The Contexts of Religion and Violence

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Implication of Religious Leaders in Mimetic Structures of Violence

The Case of Rwanda

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Introduction

> When the Whiteman came, we owned land and he carried the Bible. He taught us to pray and said "let's close our eyes and pray." When we opened our eyes, we carried the Bible and he owned the land.
>
> (Comment attributed to Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, father of Tanzania's independence)

[1] Whether the above comments were actually made by Julius Nyerere is immaterial. What is important is the reflection behind the words – the real or perceived complicity between colonialism and evangelization. In Rwanda, the Catholic Church was first introduced by German colonialists, and later reinforced by the Belgians. It became one of Rwanda's most powerful institutions, claiming in its flock about two-thirds of the country's eight million citizens.

[2] During the successive waves of violence that preceded and followed the country's accession to independence, church buildings served as safe havens as the Church belonged

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to both *Bahutu* and *Batutsi*,[1] members of the two rival socio-ethnic groups. In 1994, when *Batutsi* ran to seek refuge in churches, they could no longer enjoy the same protection. Instead, churches became the trap where *Bahutu* soldiers and militia could round them up more easily before killing them by thousands at a single go. From April 6th until the end of July 1994, between 800,000 and one million people were butchered, mainly Christians, at the hands of fellow Christians, mostly inside churches.[2] By using the concept of mimetic structure of violence, and its subsidiary concept of hegemonic structures, we will show how religious leaders, over a period of several decades contributed to a mentality that made these events possible.

[3] As anywhere in Africa, pre-colonial Rwanda was not exempt from social unrest and violence. Bernard Lugan talks of revolutions, conquest, and succession wars in Rwanda before colonization, each with its lot of victims. Indeed, just one year before the Germans entered the country in 1897, the king Mibambwe IV Rutalindwa had been assassinated in a bloody coup (1896) and replaced by one of his half-brothers, king Musinga.

[4] Nevertheless, the country had never experienced violence of the magnitude experienced in 1994, which in fact started with the "1959 *Bahutu* Revolution,"[3] developing into a culture of violence against *Batutsi*, perceived as the real colonizers and exploiters of the *Bahutu* majority (Lugan). With the 1990 incursions of the *Batutsi*-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) from their Ugandan exile, violence increased and the discursive structures, violence preparedness, in the form of orders for machetes, and organizational readiness needed for massive genocide were put in place.

[5] We will develop the concept of mimetic structures of violence and then return to the colonial history of Rwanda leading up to the genocide, paying particular attention to the role of the Church. We will then analyze the history in terms of mimetic structures of violence. The analysis will show how religious bodies generally, and the Church in this instance, can be implicated in mimetic structures of violence. These insights will point to some final reflections on what must happen to avoid the continuation of involvement in structures of violence and advance the creation of mimetic structures of blessing.

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[1] Note that Hutu, Tutsi and Twa refer to the names of identity groups within Rwanda; the prefix "Ba" in front of the group name designates members of the group in plural form and the prefix "Mu" designates an individual member.

[2] Note that both Protestant and Catholic churches were implicated in the genocide and in the development of the structured favoritism and institutionalized discrimination leading up to it. This paper will focus on the role of the Roman Catholic Church because it was the first to be involved, it comprised a majority of citizens, and it played a distinctive role in shaping national policy throughout the pre-genocide history of the country.

[3] In a climate of social tension that characterized Rwanda in the late 1950s, the Hutu leadership and population, encouraged by the Catholic Church and the Belgian administration, sparked a revolt in November 1959 that resulted in the overthrow of the Tutsi monarchy. The 1959 revolt, known as "the 1959 Social Revolution," marked a major change in the country's political life, with several hundreds of thousands of *Batutsi* being either killed or forced into exile in neighboring countries.

Mimetic Structures of Violence

[6] The concept of mimetic structures of violence was developed in order to understand atrocities such as genocide (Redekop). These structures can be understood as complex patterns of thought and action that have a particular orientation. The orientation may be towards violence or towards blessing. The structures can take on a life of their own, sometimes lasting for hundreds of years. They are passed on through the generations. They are mimetic in several ways: first, antagonists within a relational system imitate the violence done to them and return it with interest (Girard 1987); second, people within an identity group mimetically join in the violence initiated by certain members of their group; and third, mimetic structures in one relational system can be imitated in other relational systems. One example is suicide bombing, which, as a structured action, was initially confined to Israel and adjoining countries but now is found in a number of parts of the world. Mimetic structures take on certain defining characteristics yet they are subject to constant change.

[7] Violence is an orientation to do harm to the other either directly and overtly or tacitly and passively. It may take any of the following forms: getting ahead at the expense of the other; control; physical hurt; emotional abuse; destruction or theft of property; forcing people to do what goes against their core values; diminishing the self-respect of people; withholding help when people are in trouble; deliberately lying to mislead people to their own detriment; or depriving people of a capacity to take action (agency) (Redekop).

[8] Mimetic structures may also be oriented toward blessing. In this case, self and other mutually enhance each other's well-being. This may happen through mutually satisfactory exchanges of goods and services, gifts, a spirit of magnanimity, empowerment, encouragement, mutual respect, and the creative generation of new life-enhancing options to address scarcity or a perceived conflict of interests.

[9] The complexity of mimetic structures is evident in the number of theoretical perspectives that illuminate their dynamics. These include human identity needs, mimetic desire, scapegoat theory, and hegemonic structural analysis among others. Each of these will be developed separately and then the interconnections will be explained.

[10] It was John W. Burton who made the link between human identity needs and deep-rooted conflict. He observed that when the non-material, non-negotiable human identity need satisfiers of people are threatened, they will fight. The following need categories are of particular significance: meaning, action (or agency), connectedness, security, and recognition (Redekop; see Figure 1). The need for meaning includes values, beliefs, goals, and a sense of justice. Connectedness implies a need for social bonding, for family, for friends, for connection with people who speak the same

Identity Needs Implicated In Deep-Rooted Conflict

Figure 1

language and understand one's deepest experiences. Action involves being able to imagine and carry out a plan to do something that one values. This demands self-esteem, control of one's environment, and autonomy. Security dictates that human rights are respected; that physical sustenance and safety are in place. Recognition means that one's identity, complete with meaning system, actions, and circle of connections is acknowledged and valued.

