden and Linden 14). The Kinyarwandan term for these spirits means, "the ones who grab;" the spirits who were the object of this particular form of veneration supposedly took possession of their initiates. Entry into an *imandwa* society was a public event (a *kubandwa* ceremony) at which a person received their initiation into the private society (Freedman 171). Traditionally, the most widely revered *imandwa* in Rwanda was

Ryangombe, venerated mostly in southern and western parts of the kingdom (Adekunle 30). The mythology surrounding Ryangombe seems to indicate some form of opposition to kingship, at least symbolically. According to the mythology, a bull killed Ryangombe. Because the bull sometimes symbolizes the king, this story makes Ryangombe the defeated opponent of the king (Adekunle 30; Vansina *Antecedents* 38, 41; Linden and Linden 14).

The veneration of Ryangombe may have begun as a way of resisting royal power, or Ryangombe may have had a historical origin as a monarch who predated the first Nyiginya. But, by the early eighteenth century at the latest[12], Ryangombe spirit-possession was a regular part of the ritual of the central court. Vansina notes that, while in the early days, the initiation to the spirit-possession movement of Ryangombe brought an egalitarianism along with it, by the nineteenth century, its long history of usage by the highly stratified central court had negated its old egalitarian effect (Vansina *Antecedents* 39)[13]. Regardless of this move away from egalitarianism, a certain taboo prevented the king from making the ritual submission to the spirit of Ryangombe along with his subjects. According to this taboo, the king's elevated status made it unthinkable that he would make such a submission, even to a nearly deified heroic ancestor spirit. Perhaps

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[12] For the date of the incorporation of Ryangombe into the Nyiginya court ritual, see the royal genealogy Vansina put forward using Rwandan oral history in *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda*. He dates the inclusion of Ryangombe spirit-possession in court ritual to the reign of Semugeshi, who followed Ndori and preceded Gisanura. Although Vansina gives only approximate dates for these two kings, he puts Ndori at ca. 1650, with Gisanura coming to power sometime "After 1700," but before the accession of Mazimpaka, ca. 1735 (p. 216); see also Vansina, *Antecedents*, p. 58

13 In the early days of the Ryangombe movement, the cult had been widespread in certain regions, not limited to the court, and had involved the suspension of social distinctions in the initiation and possession ceremonies. Moreover, membership in these cults was voluntary (Vansina *Antecedents* 39). Berger notes that even after incorporation into the central court, Ryangombe initiation was primarily for Hutu; it thus maintained an egalitarian dimension, as it added to the prestige of the Hutu and gave them potential access to court-level patrons (84).

because of certain after-life beliefs associated with Ryangombe, it still seemed beneficial for the king to formally submit to the *imandwa*, so a ritual surrogate underwent the initiation ceremony on behalf of the king (Vansina *Antecedents* 91; Linden and Linden 15). The use of a ritual surrogate further demonstrates the very strong conservative ideology surrounding kingship that existed in Rwanda through much of the precolonial kingdom. The king's theoretically divine autonomy would remain an institution of the Rwandan court until the end of the colonial period.

The shift in the ideology of Ryangombe spirit-possession, seemingly from anti-monarchical to a ritual institution of the central court, leads me to conclude that Ryangombe's incorporation by the court resembles in some manner the method by which rulers co-opt certain movements, as Antonio Gramsci outlines in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks.* According to Gramsci, class conflicts play out in civil society, as social groups resist control by a state or government through the construction of their own institutions. In response, governments or ruling classes try to extend their power over these institutions. Timothy Longman defines civil society as an "emergent area of autonomous social action...in which people are able to envision alternatives to the existing order" and which "creates possibilities for those who lack access to state power to empower themselves through other means" (Longman *Christianity* 21-24). These earlier spirit-possession practices united geographically and economically dispersed lineages and provided a means of challenging kingship as the ultimate authority and means to prosperity. Also, the potency of spirit-possession movements to challenge authority declined by becoming closely associated with and serving to legitimate the existing state. The trouble that Ryangombe initiation originally caused for kingship

speaks to the political utility of ancestor-veneration and *imandwa* initiation.

The example of Ryangombe is not unique; while tension existed between monarchs and mediums throughout East Africa, the historical tendency was for these institutions to move toward integration. In states weaker than the Rwandan court, mediums often had more influence or could insist that even the monarch undergo initiation (Berger 86). This tendency toward integration was so pronounced by the late nineteenth century that Berger classifies the militant resistance of the Nyabingi movement as a re-emergence of a phenomenon properly belonging to an earlier historical period (86). Surely such a development speaks to the unique degree of power exercised by the Rwandan state on the eve of colonialism.

As a new manifestation on the culture of ancestor-veneration that predominated in northern regions of Rwanda, the spirit-possession cults reflected an important point of resistance in the spread of court influence. The litany of dynastic names found in the Nyabingi invocations serves the purpose of a genealogical recitation, in that it keeps alive the memory of and allegiance to the earlier monarchy. It also ties them to the region in the memory of the cult, by invoking the names of geographical locations with which northern Hutu would be familiar.

The Nyabingi movement provides an example of *imandwa* spirit-possession cults; these cults originated in beliefs in ancestor veneration. As the most widespread religious practice in the kingdoms of the Great Lakes region, ancestor veneration had the potential to unite (as well as to divide) diverse lineages over wide territories. Iris Berger states that spirit mediumship and possession represents the oldest religious culture in the region, probably preceding the movement of pastoralists into East Africa (67, 89). As such,

spirit mediumship and possession has been integrally connected to power and resistance throughout East African history. An *imandwa* cult emerged for an ancestor or dynastic spirit whose veneration came to pervade a geographical area above and beyond that of a single lineage. While scholars have historically suggested evolutionary models for the development of these movements that bear some similarity to the views of E.B. Tylor, I argue that the culture of ancestor veneration created a possibility for counter-hegemonic identity to emerge through incorporation of certain ancestor spirits by many lineages[13]. Through the connection between ancestor veneration and prosperity, the cult that I examine was able to create a nucleus for rituals of prosperity that sought to rival that of the central court. It is essential to make sense of this new hub in the context of expansion and centralization of the Nyiginya court. The movement ultimately acquired its stature and political directionality as an oppositional force to the Nyiginya.

