

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA:

The Unfinished Quest for a Bureaucracy

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Introduction

This study is on the introduction of bureaucratic norms in Rwanda from the inception of Belgian colonial¹ rule. The focus is on the attempts to integrate a bureaucratic organization at the local level, and the resistance to this imposition up to the present day.

Rwanda is situated in the Great Lakes area, on the Zaïre-Nile watershed separating East from Central Africa. With an area of 26,338 sq.km it is a small country which has, however, the highest population density of Africa (presently about 200/sq.km). The population consists of three clearly distinguishable ethnic groups: the pygmoid Twa (approx. 1%), the negroid Hutu (85%) and the ethiopic Tutsi (14%). It is generally assumed that the Twa were the first inhabitants, and that they were hunters and gatherers. When the peasant Hutu arrived later they set out deforesting the country, apparently with the consent of the Twa to whom they paid a nominal tribute upon arriving. The pastoralist Tutsi immigrated from the North in successive waves which started probably before 1400 A.D. It is likely that they established their political hegemony over the country in a generally peaceful way, thanks to their excellent political organization and through clientship relations based on the lease of cattle. The political organization of Rwanda as it stood at the end of

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1. I shall use the term 'colonial' throughout this essay, although technically it is inaccurate. Ruanda-Urundi was a mandate territory after the first world war and a trust territory after the second world war and up to 1962.

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CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA

Filip Reyntjens

the 19th century when European penetration got underway probably dated from the reign of Mwami (king) Yuhi IV Gahindiro (ca. 1800-30). It was thus rather recent and not yet solidly implanted everywhere. More particularly in the North and on the Western edge of the Zaïre-Nile watershed the authority of the Mwami was more nominal than real. In the second half of the 19th century Rwanda was divided in about eighty provinces or districts each administered by two chiefs, independent one from the other. The chief of the fields (*umutare w'ubutaka*) was generally a Hutu with jurisdiction over the farmers, subject to a tribute in foodstuffs and labour (*uburetewa*, see further), while the chief of the pastures (*umutare w'umukenke*) was generally a Tutsi with jurisdiction over the pastoralists owing a tribute in milk and dairy products. Furthermore, all Rwandans belonged in theory to an army, where they were subjected to the authority of a Tutsi army chief (*umutare w'ingabo* or *umutare w'umuheto*). The armies fulfilled a key role in the socio-political organization; they were not only in charge of the defence of the country, they also performed an essential function in the preservation and transfer of the cultural and affective values of Rwandan society. This entire administrative and political structure served essentially three goals: taxation, the preservation of the power of the central royal authority, and social cohesion. The principal officers of the central government were the king (*umwami*), the queen-mother (*umugabekazi*), the guardians of tradition (*abiru*) and the council of paramount chiefs (*abatware b'intebe*).

At the micro level this organization was supported by a cattle-based clientship contract called *ubuhake*. It came into being when a person of lower status in search of protection and participation in the prestige conferred by the possession of cattle offered his services to a person of higher status, owner of cattle. If the latter accepted the former as his client (*umugaragu*) he entrusted one or more cows to him and became his patron (*shebuja*). The *umugaragu* had to pay allegiance to the *shebuja* and to render services, for which he received the cattle in usufruct, while the *shebuja* would protect his client, especially in the event of judicial or political trouble; he kept the bare ownership of the cattle. The arrangement could be terminated by any one of the parties at any moment. The political importance of *ubuhake* was enormous: although it was individual this institution was a powerful political weapon in the hands of the Tutsi. It created a bond of friendship between the ruling minority of Tutsi and the mass of Hutu. But it did much more: by giving only a precarious usufruct to the Hutu, the Tutsi kept ultimate control over cattle, the symbol of political, economic and social power. This enabled them to specialise themselves in politics, thanks to their hold

over a sizeable part of the country's goods, without the need to integrate their own labour in the productive process (for a further description see d'Hertefeldt, 1962:61-72 and Maquet, 1954:117-150).

Among the Hutu the lineage constituted an autonomous political unit which possessed a collective domain and which formed a residential group. The lineage chief, elected by the members, performed political functions (e.g. controlling the use of land and issuing regulations on matters interesting the members of the lineage) and judicial functions (settling disputes among members). The immigrating Tutsi, having developed a politico-administrative system at the macro level, set out to desintegrate the Hutu lineages into smaller units, whose political and judicial prerogatives were gradually usurped by the Tutsi political structures. In this way, the clanic (or totemic) organization of the Hutu was displaced by the political organization of the Tutsi.

Indirect Rule Belgian Style

After having been placed under German protection in 1896, Rwanda was occupied by Belgian troops in 1916 during the British-Belgian military campaign in East Africa. The mandate over the territory of Ruanda-Urundi was entrusted to Belgium by the League of Nations in 1922.