[11] The concept of mimetic desire has been developed over the last fifty years by French thinker René Girard. He posits that desires are not spontaneous; rather we desire what the other has or wants (1990). A simple mimetic desire for an object that the other has can develop into a mimetic rivalry in which self and other compete for whatever the other has or gains.

[12] Scapegoat theory, also developed by Girard, is about societal projection of violence onto a scapegoat. There is a general catharsis as all are united against a scapegoat who is blamed for all the problems of the community (1989).

[13] For the purpose of understanding the historical dynamics of the Church in Rwanda, hegemonic structures are the most significant aspects of mimetic structures of violence. As these structures are formed, one group is put into a position to dominate systematically another group. This domination has several components to it: more obvious are the physical, political, and economic dimensions; more subtle are the discursive sub-structures and the "spirit" of domination expressed in a bearing and attitude that assumes superiority and strength (Redekop; see Figure 2). The physical dimension of domination involves the following potential dimensions: discrimination may be based on physical characteristics; a population may be physically separated (e.g., in a ghetto) or there may be limits placed on travel; there may be physical force involved in the act of domination such as torture and confinement; rape may be a factor in being subjugated; people may be forced to do unpleasant physical work; and weapons, brute force, and threats may be used to sustain the structure.
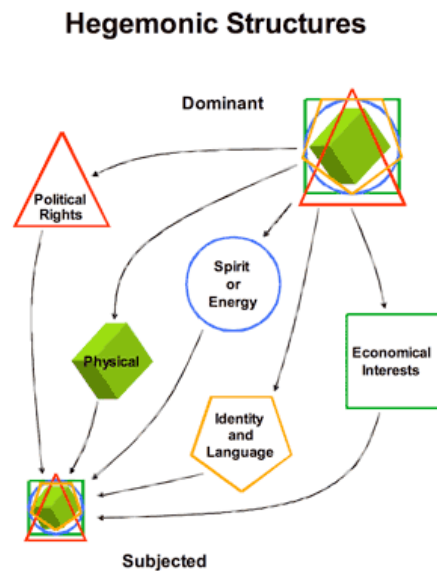

Figure 2

[14] The economic dimension means that people will be systematically shut out of certain occupations; they will work for little or no money, and collectively as a group they will be impoverished with no real opportunities to change their relative lot in life. Politically, rights may be based on belonging to a group and the rights of the subjected group will be limited. There will be impediments to political expression and political power and influence will be outside of their grasp.

[15] The identity and language dimension includes what Antonio Gramsci refers to as discursive hegemonic structures. The designation of the subjected group and the language used to describe members of the group will be such that it has the connotation of being

second rate at best and despicable and sub-human at its worst. The language becomes internalized and a sense of inferiority pervades the sub-consciousness of the subjected just as there is a tacit awareness of superiority on the part of the dominant. This dimension may include discrimination on the basis of accent or the dominance of the language of the dominant over that of the subjected. At a certain point, the various groups take on an identity that reflects their relative position in relation to the other. This leads to a spirit of domination such that the dominant conduct themselves in such a way that it becomes virtually impossible to stand up to them. This includes an authoritative tone, an assumption of rightness, pride, and arrogance. Likewise, the subjected take on a spirit of victimization and suffering such that they become accustomed to be acted upon. There is also an education and information dimension in which the subjected are deprived of optimum educational opportunities and for whom vital information is inaccessible.

[16] Dominant and subjected groups may be defined on the basis of race, class, ethnicity, religion, language, or any other identity group distinguishing markers. Given the tendency for mimetic rivalries to develop between people who identify with one another, people from the dominant group within a hegemonic structure enter into rivalries either with others within their group or with the dominant group in other hegemonic structures. For example, during the colonial era, the various colonial powers were in rivalries with one another and the subjected groups became objects of desire whose lands were taken over and whose populations were subjected. Likewise, mimetic rivalries become more intense between subjected people. As the identities of people become linked to their positions within mimetic structures, their identity need satisfiers tend to be defined in ways that reinforce these structures. For the dominant, the meaning system rationalizes superiority; links of connectedness are class driven; the imagination for action includes domination; security needs are defined in terms of what it takes to maintain the position of privilege and the need for recognition is high.

[17] When subjected groups begin to identify with the dominant group, become aware of the structures, see the injustice of the situation, and wish to usurp the position of the dominant group or at least become equal, new conflicts arise since the dominant do not usually wish to give up their privileged position. The change of structure is framed as liberation by the subjected group; mimetic rivalries develop between the (previously) dominant and subjected groups.

[18] With this composite understanding of mimetic structures in mind, we will now revisit the colonial history of Rwanda paying particular attention to the role of the Church. We will then analyze this history using this theoretical perspective.

Rwanda's Colonial History

[19] Colonial history has it that the earliest known inhabitants of the area now known as Rwanda were the pigmy or *Batwa*, a group now accounting for less than 1% of Rwanda's population, who were supplanted by the immigration of the forbearers of today's *Bahutu* from the Central African region. The *Batutsi* have been portrayed as a separate people coming from the Horn of Africa (Wikipedia).

[20] However, current research is not conclusive about the history of these migrations, which were based on early twentieth century research by scholars believed to have had stakes in exaggerating the differences and downplaying the similarities. In fact, little is known about pre-colonial Rwanda. Its history was not written but told orally, mostly through legends. Today's research focuses on the many cultural and genetic similarities between *Bahutu* and *Batutsi*, who speak the same language and share many cultural characteristics.

[21] The meaning of "*Bahutu*" and "*Batutsi*" has evolved in time as result of socio-economic determinants such as social positions, intermarriages, and switching from one group to another, supporting the idea that "*hutu* and *tutsi* labels are labels of class or caste rather than tribe or ethnicity as is usually portrayed by the media and the militants on both sides" (Wikipedia). As Octave Ugirashebuja observes:

> The Catholic missionaries and colonizers never took into account the specific unity of the *Hutu* and the *Tutsi* peoples, their common pride which made them Rwandan, nor the fact that ninety percent of the *Tutsis* belonged to the masses of poor peasants (Ugirashebuja: 117).