The Nyabingi cult was an intrinsically local movement that reproduced a local royal lineage through genealogical cliches to supersede loyalty to the divine king. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Rwandan central court overtly opposed the veneration of ancestors in peripheral regions. By extension, one can conclude that the view of the court toward spirit-possession cults was that they were a threat. As stated above, the effect of Nyabingi on the region of Rukiga and Ndorwa was to reinforce lineage-based relationships and authority (Berger 73). The Nyabingi movement utilized lineage-based authority to actively contest the spread of the court's political power. To do this, Nyabingi-invocation made use of local genealogies. These genealogies were

[13] This naturalistic evolutionary approach to religious development may account for Freedman's assertion that Nyabingi was trying to produce a regional governmental body *ex nihilo*. Tylor's model also seems to have informed the interpretation by Ian and Jane Linden, who see the emergence of Ryangombe's cult with the rise of military culture under Ndori; see Linden and Linden, p. 14

contained in the cliches of a Nyabingi medium, as shown in the litanies mentioned earlier by Freedman. These cliches made reference to a local dynasty that the central kingdom had wiped out over a century earlier. The use of the cliches in this way thus had the effect of reversing the attempted removal of local ancestor-veneration and the sense of political identity that went with this kind of veneration. Moreover, since the names contained in the Nyabingi cliches were names of royalty, the effect of the litanies was to recreate a sense of royal identity and authority at a local level.

The use of dynastic names in Nyabingi-invocations reflected an attitude toward kingship that was common in Africa, according to Vansina:

> In many African or Polynesian kingdoms it was held that the only true general history was dynastic history. Kingship was the expression of the whole country and the past of the royal house was that of the nation....Any connection with royalty reflects on the status of descent or local groups, especially if the anecdote recalls a service rendered to the dynasty, or even more when descent from a king is claimed (Vansina *Oral Tradition* 107).

The Nyabingi movement contested central kingship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by asserting itself and its leading spirit medium, a woman named Muhumusa, as the true representative of two dynasties: the Ndorwan royal lineage—eliminated through military conquest during the eighteenth-century reign of Ndabarasa—and the central monarchy itself, occupied at the time by Musinga. The invocation of Nyabingi made explicit reference to the kings of the earlier dynasty, thereby reasserting local royal history that the conquest had removed.

As an instance of ancestor veneration, particularly *imandwa* or spirit-possession cults of the larger Great Lakes region, the Nyabingi cult shows a direct relationship to health and prosperity (Freedman 171, Berger 90). In precolonial Rwanda, ancestor-veneration served to provide a sense of identity within lineages by uniting familial groups of varying size under different historical predecessors. The smallest basic political unit

consisted of three generations of patrilineal descent, associated with the hill on which they made their home. The head of each family had the responsibility of offering veneration to each male ancestor of the family since the founding of the lineage, thus it fell to him also to retain the genealogy of the lineage. In a more limited way than the god Imana, ancestors had a degree of control over the prosperity of their living descendants, according to custom. People might attribute senseless misfortune to a failure to propitiate one's ancestors (Maquet 26, 27). In addition to directly offering healing, *imandwa* spirits offered protection from the harmful ancestor spirits (Berger 73). One might interpret this power of healing and general wellbeing either as an imitation of the powers of prosperity the central king possessed, or as a means of subverting general allegiance to the powers of the king in times of deprivation. This possibility of healing as resistance becomes still stronger after the incorporation by the Rwandan central court of the cult of Ryangombe, another *imandwa* spirit. Rwandan kings were able to make use of this cult to assert power and maintain loyalty throughout the kingdom (Berger 85).

Nyabingi's influence over wellbeing, health, and prosperity clearly shows the cult was not only an independent political identity, but that it challenged the claims of the central court to supremacy. The king of the central court was believed to be the embodiment of Imana, whose name literally means “life” or “fecundity” in Kinyarwanda (Vansina *Antecedents* 82, 83). The rise of the Nyabingi cult also responded to the increase in material demands made on this region by the king and other Tutsi lords. This system of lords spread throughout regions under court control, by order of the monarch (Vansina *Antecedents* 132). These new lords then made material demands on herders and farmers in the region in addition to those of local provincial rulers. One must therefore

attribute the poverty of the northern regions that gave rise to the Nyabingi cult to the deprivations caused by centralization. It is at any rate at this time that Nyabingi's movement emerged, with a pronounced militarism (Berger 84). An especially severe form of cattle clientship emerged in the 1870s, from which time Vansina dated the polarization of Hutu and Tutsi political animosities. Following the change in clientship practices, only Hutu owed the menial client labor; Tutsi, even those of comparatively lower class, did not have the same obligations. Client obligations, moreover, saw a dramatic increase at this time. Designations of "Hutu" or "Tutsi" began to see much wider usage and became more closely affixed to individuals in these decades than they had been in the past (Vansina *Antecedents* 135, 136).