From the outset, the Belgian colonial administration decided that a system of indirect rule would best suit the needs of the sort of society Rwanda appeared to be. In 1920, the Minister of the Colonies, L. Franck, wrote:

We will apply, in Ruanda and Urundi, a policy of colonial protectorate. This policy is based on the respect of the indigenous institutions; it uses the European as a guide and a protector; it excludes direct administration. This policy is perfectly suited for countries enjoying an old and remarkable organization, where the ruling class shows obvious political talent. But this method does not limit itself to *respecting* and using the indigenous institutions; it also wants to *develop* them in order to *adapt* them gradually to the needs of the colonisation and to the economic progress of the country.²

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2. Confidential memorandum of Minister L. Franck, dated 15 June 1920, African Archives (Brussels), File AE/II nr.1849 (3288); emphasis added. Translations in this article are the author's.

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA
Filip Reyntjens

This text already carried the seeds of the contradictions of a system of indirect rule as it was going to be applied in Rwanda: "to respect" and "to develop and adapt" do not cohabit well. The 1922 *Annual Report* on the administration of the territory implicitly acknowledges this contradiction. Customs would be respected only "inasmuch as they are not contrary to the essential principles of morality nor incompatible with progress, and insofar as the indigenous authorities apply them fairly" (*Rapport* 1922:6). In 1925 Governor P. Ryckmans could hardly be misunderstood when he wrote:

The only remedy is a real and intense occupation, an intimate and permanent contact of the Europeans with the chiefs, with all of them at the same time (...). Either we are the masters or we are nothing. We can make them accept our orders; as givers of advice, we would be simple obtruders they will send packing (Ryckmans, 1925:413).

Not much seems to be left over here of a genuine indirect rule philosophy, except the mere *use* of Rwandan political personnel. The main concern appears to be to confer some form of legitimacy on the decisions taken by the colonial administration. Compared with the British version of indirect rule, the Belgian policy has been characterised as "both complicated and interfering; it wanted to do everything for the people without considering the sociological implications of what was being done" (Tanner, 1965:205). We shall see later that this assessment is, by and large, correct.

As early as in 1930 the *Annual Report* on the administration of Rwanda candidly acknowledged that "this political activity cannot be called indirect rule any more. The administration actually takes care of the petty details of execution, it is in constant touch with all the subchiefs; it controls their activity and constantly intervenes to replace those whose incapacity, inertia or bad faith block the development of the country. Without this *direct and efficacious intervention* our civilising action would be constantly threatened ...".³

The policy of indirect rule, if it was ever applied, had a peculiar ring in Rwanda because of the presence of a ruling ethnic minority, the Tutsi. Indirect rule, therefore, implied what d'Hertefelt has aptly

3. 1930 *Annual Report of the Ruanda Residency*, African Archives (Brussels), File R/RU 2 (54), p. 121 (emphasis added).

called a "dual consensus": on the one hand a consensus of the "traditional" type tied the population to her own "natural" leaders (the Tutsi hierarchy); on the other a consensus of the colonial type developed between this Rwandan hierarchy and the colonial authority (d'Hertefelt, 1960a:403). This interpretation must be qualified in that the use of the term "consensus" is metaphorical; both forms of consensus were indeed to a large extent imposed by the stronger upon the weaker. The colonial consensus was imposed by the colonial power, whereas the traditional consensus was imposed by the Rwandan ruling class.

Administrative Reorganization

The interventionist policy of the Belgian administration with regard to the chiefs was striking in many fields: the incorporation of peripheral regions into the central kingdom, the territorial reorganization, the abolition of the triple chiefly hierarchy, the reservation of political office for the Tutsi exclusively, the stabilisation of political office, the monetarisation of tribute, and the training of chiefs and subchiefs.

(i) The incorporation of peripheral regions

Around the end of the 19th century, when Rwanda was first penetrated by European administrators and missionaries, the Rwanda kingdom consisted of a central core under the direct administration of the Mwami and his chiefs, of peripheral zones only nominally administrated by the king's representatives, and of areas where the central court did exercise some influence but no effective control. The form and intensity of control by the central royal authority were thus diversified, depending on a number of factors such as the duration of the establishment of Tutsi dominance and of the incorporation into the central kingdom, the regional political and lineage organization, the strategic importance of an area and the specific needs of the central authority (such as the supply of products or services of a ritual nature) (Newbury and Rwabukumba, 1971:99).

In the context of their attempts to "rationalise" the Rwandan political and administrative organization, it was difficult for the Belgians to accept that parts of the territory escaped effective control by the Mwami. Such a situation of incomplete and diversified sovereignty was, of course, alien to the European concept of the

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA

Filip Reyntjens

State and contrary to the Belgian desire to bring about unity of authority and uniformity of administration. In the 1920s the colonial administration therefore set out to implant or strengthen the royal authority in the whole of Belgian Rwanda.⁴ This incorporation policy had a particular significance since a number of semi-autonomous regions were ruled by Hutu chiefs or petty kings.

Incorporation implied the replacement of Hutu leaders by Tutsi delegates of the king, even in regions where the latter had no historical legitimacy. As some of these regions possessed a lineage organization, as opposed to a political one, chiefly positions had often to be created *ex nihilo*.⁵ More important, the introduction of Tutsi chiefs implied the imposition of rule by an alien ethnic group; this was to dramatically alter the structure of authority and the relations between two main ethnic groups at the expense of the Hutu.