[22] Whatever the case, the Germans, who colonized Rwanda between 1897 and 1916, before losing their colonies following their World War I defeat, found a country where the *Mwami* (the king) enjoyed sacred powers over his subjects, the land, and the cattle, in a hierarchical society where a few *Batutsi* families held commanding positions. The first contact with Germans occurred on "4 May 1894 when the first European, a German count, Gustav Adolf von Götzen, was received at court by a king called Rwabugiri . . . [who] was unaware that ten years earlier, at the Berlin Conference of 1885, the European colonial powers . . . had given Rwanda to Germany. Von Götzen became the Governor of East Africa, which included Rwanda" (Melvern: 7).

[23] The Germans supported king Yuhi Musinga's authority in exchange for his recognition of the German administration, leaving intact existing relational systems, through indirect rule. The Germans were immediately followed by the Roman Catholic missionaries, the Missionaries of Africa, also known as the White Fathers.[4]

[24] On the February 2, 1900, Bishop Hirth, accompanied by the fathers Brard and Bartelemy and brother Anselme were received at the king's court in Nyanza (Lugan), inaugurating what would later become particularly controversial relationships between the Church and the political regimes in Rwanda, with far-reaching implications for the country's future hegemonic structures and the ensuing mimetic structures of violence. As will be seen in the following discussion, events are cyclical, the past influences the present and shapes the future, the political and the religious being intertwined to generate an endless repetition of empowerment of some and exclusion from power of others leading to instances of horror and despair.

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[4] The designation "White Fathers" was derived from the white cassocks that they wore.

The White Fathers' Position

[25] Although the Germans favored a stronger authority for King Musinga, refraining from interfering in existing social rapports, it was the Belgian administration, which took over the Germans following their World War I defeat, which exploited to the fullest the complicity between colonialism and evangelization. Indeed, Bernard Lugan argues that "the real colonizers of Rwanda were neither the Germans before 1916, nor the Belgians between 1916 and 1962, but the Catholic missionaries of the order of the Missionairies of Africa, the White Fathers" (31).[5] According to Lugan, the missionaries shifted alliances between the two groups as a strategy to gain influence and protect their interests. He explains how, during the first years, the missionaries systematically supported the *Bahutu* in their relationship with the traditional authority, establishing a new center of power in the country, and displeasing the German authority that favored respect for the tradition.

[26] A distinction needs to be made, at this point, between official activities of missionary leaders, who worked strategically at a political level, and what happened at the local level. Generally, the Missionaries of Africa would send three missionaries to a given locale. They would develop close ties with local people as they learned the language and took careful note of local customs. They engaged in community development and capacity building particularly through the establishment of schools. Often they would operate quite independently of their official leaders, at times disregarding the official missives (interview with Yves Morneau, a former White Father, February 2006). What follows is a description of events, concentrating on the role of strong missionary leaders who had a powerful impact on the emergence of political institutions and structures.

Father Brard

[27] In 1910, the German Governor in Rwanda, Richard Kandt, sent the following report to the Governor General of the German East Africa in Dar-es-Salaam:

> Father Brard could reign without scruples, constantly discouraging *Watussi (Batutsi)* whom he . . . strongly hated, and inciting the people to no longer obey . . . If we put aside what could be attributed to their personalities, all the (missions) superiors had in common, during their first years, strong hatred, coupled with suspicion, towards *Watussi*, taking unfair positions against the chiefs in all matters concerning members of the missions. They intervened independently without regard to the traditional authorities and the king on all matters concerning the mission and on many other issues that did not concern them . . . That way of taking sides on all matters and acting in favor of their members cannot help but provoke conflicts with the indigenous peoples . . . (Lugan: 35).

[28] There are similar letters from German authorities during these early years, addressed to Catholic missions, and openly denouncing what they saw as an involvement of the new church in local affairs concerning the *Batutsi-Bahutu* relationship. Basically, new Christians

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[5] All citations from Bernard Lugan and other French writers throughout this chapter are translated from French by the authors.

would refuse to obey the traditional authority, and the Church would side with the former against the latter. The vision of the first missionaries was to have a "Hutu Church in a Hutu State" (Ugirashebuja).

Reverend Father Classe

[29] Monsignor Léon Classe arrived in Rwanda in 1907. Being aware of the anti-Tutsi feeling within the clergy, he worked over time to turn the situation around. He initiated a policy declaration on the part of the Church that was released on 17 April 1913. He informed all the missionaries that from then on, the mission would rally itself around *Batutsi*:

> *Batutsi* have been induced to see in us the enemy of their authority, and in our followers the revolutionaries who no longer obey their orders and whom they can no longer lead. It is imperative that we take action to counter this perception which could lead to the ruin of our mission! . . . We need to win the hearts of the chiefs . . . We must absolutely destroy the belief that we are the church of the *Bahutu* . . . (Lugan: 38-39).

With this policy shift, the *Batutsi* dignitaries initiated a rapprochement with the missionaries and with the new Christians, who had been ostracized as traitors of their culture.

[30] A major shift towards *Batutsi* occurred in 1919, when Belgium was offered the German Rwanda and Burundi as a protectorate under the aegis of the League of Nations; the offer was officially confirmed on 20 October 1924 (Lugan). Reverend Father Classe, elevated to the rank of Bishop for Rwanda, became the strongest figure in the country's political and religious arena, directly and resolutely siding with the *Batutsi* on all matters concerning the running of the country. In his letter of 21 September 1927 addressed to the Belgian Governor Mortehan, Reverend Classe wrote:

> If we want to be practical and to safeguard the real interests of the country, we have in the *Batutsi* youth an element of incomparable progress . . . Ask the *Bahutu* if they prefer to be led by the commoners [i.e. Hutu chiefs] or by the noblemen, and the answer is clear: their preference will go to the *Batutsi,* for obvious reasons. They are born leaders and know what it means to be leader . . . That's the secret of their establishment in this country as well as their influence upon it" (Lugan: 41).

[31] Two major elements are identifiable from the above letter. One is the social structure that Bishop Classe had internalized with regard to the Rwandan social reality, in terms of differentiation between *Bahutu* and *Batutsi*. The other is the demonstration that the missionaries were the trusted agents of the colonial power. It is clear that Reverend Classe convinced the Belgian authorities that the country's administration should be run by the *Batutsi* who were, in his eyes, superior to *Bahutu*. The Mortehan Reform of 1926-1931 saw a policy of recruitment of administrators solely from the *Batutsi*, constructing a rigid social barrier (Ugirashebuja). This position had far-reaching implications in generating feelings of resentment and hatred within the *Bahutu* population, excluded from the participation in the country's affairs.