The accumulation and distribution of regional wealth and resources was one goal of the Nyabingi movement, as if to imitate the function that the central court played for the rest of the country. Freedman notes that Nyabingi-invocation differed markedly from other *imandwa* movements in that while most involved a public initiation ceremony, at which the initiate imitated the spirit, in Nyabingi-invocation, the *imandwa* was accessed by a medium in a ritual similar to a private séance (Freedman 171). The shift in the ritual from initiation ceremony to séance is important, because access to the spirit went from being available to anyone, in theory, to being accessible exclusively by the medium. In the present case, the medium was Muhumusa, whose exclusive access gave her the privileged position of a royal claimant. Elizabeth Hopkins has noted that it is this hierarchical structure that enabled the Nyabingi cult to gain ascendancy over other *imandwa* cults. With a single leader able to contact the spirit, the Nyabingi cult achieved the possibilities for a higher degree of economic and political, as well as psychological,

influence over those both within the cult and outside it (Hopkins 261). At the same time, she claimed to speak for the *imandwa* spirit on behalf of economically oppressed people with their grievances (Vansina *Antecdents* 136, 137). Nyabingi's powers included healing and counsel in mundane affairs (Freedman 171). The Nyabingi movement emerged as but one manifestation of a number of movements—brought on by increased exploitation in the late nineteenth century through Rwabugiri's expansionism and the implementation of more severe forms of cattle clientship—that proclaimed a powerful charismatic leader (Vansina *Antecedents* 135-137). Another such movement occurred in the 1890s in the southern part of Rwanda; the leader of this movement was a woman named Nyirafugi, who identified herself with Imana and claimed to have the power to increase the cattle possessed by people of her region and to influence the gender of their as-yet unborn children. Local people viewed her as a potential king-figure who might be able to lead them against the central court until Musinga's predecessor had her arrested and executed (Vansina *Antecedents* 137).

By other methods, leaders of the Nyabingi movement could acquire material resources more directly. The leader of the most prominent Nyabingi cult, and the one on which this chapter focuses, Muhumusa, levied tribute from persons of the region with threats of reprisal from the spirit (Des Forges Defeat 103; Hopkins 259, 260). Ndungutse, leading what came to be the continuation of Muhumusa's cult by claiming to be her heir, acquired enough material wealth to offer large gifts of cattle to Europeans in hopes of garnering their support. Ndungutse had a drum to imitate the symbol of the king's divine authority; he also donned the central monarch's headdress and hairstyle, and he rode in a hammock carried by members of his entourage (Des Forges Defeat 121, 122;

Hopkins 260). Ndungutse advised inhabitants of the area of Rukiga to refuse tribute to the court and to drive out the notables who represented central authority (Des Forges Defeat 120). Although Ndungutse did not claim to be a Nyabingi medium, he did utilize the rhetoric of Muhumusa's movement and claim supernatural powers in battle (Des Forges Defeat 122). Iris Berger notes that, where the Nyabingi movement had authority, some mediums had enough authority to overrule that of lineage heads, though in most cases Nyabingi did not aim to supplant lineage authority but instead reinforced familial bonds (73). So the claims of this movement to influence prosperity found support through imposing levies on local populations and imitating the material opulence and symbolism of the central monarchy.

While in Muhumusa's era, the cult was directed toward asserting local claims to power in an existing centralized political structure, and utilized cultural forms both local and shared with the center, to effect its political aims, it is important to add that women's leadership had an important psychological and structural effect. This effect is relevant primarily to the ability of the mediums to assert local authority in a patrilineal structure in which different clans had a "xenophobic" (to use Hopkins' term) relationship to each other (268). Hopkins asserts that male mediums in the cult wore women's clothing (260). In the case of the particularly effective Muhumusa, her initial authority derived primarily from her reputation for having supernatural control over the harm or well-being of individuals (Hopkins 259). However, the fact that she was a woman in a region dominated by patrilineal clans allowed the Nyabingi cult to acquire a superordinate structure to those clans, whose authority, being philosophically vested in men, was seriously undermined. This in turn enabled the cult to become the pre-eminent political

structure in the region (324, 327). The forms Muhumusa used in asserting herself as a supernatural as well as political entity, however, emerge directly from local and central traditions. Nyabingi was closely associated with the royal lineage of Ndorwa, possibly its queen, while her claims to being wife of Rwabugiri gave her the status of queen mother of Rwanda, a position in theory equal to that of the king himself (Vansina *Antecedents* 38). The strength of the cult only increased after European colonization, although Hopkins asserts that the necessary forms and structure of the cult did not change, but the cult grew stronger while its leadership rallied the movement against Europeans instead of the court (324, 325). The anti-European resistance was not explicitly ideological; instead the cult sought to protect itself and decrease the increased demands for tax and labor the Europeans implemented (Hopkins 329). Nevertheless, the ideological incursions of Christianity and other European patriarchal forms serve as a logical focal point for the same kind of subversion Hopkins discusses in local regions, and Rwandans tended to despise most European influences. As European strength grew in the country, the legitimacy of the cult on all levels became seriously undermined (Hopkins 335).

The Nyabingi movement most likely would not have emerged as strongly in another region. Des Forges notes that the court never completely integrated the regions bordering Rwanda to the north, in spite of military conquests in those regions (Des Forges *Defeat* 11). The court applied the term "Hutu" to inhabitants of northern kingdoms, implying that they were subjects to the central kingdom. However, rituals such as the First Fruits ceremony suggested a regional tension between the north and the center. Furthermore, under the cycle of regnal names, two kings out of every four were

required to spend much of their lives abroad, suggesting again that the court was aware of weakness in these areas. The division ritually represented in the Nyabarongo river might be the most important geographical division in terms of historical conflict between social groups within the country. However, Western scholarship has long done a disservice to the reality of this division by portraying it as the site of "primordial," or worse, "racial" conflict.