The extension of central government was carried out between 1920 and 1930 in the North (Ndorwa, Mulera), the Northwest (Bushiru) and the Southwest (Bukunzi, Busozo). Since these regions, ruled by local petty kings, had never before been effectively subjected to the central authority, it is remarkable that the Belgian administration justified the operation as a "restoration" of the authority of the Mwami (*Rapport* 1925:64). This statement is particularly striking insofar as Bukunzi and Busozo are concerned, as the central court itself had in the past preferred to leave them a high degree of autonomy, among other things for ritual reasons. The effective occupation of all these regions shows that the colonial administration valued the efficiency of a uniform administrative system more than the wish of the Mwami himself to pursue flexible arrangements in cases where they had shown their usefulness during generations.

Only in 1931 was the occupation of the whole country complete. The Mwami's authority was established everywhere and the borders of the kingdom by and large coincided with the colonial borders. However, the position of the chiefs in the "integrated" regions remained unstable; their authority was based only on the power of the colonial

4. There was, in fact, also a 'British' Rwanda, which had been severed from the kingdom through the German-British border treaty of 1910.

5. This reminds of an analogous situation in Uganda, where 'Ganda agents' were sent to other regions in order to assume 'customary' functions created from scratch (see e.g. Morris and Read, 1972:27-29).

administration. In the North and the Northwest in particular the legitimacy of the imported authorities was minimal. This was, at least in part, due to the fact that the political conception of Tutsi law clashed with the patrimonial and lineage-based local Hutu traditions there; the Tutsi turned the land-based *ubukonde* patron-client relationship (see below) into a more formal political clientship structure. The incorporated regions were thus, in the name of the principles of indirect rule, effectively subjected to a system of direct rule by the Tutsi.

(ii) The territorial reorganization

At the end of the 19th century, Rwanda was subdivided into about eighty provinces or districts. These were, however, by no means uniform: except for the military districts at the borders there existed no chiefdoms in the sense of connected units ruled by one chief. Some chiefs administered wide areas cut up in different estates sometimes far apart from each other (d'Hertefelt 1971:79, footnote 28). Each district was in turn subdivided into a large number of smaller domains. The territorial reorganization started in 1926. The smallest unit, the *igikingi* (plural: *ibikingi*) was tackled first. The *igikingi* encompassed a hill⁶, sometimes just part of it, inhabited by a few households (between two and fifteen, rarely more). These estates were endowed on favourites by the Mwami himself or by chiefs. The Belgian administration felt not only that this excessive dispersion of the chiefdoms was detrimental from a political and administrative point of view, but also that it led to an increase of burdens (tribute and labour) laid upon the Hutu (*Rapport* 1926:67). At the insistence of the colonial authorities the Mwami was forced in 1926 to abstain from allotting new *ibikingi*; every vacant *igikingi* was to be annexed to the subchiefdom. At the end of 1930 the Resident⁷ decided to abolish the subsisting *ibikingi*.⁸ Realising that this first step was insufficient, the administration had already embarked in 1927 on a systematic policy of regrouping chiefdoms and subchiefdoms in order to transform them into linked and compact territories. At first

6. Rwanda is the "country of the thousand hills"; the hill is the basic administrative and socio-economic unit of the country.

7. The Resident was the highest Belgian official in Rwanda; above him were the Governor of Ruanda-Urundi in Usumbura (now Bujumbura in Burundi) and the Governor-general of the Belgian Congo in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa in Zaire).

8. Letter nr.5395/Ord. of 4 December 1930, see Bourgeois, 1935:6.

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA
Filip Reyntjens

the initiative was left to the office-holders themselves: they were asked to exchange territory in a kind of re-allotment scheme. They were told that it was in their own best interest to initiate these exchanges, "because in six months or one year's time we will ourselves intervene in an effective way".⁹ The removal of a number of petty chiefs, "incurably bad" (*Rapport* 1931:56), added another possibility of regrouping through adding the domains of deposed notables to an adjoining chiefdom or subchiefdom. The prohibition on cumulating different functions and the obligation imposed on chiefs to reside in their chiefdom were other ways of achieving the end.

The bulk of the reorganization was finished by the end of 1932. There were then 65 chiefs, each having jurisdiction over about 5,500 taxpayers, and 1,043 subchiefs, each with 343 taxpayers on average. To attain this rationalisation and simplification the colonial administration caused a real political slaughter, especially between 1930 and 1932. Table 1 makes this clear.

TABLE 1: TERRITORIAL REORGANIZATION IN RWANDA, 1930-1932

year	chiefs dismissed	subchiefs dismissed	small entities abolished
1930	2	73	215
1931	7	223	724
1932	1	20	29
totals	10	316	968

In all 1,294 chiefs, subchiefs and *abanyabikingi* (holders of *ibikingi*) disappeared in three years' time, i.e. half the number exercising such function before the reform.¹⁰ Together with the abolition of the triple hierarchy and the regulation of tributes, which will be discussed further, these measures impoverished a considerable number

9. Letter nr.5543/Org. of 25 December 1930 by resident Coubeau to the district administrators (author's archives).

10. To this number a victim of stature must be added: Mwami Yuhi V Musinga was deposed by the Belgian administration on 12 November 1931.

of Tutsi who were forced into engaging in agricultural labour (d'Hertefelt, 1960b:451).