[32] It is important to mention here that prior to the advent of colonialism, there were power sharing mechanisms between the three groups in Rwanda. The functions of chiefs were not hereditary. In principle, they were accessible to anyone. And as a matter of fact, the king could appoint people from a modest background, in recognition of their bravery or other merit (Rutembesa). Many *Bahutu* were indeed influential in the king's leadership, either in recognition of their loyalty or deeds, through social alliances, or in geographical areas exclusively inhabited by *Bahutu*. Moreover, a change of group was possible, through either wealth, intermarriage, and/or heroic deeds, supporting the idea that *Bahutu*, *Batutsi*, and *Batwa* had a strong class dimension.

[33] Unfortunately, the Belgian administration went along with the Catholic Church's position without questioning it, convinced that concentrating power in the hands of the *Batutsi* would serve both the colonial and Church interests. As a result, the *Batutsi* benefited from educational, political, administrative, and economic favors, at the expense of the *Bahutu* majority and *Batutsi* of modest origin, who lost many of the advantages they held before colonialism. The option remained, however, for *Bahutu* to be trained for the clergy. Ironically, the *Bahutu* elite, who later carried the torch under the banner of the *Bahutu* Social Revolution, came from church schools (minor and major seminaries), the only educational institutions that accepted commoners.

King Musinga deposed by the Catholic Church

[34] Under the direct influence of Bishop Léon Classe, the pro-German king Yuhi Musinga, who had resisted conversion, was deposed and forced into exile before being replaced by his elder son, Rudahigwa, a protégé of Bishop Classe and about to be baptized. This marked a to total "rupture with Rwandan national tradition" (Lugan: 49). In a society where the king's powers were sacred, the fate of king Musinga had significant repercussions on the country's socio-political and cultural authenticity. From this time on, the real power was in the hands of the Catholic Church, which could do and undo things as it wished, for nowhere in Africa did Christianity have a more determining impact than in Rwanda.

[35] In the words of Lugan, Bishop Classe played the role of attorney during Musinga's trial. To convince the Belgian administration, he undertook a dirty campaign against the monarch:

> Musinga has a passionate antagonism toward everything Christian: he was seen stepping with rage on images of saints and the cross . . . He breaks the marriages of Christians . . . He organized festivities, with dancing, beer and meat, to celebrate the death of his own baptized brother who was struck by thunder . . . (47-48).

[36] As a depository of the tradition, the king had no other option but remain firm. Bishop Classe knew the king would never change his mind. His exile was inevitable. His condemnation was made public in 1931. The Bishop had a candidate to replace Musinga, and Rudahigwa was enthroned on 16 November 1931 under the name Charles Mutara III. "No traditional ceremony was allowed. The king's name itself was indicated by Bishop Classe. The Queen mother was not associated with the ceremony" (Kagame, cited in Lugan: 49). Subsequently, the King was baptized in 1943, unleashing "a veritable torrent of conversions among the Tutsis as well as among all Rwandans. Indeed, the conversion

movement began from the time of Musinga's deposition and the coronation of a Christian Prince" (Ugirashebuja: 51). In 1946, the King consecrated Rwanda to Christ the King, establishing Catholicism as a state religion (Ndahiro).

[37] To further strengthen the division between groups, confirming the differentiation theory supported by the Church, the Belgian administration undertook a census in 1933 whereby

> teams of Belgian bureaucrats classified the whole population as either *Bahutu, Batutsi* or *Batwa*. Every Rwandan was counted and measured: the height, the length of their noses, the shape of their eyes. Everyone was classified: the Tutsi were taller, the Hutu were shorter and broader, although for many Rwandans it was not possible to determine ethnicity on the basis of physical appearance . . . (Melvern: 10-11).

Claudine Vidal's research confirms this when she argues:

> It was from 1892 that the colonial intervention gradually conferred new social, political and ideological significance to the fact of being born *Muhutu, Mututsi* or *Mutwa*. In the 1950s, this reference accorded disproportionate privileges to a minority . . . Besides the considerable economic and social privileges, the fact that all the administrative positions were given to a fraction of the population consolidated the historic beliefs in the natural superiority of *Batutsi* (15-16).

[38] In 1952, Monsignor Aloys Bigirumwani became the first black Roman Catholic bishop in Belgian Africa. As inter-group tensions increased to the point of violence in later years, his would be a voice in favor of mutual acceptance and elimination of official divisions between identity groups (Ndahiro). However, his message would be overshadowed by another Church leader, Bishop Perraudin.

Bishop Perraudin

[39] In the mid-50s, a new group of Flemish missionaries arrived from Belgium. Recognizing a structural congruence between the plight of the *Bahutu* and the oppression of their own people at the hands of the Walloon, they began to work for justice on behalf of the *Bahutu*. This impulse was reinforced by a new emphasis on social justice within the Roman Catholic Church (Ugirashebuja). It was in this context that André Perraudin, from Switzerland, replaced Léon Classe as head of Rwanda's Catholic Church. Bishop Perraudin took office at a time when the country was in political turmoil, following similar events in other African countries aspiring for independence. Contrary to his predecessor, Perraudin's speech denounced what he called the "injustices associated with the accumulation of wealth and power by one race." "The Catholic Church agrees that one social class is struggling for its legitimate rights by different means, including the grouping in association" (Rutembesa, *et al.*: 21).

[40] In a country where democracy and freedom of speech were non-existent, this declaration carried serious socio-political implications. Indeed, the Bishop's declaration was

followed by the "1957 *Bahutu* Manifesto,[6] denouncing injustices practiced in the attribution of administrative positions" (Nkundabagenzi). Subsequently, the *Batutsi* were rejected by the Church, the colonial powers, and the *Bahutu* and condemned (Ugirashebuja). Having become conscious of a power imbalance, it was a challenge to know how to address the situation. The path chosen by the Church and colonial powers was to give complete support to the *Bahutu*, the former underdogs and to turn against the *Batutsi*.

[41] Unfortunately, the Bishop ignored the facts that: 1) the Catholic Church carried a great deal of responsibility in the promotion of the *Batutsi* minority at the expense of *Batutsi* of modest background as well as *Bahutu*; 2) those administrative positions were reserved for a tiny minority of *Batutsi* from the king's family and the clans associated with the reigning dynasty; 3) his declarations could lead to uncontrollable violence; 4) any attempt to correct injustices should not create other forms of injustice.