European portrayals of this important division between the people of the region have taken many forms, and the idea that their conflicts are attributable to "race-hate" has a long history. A German soldier originally put the idea forward in 1898 (Vansina *Antecedents* 138). To assert the conflict as racial denies the history of the region, including processes of expansion and centralization, as well as economically oppressive circumstances endured by the people in the northern regions who came together in rebellion against the central kingdom. A long time after the worst of scientific race theories were discredited in Western scholarship, "migration hypotheses" continued to maintain the view that Rwanda consisted of two peoples of distinct origins, one of which was a subject indigenous population while the other was a foreign conqueror. More recently, constructivist views of ethnicity have been able to offer evidence that challenges the idea of Tutsi and Hutu as historically discrete groups of people. Peter Uvin provides a clear definition of the constructivist view of ethnicity, especially as it relates to precolonial Rwanda:

> [The integration of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa] had gone far: they spoke the same language, believed in the same god, shared the same culture, belonged to joint clans, and lived side by side throughout the country. There are few cases anywhere in the world of different ethnic groups sharing so many of the same characteristics. This led many to challenge the notion of the existence of ethnic groups in Rwanda. This is erroneous: ethnicity is not a matter of "objective" cultural of physical distinctions but rather is a social construct, an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991), preoccupied with the creation of boundaries between in-

groups and out-groups (Barth, 1969) (Uvin 14, 15).

I have demonstrated that ethnic boundaries in Rwanda prior to colonialism, and even through much of the colonial period, were permeable. Jan Vansina and Catharine Newbury, have offered evidence that the terms refer more to residence and status in proximity to the elites of the central kingdom than they refer to groups indigenous to different regions, or, as Jacques Maquet asserted, that the terms refer to persons of different occupation in a caste system.

When one views the spirit-possession cults of the north as a push for representation and successful movement of resistance against the court, the destruction of these cults by German administrators becomes even more significant. The Germans eliminated the cults by military forces out of a policy of indirect rule that favored the central court. In so doing, the German administration assisted in suppressing one element in a society that was on a brink of plurality and class-consciousness. When the Belgian and French missionaries of the 1940s and 1950s turned on the Tutsi in support of Hutu, it was to the Hutu as an oppressed people, but also the Hutu as the native "race" of Rwanda over Tutsi as the foreign conquering "race." Had the processes of regional and social conflict that arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries been allowed to run their course, the very terminology of Tutsi and Hutu, with their court-centered value-positive and value-negative connotations, may well have fallen into disuse. Since, as scholars Timothy Longman, Alison Des Forges, and Jan Vansina has observed, the central court was not able to suppress northern movements of revolt or fully integrate these regions into the central kingdom without European military aid, it seems all the

more likely that this interpretation should hold.

Contrary to interpretations that emphasize the Nyabingi revolt only as a matter of Tutsi-Hutu conflict, this chapter presents the movement in terms of cultural discourse in response to certain socioeconomic and historical factors. The actions of the central court, as well as rituals including the First Fruits ceremony, the Path of the Watering, and the geographical requirements of the cycles of regnal names demonstrated a consciousness of weakness of the central kingdom in the north. But the possibility of invasions and the encroachment of oppressive economic measures created a hostility in the north that eventually resulted in a reaction embodied in the Nyabingi movement (Vansina *Antecedents* 135, 136). Nevertheless, the Nyabingi cult is best understood as a protest on the part of the north for representation at court that they were unable to achieve. It was also a response to a court that had contradicted its own logic of succession by rebelling against Rwabugiri's chosen heir Rutarindwa in favor of Musinga, of the queen-mother's faction. The refusal of the court to grant representation to its subjects brought about a revolt in the north that had a real possibility of overthrowing the government, were it not for the intervention of the German armies in the early twentieth century to crush the movement. It was when the court showed inconsistency in justifying an illegitimate coup and then accepted the help of Europeans in controlling the country that the Nyabingi cult began threatening an invasion on the south. For court members, the coup was more acceptable, since they had access and influence in the central power structure. My discussion of these spirit-possession cults provides support for a view of precolonial Rwanda that is

complex and dynamic, and offers an interpretation that emphasizes cultural and social discourse rather than merely conflict.

## Conclusion: The Role of Discourse in Precolonial Conflict

The examples in this thesis provide a clearer understanding of the ways in which Rwandan actors organized society, distributing, maintaining, and contesting power as embodied in the central court and the divine king. This view of Rwandan society helps to illustrate and corroborate the constructivist theory of religious myth and ritual that Bruce Lincoln outlines in *Discourse and the Construction of Society.* To return to his discussion of myth and ritual as doing the work of organizing society through taxonomy, Lincoln writes of myth that it "is not just a coding device in which important information is conveyed, on the basis of which actors *can then* construct society. It is also a discursive act through which actors evoke the sentiments out of which society is actively constructed" (25). He says of ritual:

> Like myth, ritual is best understood as an authoritative mode of symbolic discourse and a powerful instrument for the evocation of those sentiments (affinity and estrangement) out of which society is constructed. The differences between the two, although hardly negligible, are in large measure a matter of genre, ritual discourse being primarily gestural and dramatic; mythic discourse, verbal and narrative (53).

My emphasis throughout the thesis has been on the socially constructed nature of myth and ritual as seen in precolonial Rwanda out of social and political factors. Although the methodologies I have applied are strongly rooted in the Western academy, the thrust of this essay has been to reverse the trend of emphasis on conflict and violence and focus on discourse instead.