(iii) The abolition of the triple hierarchy

We have seen in the introduction that the traditional political and administrative organization at the district level relied on a triple hierarchy of chiefs. These three chiefs controlled each other: for their subjects the competition between them provided a protection against abuse of power and for the Mwami it constituted a useful tool for a better control of the country.

Not surprisingly the Belgian administration looked with suspicion upon this system, which it considered too complicated and "irrational". During the military occupation (1916-1918) it had already experienced the problems inherent in dealing with different local authorities, especially in obtaining porters and food. The administration started therefore, in 1923-24, to appoint one chief per area to be responsible for the execution of its orders; if no chief clearly emerged as the most important, the district administrators themselves appointed a "chief of *akazi*" (chief of labour-duty). The aim was however to achieve a formula more in line with European bureaucratic thinking, which left no room for a system with three political authorities in the same jurisdiction. The administration, therefore, decided to merge the three functions in one person. The army chief (who was always a Tutsi) would generally receive the unified command, as the term *umutware* (chief) was often understood as referring to the *umutware w'ingabo*.

This reform went far beyond the importance the Belgians ascribed to it, as the social relations between the ethnic groups were fundamentally modified: after the abolition of the triple hierarchy, coupled with the monopolisation of political office for the Tutsi (see *infra*), there followed a rapid evolution toward a more authoritarian regime exercised by one district authority. Before the reform, even Tutsi chiefs often lent a ready ear to complaints by their subjects against another chief, as they were engaged in a permanent battle for the preservation and extension of their powers. This enabled the Hutu to obtain the support of one chief in their conflicts with another: in this way the system provided the population with a certain protection. The formal institution of only one chief did away with this possibility of appeal to a protector. Not only did this increase the risk of oppressive rule by the Tutsi notables, but - perhaps more importantly in the long run - it made it less likely that the Hutu

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA

Filip Reyntjens

would look upon at least some Tutsi as their allies and protectors. The Belgian lack of understanding of the normative and affective basis of the relations between chiefs and subjects thus not only made life harder to bear for the Hutu but also sharpened ethnic contradictions.

(iv) Monopolisation of political office for the Tutsi

The "Hamitic Hypothesis" was widely held among colonial administrators and missionaries. This hypothesis held that "everything of value found in Africa was brought there by the Hamites, allegedly a branch of the Causasian race" (Sanders, 1969:521). Speke was a great propagator of this hypothesis in the interlacustrine region: when he discovered the kingdom of Buganda with its sophisticated political organization, he attributed this civilisation to a race of nomadic herdsmen related to the 'hamitic' Galla. Pastoralism and its attributes thus received an aura of cultural superiority (idem:528-530). The attractiveness of this theory for the Europeans was that physical qualities (the Nilo-hamitic physiognomy) could be linked to mental and intellectual capacities: the 'Hamites' - in Rwanda the Tutsi - were born rulers and entitled to a past and a future almost as honourable as their European "cousins" (Linden, 1977:2). Collaboration with the Tutsi could thus be easily supported ideologically.

Although historically the Hutu had always exercised political functions¹¹, in the peripheral regions as well as in central Rwanda, the Belgians set out to reserve political office for the Tutsi. The head of the Catholic church in Rwanda, Bishop Classe, insisted upon following this course when the Belgians, exacerbated by Tutsi resistance to reform, considered using more Hutu in government. Mgr. Classe wrote in 1930:

The greatest disservice the Government could do to itself and the country would be to eliminate the Tutsi caste. *A revolution of that kind would lead the country straight to anarchy and to odiously anti-European communism.* Far from ensuring progress, it would annihilate the action of the government by denying it the assistance of born auxiliaries, capable of understanding and following it (...). As a general rule, we will find no chiefs who are better, more intelligent, more active, more capable of

11. Even the Twa occupied posts of subchief. Kagame (1952:117, footnote 71) cites the names of 40 Twa subchiefs.

understanding progress and even more accepted by the population, than the Tutsi. (Classe, 1930)

In the early 1930's all Hutu chiefs and subchiefs had been dismissed and replaced by Tutsi, and the colonial administration pursued an active policy of protecting and strengthening the political hegemony of the Tutsi. By disallowing access of Hutu to political office - even where they had occupied it of old - the colonial authorities and the Catholic church without doubt exacerbated, and sometimes even created, ethnic opposition.

(v) The stabilisation of political office

As early as 1919 the royal court was obliged to inform the colonial administration of any change in the tenure of chiefs and subchiefs. However, it took the administration four years to induce the court to submit a list of office-holders. According to an official report the Mwami opposed such an obligation "because he feared that such information about the hills and their notables would allow the administration effectively to fight the arbitrariness in the allocation of office".¹² In 1923 the appointment to or the acceptance of a function without the approval of the Resident was made punishable with a prison sentence of two years. The prior approval of the Resident thus became necessary for appointments and dismissals, but it soon became more than that: the colonial administration itself set out to appoint chiefs and subchiefs, with or without the approval of the Mwami or the chiefs.