Collaboration Between the Church and Post-independence Political Regimes in Rwanda

[42] Rutembesa argues that there was nothing wrong for the Church in seizing political advantages that were favorable to its development, just as there was nothing wrong for the state in offering opportunities for the expansion of the Church. However, he is critical of the ambiguities stemming from the confusion between political and religious interests. Unfortunately, this confusion characterized the situation between 1959 and 1994 in Rwanda. On the one hand, political regimes successfully used the influence of religious leaders for their benefit, and on the other hand, religious leaders forged close links with political regimes in order to maximize their advantages. On the eve of independence, most Church leaders, as well as many other leaders, did not understand the socio-political evolution that was taking place and as a consequence, got caught up in rumors and lies regarding the true nature of the nationalist movement in the country.

[43] Rutembesa refers to a Rwandan Bishops' confidential letter to superiors and other priests of their missions that warned them about the true intentions of the *Rwandese National Union* party, a nationalist party that called for immediate independence. The letter underlined two elements, namely, Islam and communism. In reality, this party was no different from other nationalist parties that were proliferating in Africa. Yet, guided by old clichés, the Catholic Church assimilated this party to the Italian nationalist party, which once restricted the powers of the Italian Church. The Church campaign for the marginalization of the *Rwandese National Union*, a party supported by the newly enthroned Tutsi King Kigeri V, had serious political implications for the country's political process during the crucial independence period.

[44] With regard to the issues of Islam and communism, Rutembesa, argues that "the bishops accused this party of wanting to reduce the influence of missionaries on the country's schools, due to its communist and Islamic ideas" (28). Naturally, such declarations were enough to mobilize against this party, given the fragile culture of critical reflection and

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[6] On 24 March 1957, the *Bahutu* Manifesto was published in the Catholic newspaper *Kinyamateka* by the *Bahutu* elite with the help of Bishop Perraudin. For the first time, a Rwandan political problem is explicitly stated and explained in racial terms, demanding *Bahutu* emancipation and the establishment of racial quotas in education and employment.

the absence of political awareness and mass education. For Rutembesa, "the emergence of this party on the Rwandese political scene marked the end of the original alliances between the Catholic Church and the traditional administration" (28).

The Birth of PARMEHUTU

[45] In 1959, the authors of the 1957 Bahutu Manifesto created the *Parti du Mouvement de l'Emancipation des Bahutu* (PARMEHUTU). Its leader, Grégoire Kayibanda, a former seminarian, was clever enough to paint himself as a true Christian, so as to attract the sympathy and support of the all powerful Catholic Church. "His struggle was in the perspective of a Christian who is against animism, the feudal system and communism" (Rutembesa, *et al.*: 29), thus appearing as the defender of the free world. Internally, he denounced the injustices of which the *Bahutu* were the victims, recalling their humiliations as a means to mobilize the masses through scapegoating, and stating that "genuine decolonization should be preceded by the abolition of colonization of the Black by the Black" (Rutembesa, *et al.*: 29).

[46] Despite the fact that PARMEHUTU was an exclusively ethnic party whose strategy generated violence and hatred, it was officially supported by the Catholic Church, other Christian churches, and the colonial administration. Colonel Guy Logiest, who was called in to reestablish security and order, met Bishop Perraudin who, in the words of Rutembesa, "made him understand that there was a need to repair the injustices of which the *Bahutu* had been the victims" (29). The Colonel admitted "having been influenced by the Bishop, meaning to support *Bahutu* and fight *Batutsi*" (Procès-verbal de la réunion des administrateurs du Territoire, Kigali, 17 November 1959).

[47] Later on the PARMEHUTU was notorious in spreading violence against *Batutsi* of all backgrounds, with the full support from the Christian churches. The 1959, '60, '61, '62, '63, '67 and '73 massacres were carried out under Kayibanda's PARMEHUTU, with Bishop Perraudin as the "intellectual guide" for the President, creating a situation in which the State was dominated by the Church (Ugirashebuja). "In a letter addressed to Pope John XXIII, he interpreted the events in Rwanda as a resurgence of old tribal rivalries" (Rutembesa, *et al.*: 31).

The 1973 Military Coup

[48] Major General Habyalimana Juvénal seized power in 1973, overthrowing Grégoire Kayibanda, and abolishing PARMEHUTU. This political development was welcomed by many *Batutsi*, both inside and within the diaspora, hoping for a profound change in the country's relational systems. This did not happen though, as the new regime shied away from courageous social reforms such as an end to discriminatory policies and allowing the return of refugees. Also, and despite real efforts to promote economic development, the center of political and economic power was in the hands of the President's family, under the umbrella of a single party structure, the Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND).

Archbishop Nsengiyumva

[49] The Catholic Church alliance with the political regimes is principally illustrated by the continued influence of Bishop Perraudin based in Kabgayi and the 1976 promotion of Bishop Nsengiyumva to the top post as Kigali Archbishop. While the former enjoyed the many ties forged over decades of undisputed powers, the latter gained power through his inclusion within the political structure, becoming a member of the Central Committee of the ruling MRND. Besides, he came from the same Northern region as the President and as such, had direct contacts with the highest authorities, participating in the definition of the country's political, economic, military, and ideological standards. Consequently, he drew his church hierarchy subordinates into the service of the State, through a partnership in which no one could oppose the wishes of the regime.

[50] This was particularly so during the war years, following the 1990 attack by the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) from Uganda. In the face of massive abuses of human rights against the *Batutsi* minority, the Catholic Church found itself delivering the same speech as the Habyalimana regime. In an interview published by *De Volstrant* on 26 June 1994 (in the middle of the genocide), Phocas Nikwigize, Bishop of Ruhengeri declared, "As in all wars, there were spies . . . *Batutsi* were collaborators, the friends of the enemy. They were in contact with rebels. They had to be eliminated so that they do not betray us."

[51] Rutembesa compares Bishop Nikwigize's comments to the racism that justified the violence against Dreyfus in France, particularly when he said in the interview noted above, "*Batutsi* are cunning, hypocritical and bad people by nature." When the RPF entered Rwanda, thousands of innocent *Batutsi* were arrested, tortured, and killed. It is clear that neither Bishop Nikwigize, Archbishop Nsengiyumva, nor any other *Muhutu* bishop stood against these abuses. In 1993, when communal violence was high, the Catholic Church bishops met and denounced the violence. But it was too little too late, as the country was already on the verge of total collapse. The lack of a courageous stand against the evil was partly responsible for the 1994 genocide.