Drawing from the work on ethnic boundaries by Fredrik Barth, which is also of a distinctively constructivist point of view, this essay has shown how earlier Eurocentric taxonomies of Rwandan society into Hutu and Tutsi wrongly did so on the basis of "race" or "tribe", as though in some way the two groups fundamentally differed at the level of

identity. Rather than accepting essentialist views of ethnicity that see groups as differing on the basis of content, Barth argues that the crucial point in defining ethnicity as being the boundary between ethnic groups, or, "the cultural materials that the actors themselves are deploying to construct their own identities and actions,...not whatever cultural materials the analyst might wish to bring in to characterize cultural differences that may persist between two populations" (6). While the subject of the book Barth edited, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries,* is ethnic boundary-maintenance, he notes in his introduction something that is key to understanding the relationship between "Hutu" and "Tutsi" groups such as the existed prior to colonialism. Barth writes:

> [A] system of stratification does not entail the existence of ethnic groups. Leach (1967) argues convincingly that social classes are distinguished by different sub-cultures, indeed, that this is a more basic characteristic than their hierarchical ordering. However in many systems of stratification we are not dealing with bounded strata at all: the stratification is based simply on the notion of scales and the recognition of an ego-centered level of 'people who are just like us' versus those more select and those more vulgar.... Ethnic groups are not open to this kind of penetration: the ascription of ethnic identity is based on other and more restrictive criteria. This is most clearly illustrated by Knutsson's analysis of the Galla in the context of Ethiopian society....[T]he attainment of a governorship does not make an Amhara of a Galla, nor does estrangement as an outlaw entail the loss of Galla identity. (27)

I argue that it is the model of class and status that really serves to represent the precolonial situation in Rwanda than the model of alternately ethnic, race, or tribal conflict. It is necessary to keep in mind, in keeping with Barth's distinction between what actors themselves use to construct identity as opposed to what analysts use, Mamdani's argument that European rulers constructed Rwanda as divided between two different antagonistic races (87-102). Mamdani has also shown how in restructuring relations between the two groups during the Second Republic (the Hutu administration under Juvenal Habyarimana, 1973-1994), the government viewed Tutsi as an "ethnicity" rather than a "race." This change was able to retire the colonial idea that the Tutsi had a foreign origin, although as a minority ethnicity they were only entitled to limited participation in

government (138).

In reality, both racial and ethnic terms used to describe Hutu and Tutsi are projections onto the past from the present. Although Hutu and Tutsi of precolonial Rwanda had clear distinctions of social status and material culture they nevertheless shared a common language and culture of religious symbols and institutions that illustrate a single ethnic community. The expressions differed depending on the actor and their intentions.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I analyzed a Rwandan origins myth that provides information as to the identities of "Tutsi," "Hutu," and "Twa" as the discourse of the precolonial kingdom constructed them. Since, in this origins myth, the identities of each character correlates to competency and leadership, I have interpreted the myth as a product of centralization and the hierarchy that centralization produced. This myth does not give the idea that Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa identities are intrinsic or "racial," as European systems of thought would later claim. It also makes no mention of occupational characteristics such as herding, farming, or hunting, or any intrinsic physical characteristics. Instead, these identities are constructed as pertaining to the abilities of each character, with Tutsi exhibiting the greatest deal of self-control and the faculty of anger linked with the position of command. Hutu lacks Tutsi's faculties of self-control and leadership and is fit for labor, while Twa is gluttonous and receives a marginalized position in this construction of society. The evidence available shows that although these statuses were generally true throughout the country, there were exceptions in which Hutu or Twa were patrons, or when a person's identity changed during the course of their lifetime as their socioeconomic status changed. This information contradicts the view of

Rwandan society that says that Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa are radically different groups, even to the extent that they are discrete "ethnicities" with definite, essential characteristics. The view of Rwandan society found in this myth does not account for geographical distinctions that determined whether one was considered "Tutsi" or "Hutu."

In the second chapter, I discussed the First Fruits ritual and the patterns of travel of the Rwandan monarchs. I argued that these rituals illustrate a recognition on the part of the central court of the disparities in class and geography that were some of the major distinctions between "Tutsi" and "Hutu" late in the precolonial era. The First Fruits ritual involved a reciprocity between the king serving in his ritual function and an unidentified "Hutu" to symbolize the ideology of the court that legitimated the king's authority over the Hutu as essential to Hutu prosperity. This ritual included the use of the Nyabarongo River as the symbolic division between the north and south of the kingdom, which in essence stood for the geographical division between Hutu- and Tutsi-dominant regions. For this ritual, the king accepted the symbolic diminishing of his status in order to present him as in a sense the servant or guarantor of the prosperity of the Hutu. The restrictions on the king's residence and travel attempted to ensure the unity of Rwanda and the continued success of court power over peripheral regions. In this sense, the king was both the symbolic and the real mediator of power between the center and the periphery of the kingdom. These rituals represent a conservative means of legitimating and perpetuating a system of centralized authority that attempted to address, though it did not resolve, disparities in power and prosperity that existed between Hutu and Tutsi.

The first two chapters discuss uses of myth and ritual by the central court for purposes of legitimating the power of the status quo. The third chapter discussed the

appearance of spirit-possession cults as a means of contesting centralized power at the peripheral regions. Using the example of the Nyabingi cult, I have shown that this spirit-possession cult created a hub of power in the north that contested the power of the center and the legitimacy of the king. The ability of the leadership to use the logic of succession against the monarch and the dynamics of power that brought the center into conflict with the periphery over the matter of ancestor-veneration demonstrate further that precolonial Rwanda including both Hutu and Tutsi is a single, dynamic, and complex society that demonstrates unequal distributions of power. Resistance movements arose that drew from a common religious culture to challenge central power. The representation of the Hutu on behalf of leadership of these movements, which was in some cases Tutsi, or which followers described as Tutsi, shows how these movements came to transcend the regionality of the Hutu/Tutsi dichotomy. This is true of them though they at the same time represented a profoundly local resistance movement.