Inevitably this led to a gradual shift of authority. The colonial administration increasingly controlled appointments and dismissals at all levels and the intervention of the Mwami was asked merely in order to obtain the appearance of legitimacy. This evolution entailed three important consequences. The first was that unrest and instability among chiefs greatly diminished as they were no longer forced to pay court to the Mwami or to indulge in intrigue in order to avoid having rivals replace them in the Mwami's good graces. The second effect was that the real chiefs had to come forward and make themselves known to the colonial administration. The finding of the 'real chiefs' has been a common problem everywhere in Africa.

12. *Rapport Etabli en Reponse au Questionnaire Adressé en 1929 par M. le Gouverneur du Ruanda-Urundi à l'Administrateur de Nyanza*, p.6.

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA

Filip Reyntjens

Margery Perham, for instance, reports for northern Ghana that "they (the chiefs) feared for the effects of contact with these impatient revolutionary white men, and they sent unimportant agents to face the music" (Perham, 1934:7). A similar phenomenon had occurred in Rwanda during the early years of the occupation: chiefs wanting to back out of the obligations imposed by the colonial authorities passed the responsibility of contacts with the administrators on to subordinates, who in turn would delegate further, so that ultimately the administration found itself giving orders to obscure clients with no political authority whatsoever. Some chiefs lost out in their own plot: "Certain holders of office became the victims of their initial lie when they got replaced by those they had deliberately used as a façade" (*Historique et chronologie*, s.d.:24). The last consequence was that the chiefs became dependent on the administration instead of the Mwami for the obtaining and preservation of their function. I shall later briefly discuss the role-conflicts that resulted from this shift.

(vi) Monetarisisation of tribute

Although precolonial Rwanda knew many forms of tribute and service, I shall only describe here the transformation which the most important, *uburetwa*, underwent. In the early days of the Belgian occupation *uburetwa* entailed tribute-labour of two days out of five (the Rwandan week) or 146 days per year per household (*urugo*) in favour of the chief and the subchief. In 1924, *uburetwa* was reduced by the administration to two days out of seven (the European week) and in 1927 it was further diminished to one day per week. This last reduction was, however, specified as meaning 13 days per year per able male adult. In practice this often led to an increase of the burden as obligations formerly imposed upon a group were now laid upon individuals. The colonial administration furthermore coupled the reduction of labour-duty with its introduction over the whole territory, even where it had never existed, e.g. in the recently incorporated areas.

At that time, the administration refused to intervene further in this field. It feared that this would disturb the social and political organization as it felt that the authority of chiefs and subchiefs found its main expression in their right to tribute-labour, without which they would enjoy "neither prestige nor power" (*Rapport* 1927:37). The Belgians repeatedly used this argument until 1937, e.g. when Lord Lugard in the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations pleaded in favour of replacing the labour-duty by a tax. However, the reform considered impossible in 1934 became partly

possible in 1936, and it was in general use in 1944 before becoming compulsory in 1949. Between 1936 and 1938 certain categories of Rwandans were given permission to 'buy off' *uburetwa* for 1 Franc a day, i.e. 13 Francs per year. As is true for politics in general, in colonial politics things often happen much faster than expected. While the 1938 *Annual Report* still stated that "though the abolition of duties remains the final objective, it will take a long time to realise" (*Rapport* 1938:75), in 1944 it was decided that all Rwandans could redeem *uburetwa* if they wished. 90% of the population had already made use of this opportunity in 1947 and the redemption was made compulsory for all in 1949 (*Historique et Chronologie*, s.d.:29).

The story of the abolition of *uburetwa* is interesting for different reasons. First, because the colonial administration, in its strive toward uniformity, generalised a form of tribute even in areas where it had never existed. Second, because the administration, committed to the preservation of the existing 'traditional' order, for a long time withstood pressure fundamentally to change the system of tribute-labour, and yet was forced after only a few years to accept the abolition of a custom which it had considered to be essential for the safeguarding of the social and political order. Finally, because the evolution of the thinking on *uburetwa* is a fine illustration of the bureaucratisation of local cadres. A customary obligation expressing a personal bond between chief and subject was replaced by a monetary levy, a tax, a salary for the office-holder.

(vii) Training of chiefs and subchiefs

In order to render an indirect rule policy based on the Tutsi hierarchy compatible with the requirements of 'modern' and 'rational' government, notables would have to be trained in a number of administrative and other skills. During the first years of the occupation the Resident had already attempted to convince the Mwami's court and the great chiefs to send noble children to the mission schools being created everywhere. The Mwami and the chiefs had resisted this idea as they considered Western education to be poison (*uburozi*) which would destroy the Rwandan soul. Their main objection was to the religious character of the schools.¹³ The

13. The Bible was compulsory reading in these schools: "Without realising it, these children are learning our holy religion: their main reading book is the Holy History" (*Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique, Rapport Annual 1919-1920*, Algiers 1920, p.381).