The Catholic Church and the Hamitic Hypothesis

[52] Migration or population movement is a fact of life today as it was in ancient times, and obviously Rwandan *Batutsi* were no exceptions. However, while the royal mythology assigned a sacred origin to the Rwandan kings, never has the Rwandan monarchy or the *Batutsi* group claimed a foreign origin. That *Batutsi* were superior to *Bahutu* because they were foreigners is a purely colonial idea shared by both Germans and Belgians, who were surprised by the complexity of the existing political, social, and military organization in the country. Such organization, in their view, could only come from an alien group. The Hamites were said to be the mobile, cattle breeder group on the continent, an idea rooted in the biblical account of Ham, Noah's son, cursed by his father for contempt and believed to be the forefather of the Black race. "The notion that Hamites were the hidden hand behind every bit of civilization on the continent was known as the 'the Hamitic Hypothesis,' which easily appealed to the colonial sensibility" (Mamdani: 80).

[53] Although the *Tutsi* identity was associated with privilege from pre-colonial times, it was not until Belgian colonialism and the country's Christianization that Rwanda's political and

social structures were systematically run by *Batutsi* feudal lords, thus becoming the symbol of power and privilege for a few. This differentiation between indigenous *Bahutu* and alien *Batutsi* shifted identities from a socio-ethnic to a racial categorization, with *Batutsi* being presented as non-indigenous and as "Caucasians of a lesser breed" (Mamdani). By systematically excluding *Bahutu* from education and employment opportunities, the Belgians and the Church institutionalized *Bahutu's* inferiority status, with far-reaching social and political implications. During the genocide, *Batutsi* were killed not as Rwandans, but as alien Hamites. For ". . . ethnicity marks internal difference while race marks external difference. And the racialization of Tutsi, we must not forget, was the joint work of the state and the Church" (Mamdani: 231-32). As the original ethnographer, the Church was the inventor of the Hamitic Hypothesis. It was the Church that initiated the census based on races instead of socio-ethnic groups before issuing identity cards. It was the amalgamation of the Church and the state that brought the Kigali Archbishop in the political limelight, sitting on the Central Committee of the ruling party. But unlike state institutions, the middle-level church leadership comprised many *Batutsi*. With the civil war increasing the momentum, the Church turned into the battleground instead of being a place of healing and a voice of tolerance.

> Let us recall that there was no single institutional home, no mortuary, bigger than the Church for the multiple massacres that marked the Rwandan horror. After all, but for the army and the Church, the two prime movers, the two organizing and leading forces, one located in the state and the other in society, there would have been no genocide (Mamdani: 232-33).

The Role of the Church during the Genocide

[54] The Church played two opposed roles during the genocide. The first was to support it, the second to work courageously to resist it and save lives. It this juncture, it is important to note that one of the most troubling aspects of the genocide was the fact that it was perpetrated by ordinary people, under the guidance of the army and the *Interahamwe* militia. As mentioned earlier, the killings were done in the open, mostly in places of worship and other public places. Gérard Prunier contends, "the bystanders were mostly churches." As a matter of fact, the Church had a more direct role in the genocide. "Rather than a passive mirror reflecting tensions, the Church was more of an epicenter radiating tensions" (Mamdani: 226). As the rest of the population, church leaders comprised those who were to be killed and the killers, with little space between the two. But while the former could not avoid their fate, the latter had a choice between participating in the killings or opposing it. Few resisted the temptation to lead or facilitate the killings. There are troubling accounts of complicity of church leaders in turning over those gathered in churches for sanctuary to *Interahamwe* militia for execution (Petrie). "In all, 105 priest and 120 nuns, at least a quarter of the clergy, are believed to have been killed" (Mamdani: 226). But priests and nuns were not only among those killed. They were also among the killers, supervising or assisting the killers. Father Wenceslas Munyeshyaka, the curate of the Holy Family church in Kigali, sheltered eight thousand refugees, but provided the militia members with the lists of those he alleged had expressed sympathy for RPF, and agreed to let them come and pick off those they wanted. Wearing a flak jacket and toting a pistol during the massacres, he fled to Goma with the interim government and was one of the twenty-seven *Bahutu* priests who sent a letter to

the pope from Goma on 2 August 1994 defending the Rwanda army and blaming the RPF for the massacres (Mamdani: 227). The Catholic archbishop, Vincent Nsengiyumva, even moved from Kigali to Gitarama with the interim government responsible for the genocide. Rakiya Omaar, Director of African Rights, sent an open letter to Pope John Paul II, listing the most shocking instances of clergy organizing massacres, and summed up participation of the Church in the genocide: "Christians who slay other Christians before the altar, bishops who remain silent in the fact of genocide and fail to protect their own clergy, priests who participate in the murder of their parishioners and nuns who hand people over to be killed cannot leave the Church indifferent" (Mamdani: 227).

 [55] The second role, that of resisting the genocide, can be seen in the example of a Missionary Sister of Charity who asked for prayer that she and the 150 orphans in her charge be shot rather than be hacked by machete to death. This woman, at great personal risk, hid the family of a moderate Hutu man who had been killed by the *Interahamwe* (Petrie). Sister Félicitée Niyitegaka likewise resisted the genocide and was killed with her companions; later she was named a "hero of the nation" (Farrington). Pope John Paul II was one of the first voices on the international scene to describe what was happening in Rwanda as genocide (27 April 1994) and call on authorities to end it (Rittner).

 [56] After the genocide, the bishops invited their followers to create a space for peace and reconciliation (Conférence des évêques catholiques du Rwanda). But once again, a very important element had been forgotten, what Pope John Paul called the first "sign of the purification of the memory" (Pope John Paul II, 1998). This sign required that all act with courage and humility to recognize the mistakes committed by those who called themselves Christians. Only then could there be an end to the mimetic structures of violence, so characteristic of the Rwandese society.