The purpose of this thesis has been to illustrate that precolonial Rwanda was a complex society that had a large degree of unity and stability. This was true although conflicts over power, including the differences between regions that emerged from centralization, expansion, and conquest, and the inequalities created by these processes of centralization and accumulation of wealth and resources led to deep divisions. My hope is that this thesis will be useful in re-conceptualizing the precolonial era as a precursor to a unified future country of Rwanda that lacks the outdated division that still exists between Hutu and Tutsi. To do this, it has been necessary to re-examine these terms as products of a particular way of constructing Rwandan society. This thesis reverses the scholarly approach that emphasizes conflict without contextualizing conflict according to

relevant social discourse. The northern revolution looked at itself as part of the social construct by which the central kingdom was under obligation to its subjects. This contractual basis served as the impetus for resistance, organized according to the religious practices of the region. This reconceptualization of the history of conflict serves another purpose. The current president of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, has placed a moratorium on the use of the old "ethnic" labels in hopes that silence will solve the conflicts (Straus and Waldorf "Introduction" 8). While it is to be hoped that this approach will prove effective, I argue that a more lasting solution will emerge from critically examining the origins of these terms and their usages as a way of reconceptualizing Rwandans as members of a single contested society. As Mamdani states, "To break the stranglehold of Hutu Power and Tutsi Power on Rwanda's politics, one also needs to break their stranglehold on Rwanda's history writing, and thus history making" (*Victims* 268). I believe that the work I have presented more accurately reflects the historical reality of the Rwandan people.

# Epilogue: Discourse and the Construction of Rwandan Society Today

In closing, I discuss the discourse surrounding persisting dispute between Hutu and Tutsi political identities in present-day Rwanda. In spite of efforts at removing these political identities from the public sphere by the government, there remains strong opposition between the administration—whom critics identify as predominated by Tutsi—and self-identified Hutu who continue to face exclusion from power. In the wake of genocide, the rhetoric between the two sides has remained apocalyptic in its tendency to see the conflict in black-or-white terms. While proponents of Rwanda's current government under president Paul Kagame see the country's direction as moving from a state of genocidal darkness to the light of development and prosperity, critics see the administration as using totalitarian means to suppress dissent. Today, mass media and the internet have become the means for transmitting the rhetoric utilized by either side, as the government and its opposition clash over the possibilities for unity and mutual prosperity in Rwanda's future, the role of Western donors and "experts" in constructing that future, and what president Kagame's legacy ultimately means for the well-being of the country. In spite of strides the country has made economically since the genocide, the two sides remain diametrically opposed on nearly all positions, including whether or not the events of 1994 even constituted genocide at all. Opponents of Kagame's government often claim the genocide is itself a fabrication, while the government views oppositional politics in any form as belonging to the mentality of genocide denial that is a reality among the most vitriolic of its Hutu critics. This epilogue will show how the conflict

between Hutu and Tutsi remains a black-or-white, up-or-down rhetorical battle today. This in turn demonstrates the importance of problematizing these identities historically, understanding their reality as social constructs, and recognizing sociopolitical realities that threaten to preserve these hostilities as Rwanda moves forward under Kagame's governance.

The controversy over the government's approach to ethnicity as a matter of public discourse arises in part because of Article 54 of the Rwandan Constitution, ratified in 2003. The clause states:

> Political organizations are prohibited from basing themselves on race, ethnic group, tribe, clan, region, sex, religion or any other division which may give rise to discrimination. Political organizations must constantly reflect the unity of the people of Rwanda and gender equality and complementality, whether in the recruitment of members, putting in place organs of leadership and in their operations and activities.

The wording in the clause strongly reflects the emphasis on unity and equality that president Kagame has tried to convey as a key feature of Rwandan society moving forward. Yet the removal of ethnicity as an organizing principle in Rwandan politics has created a dilemma. The RPF, which is the political party to which president Kagame belongs, is predominantly Tutsi who first organized as refugees in Uganda. Several critics have noted that Hutu receive marginal positions in political power as well as the burgeoning economy as a result, yet Hutu may not organize in representation of themselves as such. When one looks at the political discourse in Rwanda between Kagame and his critics, it immediately becomes clear that identities of Tutsi and Hutu remain critical distinctions for this society. Yet the moratorium on ethnicity as an organizing principle in effect prohibits nuanced discussion of how identities have been and remain constructed differently at different times. In direct result of this, members of

both sides discuss the conflict in terms that are starkly black and white.

Kagame himself, as Rwanda's foremost political personality, is comparatively moderate in his public statements on relationships between Tutsi and Hutu. Yet his words convey a definite bias toward the Tutsi, and the idea of Tutsi innocence as being the fundamental truth of genocide and consequently of social justice in the wake of genocide remains a clear priority of his. In a recent interview published online in mid-2014 entitled "Rebooting Rwanda: A Conversation With Paul Kagame," the president emphasized unity, reconciliation, and progress, he stated, "After total disintegration, the country is making progress, because the country has come back together. Rwanda has come back to life in many forms….In the *gacaca* courts [courts where defendants accused of genocide went to trial], justice was intertwined with reconciliation, almost in equal measure" (pg. 3, 9). He also pointed to the fact that many who were found guilty went free if they showed remorse and proved they had no choice but to commit acts of genocide (pg. 11). A long-standing criticism of the RPF pursuit of justice in the wake of the genocide has been that the government ignored acts of violence committed by Tutsi against innocent Hutu. Kagame's remarks distinguish between acts of genocide, which he categorizes as exclusively perpetrated by Hutu against Tutsi, and acts of war, which Tutsi may have perpetrated in reprisal against Hutu (pg. 23, 24). When pressed to comment upon the numerical inequalities in number of persons tried that critics see as self-evidently demonstrating a bias in favor of Tutsi, Kagame countered that there is no standard by which to gauge proportionality. In a response to an observation that only 20 Tutsi went to trial for war crimes, the president stated: "[H]ow many should have been

tried? Is it 100? 500? 1,000? I ask you, how many did you want or did you expect? You can't just play with numbers and say, 'No, it should have been something more than this.' Based on what?" Kagame's key distinction was that in the genocide crimes were committed by civilians, whereas acts of violence against civilians in the case of reprisals were the responsibility of commanders; he added that in trying genocidaires, courts also gave priority to degree of responsibility (pg. 27-29).