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA

Filip Reyntjens

attempts of the Belgian administration to force the chiefs to send their children to these schools were bypassed by the registration of children of clients or illegitimate children. When these practices dawned upon the colonial authorities the resident and the missionaries told the Mwami it was their intention to call only upon educated youngsters when attributing political functions: therefore, if the court and the notables went on refusing to have young Tutsi of good families educated, political office would be offered to Hutu or poor Tutsi. As the Mwami immediately perceived the dangers of such a move, he assured the administration that his only objection was to the religious character of the schools.¹⁴ There was little the Resident could say to this reply and he decided to create state-controlled (and theoretically neutral) "Schools for sons of chiefs". Soon the access to these schools, of which the most important was in the royal capital Nyanza, became exclusively reserved for young Tutsi. In 1925 the Mwami had accordingly "readily agreed to the wish of the resident to appoint young literate Tutsi, graduated from the Nyanza school, to positions that have become vacant because of the death of a chief without male descendant" (*Rapport* 1925:65).

After their education in the school, the youngsters were offered a practical training of 6 to 12 months with a district administrator. If they were sons of a chief they would first assist him and then succeed him in office. If their father held no political office, they were given a function as soon as the Mwami saw fit, e.g. upon the death or the dismissal of a subchief without trained sons.

By and large, the schools corresponded to the aims envisaged by the administration, namely "gradually to constitute a breeding-ground of candidates penetrated by our civilising ideas, among whom the leading elements for the future can be selected" (*Rapport* 1927:37). It is obvious that teaching the art of reading and writing was by no means the only objective, and that political and social acculturation was at least as important. As early as in 1920 the Royal Commissioner for the occupied territories gave a nice sample of his firm belief in the force of a dominant culture:

More than one hundred sons of chiefs attend the school at Nyanza (...). Three years during which they are not just being trained: they live in the constant environment of the European,

14. Letter of 23 June 1918, Mwami Musinga to Royal Commissioner General Malfeyt, African Archives (Brussels), File AE/II nr.319 (2654).

they confide in him, learn through contacts with him, and leave the place definitively under our influence; all the chiefs of tomorrow will be educated according to our views; through them we hold the entire country.¹⁵

The 'neutral' character of the education notwithstanding, this cultural action also indirectly involved christianisation. The administration implicitly made clear that it was in the notables' best interest to be not only literate, but also Christian. The message was received loud and clear: in 1928 nearly all the pupils at the Nyanza school were Christian or being catechised. In 1936 with only 18% of the population converted, 78% of the chiefs and 84% of the subchiefs were Christian (Linden, 1977:195). These figures speak for themselves: the stress laid upon the christianisation of the elite was immense.

The New Chiefs

All the interventions I have described gradually transformed the Rwandan local authorities into civil servants of the Belgian administration. This tendency was made apparent through the imposition of uniform bureaucratic rules, the use of chiefs and subchiefs for the execution of decisions and measures decided by the colonial administration, the control over appointments and dismissals, the training, the monetarisation of tribute and the 'salarisation' of income. The new bureaucratic functions imposed upon the chiefs came on top of their 'traditional' commitments, and made their authority much more difficult to bear for the population. Patronage-functions got further removed from established norms and therefore less accepted. This trend toward a bureaucratic service made M. Perham conclude that "it makes little difference whether the chief was originally a natural authority, or is merely an appointed agent" (Perham 1934:11).

Especially since the mid-1920s the Belgian administration initiated far-reaching changes in order to transform the Rwandan administrative hierarchy into a bureaucracy compatible with European standards. What had been a hierarchy based on hereditary leadership was turned into a structure where recruitment was based on competence and skill, measured increasingly by the level of formal training; income of

15. Letter nr.2319 of 29 December 1921, Royal Commissioner a.i. Ryckmans to the Minister of Colonies, African Archives (Brussels), File AE/II nr.631 (373).

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA

Filip Reyntjens

chiefs and subchiefs accrued from salary rather than from tribute; holders of office were appointed, promoted, transferred and dismissed on the basis of civil service norms. Their dwindling number and their transferability further weakened the capacity of chiefs and subchiefs to determine the political and economic fate of their populations.

The *function* of chiefs and subchiefs underwent by far the most thorough change. The colonial administration imposed obligations quite incompatible with their 'traditional' functions. Fallers has arrived at conclusions for the Soga that are, *mutatis mutandis*, applicable to Rwanda. He wrote:

Traditional Soga political institutions emphasised the value of particular rights and obligations, a pattern which Parsons has described by the term "*particularism and functional diffuseness*" (...). The value system associated with bureaucratic organization is in most respects in opposition to this pattern. Here the guiding norm is (Weber) "straightforward duty without regard to personal considerations". Relations in such a system are to be, in Parsons' terms, "*universalistic and functionally specific*" (Fallers, 1955:290; see more generally, Fallers, 1956:155-203).