Mimetic Structures of Violence in Rwandan History

[57] Given the fact that pre-contact oral histories died with the elders who lived at that time without having been transcribed, it is impossible to reconstruct exactly how the social structure that the Germans found in 1892 came to be. Undoubtedly conflicts played a role in putting into place the existing hierarchy. What is clear is that there was a highly differentiated king; that is, a king who was considered almost super human. René Girard, in analyzing rituals around the naming of a new king in that part of Africa, sees all the evidence of a sacrificial ritual. According to his interpretation, there is an enactment of chaos and mock scapegoating of the proto king who is then almost deified at the end, when order is re-established (Girard 1979: 104-8). The Germans noted that within the Rwanda they found, there was a well-established social order with a

Pre-Contact Rwanda

Figure 3

relatively small number of Tutsi families surrounding the king and carrying out administrative functions. At the local level, it appeared that *Bahutu* and *Batutsi* lived together without a high level of differentiation of status (see Figure 3).
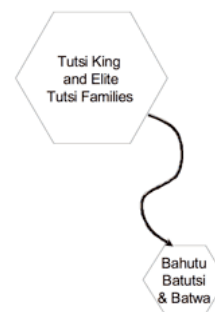
[58] The Germans then reinforced this hierarchical structure and entrenched it as a hegemonic structure that they manipulated and reinforced in order to administer the country. In terms of control, the Germans exercised hegemony over the country; however, they kept their interference to a minimum. There existed then a compound structure in which the Germans could dominate the *Batutsi* king and bureaucracy which in turn could dominate the local population. The Germans were in a position to be the dominant group in a meta-hegemonic structure that could manipulate the intra Rwanda hegemonic structures. Because the Germans contributed to the internal power of the king and his administrators, they accepted the arrangement. If anything, the intrusive powers of the king increased (see Figure 4).

[59] Early in the twentieth century, Christian missionaries entered the scene. Initially, they simply worked in concert with Germany, the colonial power of the time. Increasingly, especially as the position occupied by Germany in the hegemonic structure was taken over by Belgium, church leaders played a political role within the hegemonic structure (see Figure 5). When Bishop Classe orchestrated the replacement of the king by a new king who was supportive of Christianity, the process of the Church becoming a significant actor within the hegemonic structures was significantly advanced. The additional steps included leveraging the support of the king and other *Batutsi* in leadership to make all of Rwanda Christian, to the point that it became the most Christianized of African countries. A second step was to use the Church run education system to re-enforce the *Batutsi* domination by allowing only *Batutsi* to be educated for professional, bureaucratic, and leadership positions. The dominance of the *Batutsi* in an ever clearer hegemonic structure was further strengthened as the whole population was classified as *Hutu, Tutsi*, or *Twa* (see Figure 6).
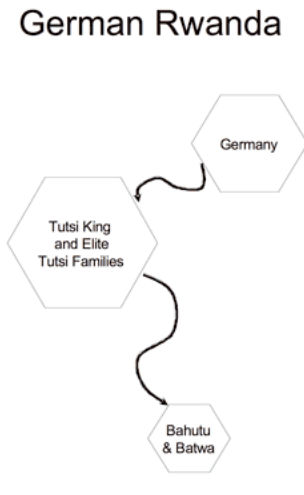
German Rwanda

Germany

Tutsi King and Elite Tutsi Families

Bahutu & Batwa

Figure 4

German Christian Rwanda

Church Germany

Tutsi King and Elite Tutsi Families

Bahutu & Batwa

Figure 5

Belgian-Christian Rwanda

Church Belgium

Batutsi

Bahutu & Batwa
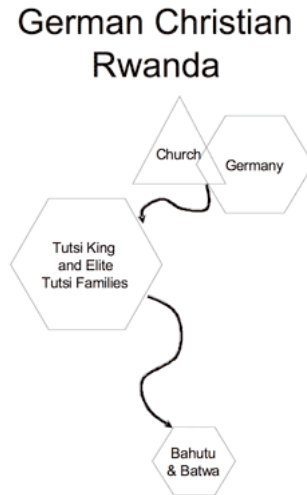
Figure 6

[60] During the 1950s, there was a trend in Africa to move toward de-colonization. Generally accompanying this process was an emphasis on the desirability for democracy. The Belgians realized that it was only a matter of time before Rwanda would gain its

independence and that if there was any democratic impulse at all, the overwhelmingly *Bahutu* majority would eventually take control of the country. With this in mind, they switched allegiance to the *Bahutu*. In the process, they could for a time, assert themselves more strongly over the *Batutsi* leadership. In structural terms, a meta-hegemonic structure controlled by the Belgians, orchestrated a reversal of the relative position of the *Bahutu* and the *Batutsi* (see Figure 7).

[61] The Church with its new bishop worked in close harmony with the Belgian plan; in fact, it could even be that the Church was the lead body in this hegemonic reversal. Now the *Bahutu* became the favored ones by the Church and the administering power. Only *Bahutu* were given the top education; the only place for gifted *Batutsi* was in the Church itself. Given the role of the Church as hegemonic "king-maker," when the Hutu regime was established in 1959 and Belgium had to withdraw as colonial master, the Church was allowed to stay and maintain its role. Just as the Church had installed its own king in a previous era, now the Church was seen to be the supporter of the new regime. A close relationship was established between the Church and the Government of Rwanda. Eventually, it was not only the foreign-born bishop who would play a leading role but also indigenous *Bahutu* bishops, and it was only the *Bahutu* who ascended to the highest clerical positions (see Figure 8).

[62] These hegemonic structures, as they went through their various permutations, were highly mimetic. The *Bahutu* who came to power exercised power in a manner similar to the *Batutsi* before them. The Belgians mimetically assumed the same role in the power structure as the Germans. Throughout the pre-independence era, the Church and the colonial powers mimetically adopted the same approach to establishing a *Hutu-Tutsi* differentiation and both used the division for their own ends at establishing meta-hegemonic control.