Kagame also relied on what he saw as the subjective nature of the question in responding to whether Rwanda has achieved political openness:

> I never see a conflict between political openness and social and economic development. Rather, I think the two are intertwined, even if you think one is lagging behind. The social and economic development indicators are very clear. But political openness, or whatever you call it, is subjective. Everybody has a right to define it the way they want, because there isn't tangible specific data to base it on. (pg. 41)

The interviewer then defined political openness as:

> [H]aving a free press that's able to function without fear of government reprisal. It means the freedom to register political parties based on ideology and to hold contested elections where parties can compete on an even footing. And it means the freedom for individuals to speak freely and openly, without fear of repercussions, except maybe in extreme cases. (pg. 44)

Kagame in his reply said both that, "Different countries have different standards," and "[M]y own standards are no different from other standards," without addressing point-by-point the standard as the interviewer worded it (pg. 44, 45).

Kagame's justification of the status quo in Rwanda includes drawing distinctions between how to try Tutsi as opposed to Hutu following the genocide, broadly defined in terms *prima facie* more favorable to Tutsi. He falls back on the subjective nature of terms and definitions and insists on the prosperity, equality, and political opportunity for the "Rwandan people" without assessing whether real disparities exist. Supporters of Kagame similarly tend to deny any ongoing legal or political reality to the terms Hutu

and Tutsi and to accuse critics of the administration of conspiracy, reactionary behavior, or genocide denial. The online newspaper www.newsofrwanda.com is one example of a news source that has accused Westerners including journalists, documentarians, or members of Human Rights Watch of conspiring against or of seeking to undermine president Kagame.

On the side of critics of the administration is the newspaper www.therwandan.com. The political language one finds in this source is black-or-white with Kagame as a propagandist and tyrant. One such article published in December, 2014 by Ambrose Nzeyimana accused Kagame of using deception to control Western influence, accepting money from donors then decrying Western influence when he receives pressure to leave office at the end of his term in 2017. The language of genocide-denial is thick in Nzeyimana's piece, and the author uses the ethnic terms throughout his article, with the words "Hutu" and "Tutsi" written in all capital letters when they appear. Nzeyimana accuses Kagame and the RPF of "Palestinizing" the Hutu community by "treating them the way Palestinians have been treated since the creation of Israel: as pariahs" (pg. 10). Nzeyimana states:

> In the census 1991, there were three ethnic groups in Rwanda, recorded proportionally as in the following statistical figures: HUTU (85%); TUTSI (14%); and TWA (1%). These numbers might have significantly changed since for different reasons, the main one being war. According to today's upheld propaganda, prevalent especially since 1994 and which is found in many circles dominated by TUTSI extremists across the world, HUTU are genocidaires. That propaganda preaches that HUTU are genetically born with the intend [sic] to kill TUTSI…. The [Tutsi exiled during the 1950s] had well observed how effectively the then 'civilized' world had come to the rescue of the Jews during Adolf Hitler military campaigns across Europe of WWII [sic]. At the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, the Rwandan ruling TUTSI elite found that by using the genocide card to attract international sympathy for its minority leading community, its royal and political privileges could be safeguarded. Approximately thirty years later, in 1994, having refined all the required propaganda…understandably with the help of all foreign vested interests which found appropriate to be associated to the new propagandists of genocide, the accusation succeeded. Today, it is widely accepted by many uninformed people outside Rwanda that HUTU are

> genocidaires. This might not be their fault because broad interested parties have heavily invested in that propaganda of tarnishing the image of HUTU for strategic reasons. (pg. 1-9)

Using not only genocide denial but even Holocaust denial amid undercurrents of anti-Semitism, Nzeyimana states the political conflict as one in which Tutsi are all propagandists and Western conspirators; not only is the 1994 "genocide" only a tool of that propaganda, he says, but the Tutsi are casting the Hutu in overtly racist terms as genetically prone to committing such acts of violence.

The rhetoric is uncompromising on either side: the government denies the existence of disparity or political contention, while its critics deny the crimes against humanity that brought the government to power in the first place. The remainder of this epilogue will argue for ways in which present-day Rwanda shows a large amount of promise but also displays lingering problems that a change in the black-or-white nature of ethnic discourse may help to expose and rectify. The legacy of colonization, originally responsible for the creation of the division of Rwanda into "racial" or "ethnic" groups based on imposed class division threatens a re-emergence if Hutu, categorized broadly as "genocidaires" continue not to have access to power or equality in the neoliberal economy.

While many studies have focused on the history of conflict between Hutu and Tutsi as though this were the primary source of conflict in Rwanda's history, it might be more accurate to say that the country's most persistent enemy is poverty. Economic analyses of the genocide of 1994 have shown that what had been a model of African development plunged into chaos in part because of mounting debts and a crisis of natural resources (Uvin 4). Historians of the precolonial and colonial era have emphasized the

material exploitation of peasants by elites as creating the polarization of Hutu and Tutsi into opposed political identities (Vansina *Antecedents* 138; Mamdani 9-14). Given these arguments, it is no wonder that the focus of the Kagame administration has been the development of a robust economy. Kagame's leadership of the country reflects his focus on this goal, and his style has earned him the nickname "Rwanda's CEO." True to his sobriquet, Kagame publicly eschews international aid as he seeks to renew Rwanda as an economically viable country. The authors of *Rwanda, Inc.* state Kagame's approach as follows:

> President Paul Kagame preaches a gospel of economic self-reliance, turning the country, especially the younger generation, into a nation of believers.... The only way to cut dependence on foreign aid is private investment from local and foreign business interests, which creates jobs and opportunities—and generates tax revenue.