No matter which attitude the chief adopted or which function he emphasized the risk of getting into trouble was ever present. These contradictory demands, therefore, afford a partial explanation for the large number of dismissals of chiefs and subchiefs: confronted with highly divergent expectations it became very difficult to avoid sanction. Parallel with his roles in the framework of the old institutions the chief was forced to function within the new bureaucracy of the colonial administrative structure. Bereft of real responsibility and cursed by their subject because of the burdens they were forced to impose upon them, the chiefs and subchiefs were driven increasingly to seek the support of the Belgian district administrators, whose instruments they finally became. While the basis of everyday acceptance of the chief's position and performance of the subjects' duties "was to be found (...) in the reciprocal nature of their relationship - in the interpretation of the subjects' duties as returns for benefits received" (Mair, 1936:307), this relationship was now completely destroyed. In order to stand their ground they alienated the sympathy and loyalty of their people for the simple purpose of maintaining themselves in office. They thus gradually got imprisoned in an administrative career which deteriorated into a livelihood, certainly after their income accrued essentially from a salary.

The last conflict around the chiefly position was one of loyalty. Answerable to the Mwami according to customary constitutional law, chiefs and subchiefs in effect depended on the Belgian administration. They were, therefore, forced into a permanent search for a balance between these two sources of authority, of which the colonial one of course emerged as the most important for survival in office.

Attitude, functions, loyalty: again and again the chief was trapped in conflict caused by a mosaic of conflicting obligations, expectations and restraints. Thus, while the colonial administration no doubt enhanced the position of the ruling class in the framework of its indirect rule policy, it also made it completely dependent on external support. That was the consequence of a wish to have 'traditional' authority at every level function according to bureaucratic norms. The changes in the chiefly functions were thus structural, functional and normative.

The near-absorption of chiefs and subchiefs into the colonial civil service was unequivocally and officially cons^ecrated in the Law of 4 October 1943 on the indigenous political organization. The Mwami, chiefs and subchiefs had to be invested by the colonial authority and upon assuming office they were required to take an oath promising that they would faithfully conform to the instructions and orders of the Belgian administration. Most tasks enumerated in the text are duties of support, information or execution of decisions of the colonial authorities: these tasks were to be fulfilled "upon the summons and instructions of the competent territorial authority". The latter could always veto any decision or action by a chief or subchief. The chiefdom's treasury was administered by the district administrator. And so on.

The Revolution

The imbalances created by the interventions of the Belgian administration can be identified as a consequence of the inherent contradictions of a policy of indirect rule, about which White has correctly said that it contains the seeds of its own destruction (White, 1959:165). Belgium was by no means the only colonial power that fell in the trap of the contradictions of an indirect rule policy. It was in this respect in good company. In his work of great authority, *Native Administration in the British African Territories*, Lord Hailey wrote:

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA
Filip Reyntjens

If originally there was some difference between them [direct rule and indirect rule] in principle, there is today far less distinction in practice (...). Those governments (...) which have relied in principle on the use of traditional institutions are seen to have so transformed them in the process that Africans of a past generation might find it difficult to recognise them (...). (Hailey, 1953:36)

Indeed, while the support given by the colonial authorities to the local political elite enhanced their position and increased their exploitative capability, the equilibria of protection and allegiance that had made this supremacy bearable in the past were gravely disturbed in the process. In the 1950s it became increasingly clear that the system had undergone a fundamental change, brought about by an array of interventions by the colonial authorities and the missions: the divesting of the Mwami, the chiefs and the subchiefs of their 'traditional' functions, the imposed and artificial extension of central Tutsi authority, certain cautious but disruptive emancipatory moves (e.g. education, cash-crops, religion, abolition of tribute in kind, etc.) all contributed to create a pre-revolutionary situation. While these interventions had slowly eroded the stability of the system, the 1950s brought an additional number of more immediate "premises" (the term is Chalmers Johnson's) of the Rwandan revolution. These included:

- the constant pressure of the United Nations and its Trusteeship Council: reports of visiting missions forced the Belgians into political reform and their insistence on establishing a time-table for the achievement of autonomy and independence placed Rwanda in the broad movement of nationalism and decolonisation;
- the Belgian "Ten Year Plan for the Economic and Social Development of Ruanda-Urundi" explicitly recognised the need for social and political reform;
- a decree of 1952 introduced, albeit very timidly, the principle of the democratic election of councils at the different levels (subchiefdom, chiefdom, country);
- the *ubuhake* clientship contract was formally abolished in 1954: while this reform purported to emancipate the Hutu from their Tutsi patrons, it was deficient in that it was not accompanied by land reform, thus leaving the Hutu dependent on their former patrons for the availability of grazing lands; this caused frustration and the feeling among many Hutu that the system would not allow their effective emancipation;
- the emergence of counter-elites, both among the educated Hutu and progressive, reform-minded Tutsi.