Figure 8

[63] As the *Batutsi* enjoyed privilege until the 1950s, their identity need satisfiers were defined in terms of leadership and relative prosperity. As their situation was radically changed, they must have felt a grave threat to their identity need satisfiers. The *Bahutu* must have interiorized a sense of inferiority after years of being told by educators and colonialists that the *Batutsi* were superior. They would have felt split in their identity between recognizing the injustice of being dominated by a minority on the one hand, and tacitly accepting the superiority of the *Batutsi* on the other. The combination of fear of the "superior" *Batutsi* with anger and resentment over the former domination system and the challenges to make the system work would have fueled the impulse to get rid of the *Batutsi* through a number of
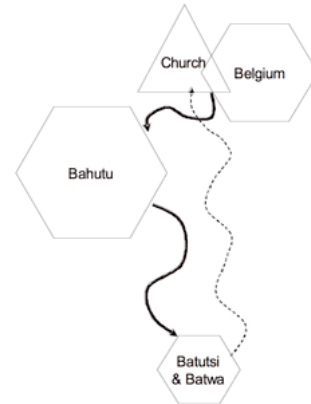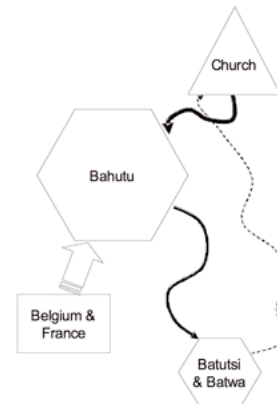
persecutory massacres from 1959 to 1994. These feelings were re-ignited in preparation for the genocide when a combination of the Arusha Accord – a peace agreement between the Government of Rwanda and the RPF that called for power sharing and a new democratic constitution and other reforms – and a series of military actions by the *Batutsi* run Rwandan Patriotic Front meant that once again *Batutsi* could play a role in the Government, and if they were left a role, they would, in the minds of many *Bahutu*, surely make it a dominant one.

The 1994 Genocide as a Mimetic Structure of Violence

[64] Genocide as the elimination of a group of people is dependent on the differentiation of a group of people that could be eliminated. In this case, the *Batutsi* as a distinguishable group came into being as such in large measure because of the work of the Belgians in general, and the Church in particular. The issuing of identity cards that distinguished every citizen as a member of a distinct group was reinforced by discriminatory education processes. Similarly, the deeply embedded structure that one group needed to be dominant as a group was strengthened by the combined meta-hegemonic powers of the Church and the colonizer. The inversion of the hegemonic structure left a passion on the part of some *Batutsi* to return to power, and fear and resentment on the part of the *Bahutu*.

[65] Not only did the Church play a role through the decades of contributing to the hegemonic structures that were a key part of mimetic structures of violence, but members of the indigenous Church indwelled these divisive mimetic structures of violence so much so that it trumped all other Christian values. The majority of the *Bahutu,* who slaughtered the *Batutsi* and their moderate *Hutu* supporters, were church members. The Church, which in all previous massacres had offered sanctuary, now turned those seeking refuge over to the *génocidaires*. It is as though the Church helped set up a contrived domination system complete with the resentments needed to sustain it, and then mimetically accepted as true that which it had created.

Reflection

[66] The above analysis has made clear that the 1994 genocide took place in the context of mimetic structures of violence that existed for decades. These structures were predicated on a clear differentiation between identity groups and the domination of one by the other. These two conditions were brought into being by colonial powers working in concert with churches, primarily the Roman Catholic Church. We have also observed that just before and during the genocide a number of church leaders spoke out and worked against the violence. It is also clear that the development of these mimetic structures of violence were consistent with global trends of European-based colonization with its supporting ideologies and later a global movement toward official decolonization. The Church, in effect, rode these waves and consistently wielded considerable power.

[67] The past cannot be recovered. However, to create a new future the past can be reframed. The reframing of memory would call for the Church, however constituted, to own up to its complicity in the evolution of the mimetic structures of violence that culminated in the genocide. Theologically, there is much to be said for a profound transformation in orientation. The Church could serve as a model to society by naming its role, showing

remorse, asking forgiveness, and generating a new perspective to guide the rebuilding of relationships.

[68] This new perspective could include creating an ethical vision of mutual blessing. This could lead to the creation of safe discursive spaces to address the following questions:

1. How can *Batutsi* who witnessed the genocide and continue live in fear as they suffer the consequences be assured safety and assistance as they try to rebuild their lives?

2. How can the many *Bahutu* who supported the genocide but were not sufficiently culpable to be brought before the Arusha Tribunal nor the *gacaca* processes, be provided with a process whereby they can express their remorse, the fears they experienced before the genocide, and be allowed to work toward a change of heart in a supportive environment?

3. Considering that at a "table truth" level everyone knows who is a *Mututsi* and who is a *Muhutu* but at a "public truth" level it cannot be talked about, what role could the Church play in the construction of a shared humanity that would creatively harness the potential of both groups?

4. As there is no cultural identity in Rwanda, how can the Rwandan people forge a political identity that transcends Hutu and Tutsi identities, so as to build genuine democratic institutions that incorporate a perpetrator of genocide majority alongside a fearful minority within one political community?

5. As there can be no reconciliation without reorganizing power in Rwanda, is there not a need to focus more on building inclusive political institutions rather than exclusive political agencies?

6. How can we depoliticize the history of migrations and resolve the issue of legitimate citizenship in Rwanda so that there is no longer a distinction between indigenous *Batwa* and *Bahutu* and *Batutsi* settlers?

7. As the concept of survivor in today's Rwanda applies exclusively to *Batutsi* who were in Rwanda during the genocide, how can the new power in Rwanda reach out to the perpetrator majority, transcend the opposition between survivor and perpetrator, and define both as survivors of the war?

Final Reflections

[69] While writing this text, we knew too well that we were looking at an early twentieth century reality with twenty-first century lenses. There certainly are compelling contextual facts that are no longer available to us today, and which were so valid then. Far from blaming anyone, we do recognize the important contributions of the Church to the county's social development, even if some wrong choices were made along the way. Interesting to note is the fact that as power changed hands between the two groups, the Church was always there to welcome the excluded group in its schools and its hierarchy.

[70] We have been simply trying to bring together available facts, and to explain how these facts are corroborated by theory. One aspect that needs to be mentioned is the responsibility of Rwandans themselves. Considering the sad colonial situation described above, one would have expected post-independence Rwanda, including the indigenized Church, to immediately embark upon the deconstruction of existing structures of violence. That the indigenous Church was unable to initiate genuine change after independence and instead followed in the steps of its predecessor attests to the power of mimesis.

[71] There is therefore a need to initiate a transformative debate that may guide today's Rwanda from the structures of violence to the structures of blessing, with the Church as a key player. Rwandans cannot do without their Church. As the saying goes, *"Imana yirirwa ahandi igataha i Rwanda"* (God spends the day elsewhere and comes to sleep in Rwanda).

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