Kagame's favorable attitude toward large investors is highlighted in *Rwanda, Inc.*: "The Rwanda Revenue Authority presents certificates each year to the best taxpayers, recognizing those who pay the most (the Rwandan brewery Bralirwa has been a past honoree, along with a foreign-owned telecommunications company) as well as those who are the most compliant" (Crisafulli and Redmond 111, 112). This favoritism toward private investors and big business has made some progress in fighting poverty, but the numbers still do not compare favorably with percentages elsewhere. In 2011, Rwanda still had 44.9 percent poverty, with about 80 percent of the population living as subsistence farmers (Crisafulli and Redmond 3, 113).

One of the main points that I argued is that prior to colonialism, identities of Hutu and Tutsi—what people today identify as Rwanda's "ethnicities"—began as class identities that distinguished persons who identified with the material wealth of the central

court from those who did not. The latter group were the poor and those who lived in peripheral regions where expansion and centralization were not very far advanced. What amounts to promotion of neoliberal, market-centered economics that focuses development in the capital of Kigali risks creating the same kind of centralized political and economic structure that characterized the earlier iterations of the Rwandan state. Since Kagame's political power rests in part on suppression of opposition, the potential for a relapse into violence remains a threat, particularly in the event that oppositional candidates do not have the same opportunities for office that RPF-backed candidates do.

The Kagame administration has enacted policies that it has presented as "decentralizing," but in reality these programs are more likely to lead to greater channeling of control into the hands of the central government. *Imihigo* and *umudugudu* are the key terms in this government's policies that it claims lead to decentralization. *Imihigo* is a term drawn from precolonial Rwandan society that refers to a vow taken before a chief. The vow invested communal support in the one making the vow on the basis of that person's ability to accomplish a public goal (Crisafulli and Redmond 123, 124). In its usage in the modern state of Rwanda, however, *imihigo* refers to the appointment of human development tasks to local elected authorities by central authorities who most often receive their offices through appointment from still higher up (Ingelaere 73). In at least one instance, elections at the local level have seen manipulation from above by RPF members and soldiers, in spite of official bans on party activity during elections (Ingelaere 71, 72). Numerous RPF-approved candidates gave the appearance of free elections, while non-RPF candidates could not run. Following

elections, these local "representatives" only have the responsibility of carrying out directives made by their government-appointed superiors (Ingelaere 72). Recently, this hierarchy has come to extend to private households in local areas (Ingelaere 72). Appointment of local officials purports to provide local representation over development projects; however, they are really under central authority. The extension of these hierarchies only serves to strengthen centralization; it does not lead to local representation.

*Umudugudu*, or government-sponsored relocation of rural populations into villages, is a part of this program that the Kagame administration has defended as decentralizing Rwanda. In pursuing this policy, the administration has ignored the negative effects of similar policies in Tanzania, Mozambique, and Ethiopia (C. Newbury "*Imidugudu*" 225). The *umudugudu* villages are relocations of rural peasants from their scattered traditional homesteads, and the Rwandan government under Paul Kagame has undertaken this procedure without the authorization or input of the majority population. This villagization has oftentimes relied on coercion of peasants and resulted in many negative consequences. These have included inadequate provision of services and amenities, negative environmental effects, including deforestation and overuse of fields near villages, as well as loss of risk aversion from scattered farming techniques used by peasants in many regions. Increases in accusations of theft and sorcery have also accompanied concentration of rural populations through villagization (C. Newbury "*Imidugudu*" 225). Monocropping and regional specialization of agriculture have replaced the approach of individual, non-profit-oriented farmers to cultivating different

kinds of produce.

In addition to loss of representation and livelihood among rural farmers, the policy of the present administration of Rwanda has been to attribute the poverty of rural areas to the poor themselves. The rhetoric diverges sharply from the positive rhetoric of Juvenal Habyarimana's administration to these groups, when he in 1987 credited them with Rwanda's successes in development. By contrast, Kagame and others inside his administration have attributed the poverty of the poor exclusively on the poor, saying each citizen has the responsibility to overcome poverty himself or herself. As one southern province official stated: "You talk to them and you think they listen, but the people do nothing with the good advice you give them. They say 'yes' because they are tired of you and your speeches, but they are never convinced.... They are resistant, they are really difficult" (Ansom 243). The tendency of the administration again shows a marked tendency to embracing neoliberal market doctrines and centralization of the structures of government. The Kagame administration can point to a 12% drop in poverty from 2006-2011 to justify its economic programs (Crisafulli and Redmond 113). However, poverty remains at epidemic levels for the country, and overwhelmingly the poor are Hutu, their appointed or questionably elected officials remaining Tutsi. Under these circumstances, the possibility for future ethnic fragmentation over the issue of inequalities of wealth remains a serious threat, unless leaders attuned to Hutu problems have the opportunity to represent the constituency of the country.

In *Imagining Religion*, Jonathan Z. Smith made the following statement:

> [C]haracteristic history of religions materials such as myths are best approached as "common stories," as pieces of prosaic discourse rather than as multivalent, condensed, highly symbolic speech. In short, I hold that there is *no privilege* to myth or other religious materials. They

> must be understood primarily as texts in context, specific acts of communication between specified individuals, at specific points in time and space, about specifiable subjects.... For the historian of religion, the task then becomes one of imagining the "situation," of constructing the context, insofar as it is relevant to his interpretative goals. This implies, as well, that there is no privilege in the so-called exotic. For there is no primordium—it is all history. There is no "other,"—it is all "what we see in Europe every day (xiii).

Drawing from Smith and also from the work of Fredrik Barth and Bruce Lincoln, I have used this thesis to stress the importance of power and class in determining the relationships between ethnic groups in Rwanda, drawing from my examination of precolonial religious practices. I have also explored the social and economic policies of the present-day administration of Paul Kagame. I add my voice to other voices that have called President Kagame not to neglect the warnings of history as his government seeks to create a thriving country with a centralized structure.

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