In Chalmers Johnson's terms such premises may lead to "power deflation" and loss of authority when the incumbents are unable to formulate and implement a policy which restores the confidence of the participants and resynchronises the system (Johnson, 1966:88-118). In such a situation, certain "accelerators" (Johnson) or "precipitants" (Eckstein, 1965) may lead to revolt and eventually to revolution. This is what happened in Rwanda: the death in suspect circumstances of Mwami Mutara III Rudahigwa in July 1959, the creation of three political parties in August and September of the same year, and an incident involving one of the few Hutu subchiefs on 1 November 1959 resulted in an uprising by the Hutu. The Hutu engaged in a violent 'jacquerie' which displaced about half of the Tutsi chiefs and subchiefs, who were either killed, arrested or dismissed, or went into exile (for more information on the revolution see Reyntjens, 1985:181-317). With the help of the local Belgian administration, which after some hesitation decided to support the insurgents, a Hutu regime was put in place. One of the means of doing so, of particular interest to this paper, was the organization of local elections in 1960.

The violent revolt of November 1959 against the Tutsi hierarchy had left a large number of chiefdoms and subchiefdoms vacant. Table 2 shows the extent of the change caused by these events.

TABLE 2 CHANGES IN THE ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF CHIEFS AND SUBCHIEFS AFTER THE 'JACQUERIE' OF 1959

	1 November 1959	1 March 1960
number of chiefdoms	45	45
vacant chiefdoms	2	1
Tutsi chiefs	43	22
Hutu chiefs	-	22
number of subchiefdoms	559	531
vacant subchiefdoms	-	17
Tutsi subchiefs	549	217
Hutu subchiefs	10	297

As can be seen from these figures, about half the chiefs and subchiefs were now Hutu, termed 'interim' authorities. In the meantime, a decree of 25 December 1959 stipulated that the subchiefdoms were to be replaced by *Communes* (municipalities) and that the

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA

Filip Reyntjens

chiefdoms were to disappear as political units. The municipal elections were held between 26 June and 30 July 1960. 229 burgomasters (mayors) and 2,896 municipal councilors were to be elected by universal male suffrage. After a stormy campaign the major Hutu party, Parmehutu, scored a massive victory: it captured more than 70% of the votes, while the Tutsi parties managed a mere 14% which corresponded roughly to their share of the population (Reyntjens 1985:275-288).

Upon assuming power many burgomasters interpreted their role in prerevolutionary terms. They set out to assume all the regalia of the demoted Tutsi chiefs and subchiefs. One particular instance is related in quite some detail in a case study on Remera by Gravel. Ijeri (pseudonym), a young opportunist, was declared burgomaster of Remera when other candidates declined the office. After a cautious start, during which he committed only minor abuses of power, he became increasingly authoritarian: ordering arrests, ~~chase-haressing~~ making the population buy membership-cards of Parmehutu, etc. He then started disregarding certain customary rights. The inhabitants were too afraid to denounce him; on the contrary, they brought him presents hoping to appease him. Feeling 'chief' more and more, he next dismissed all Tutsi working for the commune before embarking on a genuine operation of terror against all Tutsi indiscriminately. They were arrested, their homes ransacked and burnt down. It was only when Ijeri started 'executing' people that the administration intervened. He was arrested and charged with murder and inciting violence (Gravel, 1968:192-195).

Clearly in Ijeri's mind, a translation of his role as burgomaster was seen in terms of the old political organization: when he imitated the Tutsi chiefs and subchiefs he did this, however, without the slightest basis of legitimacy. Ijeri went too far and eventually lost his position, but others must have known the limits of arbitrary action.

The Thermidorian Syndrome

The regime that emerged from the revolution and inherited the reins of power upon independence seemed decided to adhere to a 'rational' and bureaucratic form of government. This was the logic of things: the breach with old regime toppled by the revolution implied a breach with its clientship-based political relations. And yet, in practice Rwanda experienced what Lemarchand has aptly called a 'Thermidorian Syndrome': "It involves a partial restoration of the very order of things which the revolution at first proposed to destroy"

(Lemarchand, 1966:318) or, in the words of Hannah Arendt, "a movement of revolving back to some pre-established point and, by implication, a swinging back to a pre-ordained order" (Arendt, 1963:35). This became very apparent in administrative behaviour at all levels, from President of the Republic to municipal councillor. The reports of parliamentary commissions of enquiry in 1964 and 1968 provide numerous examples of burgomasters, *préfets*, local and regional party officials arrogating to themselves all the attributes, attitudes and values associated with the functions of chief and subchief under the *ancien régime*. Ideologically, therefore, the revolution has had a limited impact on Rwandan society. An early politician and journalist, A. Munyangaju, had warned this danger already in 1959. Realising that the problem was not just ethnic, but rather socio-economic, he wrote that "we will not solve it by giving to the Hutu the caste privileges presently reserved to the Tutsi aristocracy" (Munyangaju, 1959:43). These were prophetic words, as that is exactly what happened: while Hutu replaced Tutsi as occupants of roles no fundamental alteration in the structuring of the roles occurred (Lemarchand, 1966:318). In such a situation, conflict is inevitable: the incompatibility of the survival of numerous elements of the old order with the democratic aspirations of the revolutionary movement was bound to create frustrations.

For instance, the 1964 Report had this to say about the prefectural administration: "In almost all *préfectures* the *préfet*, the *sous-préfet* and the civil servants spy on each other instead of pulling their efforts together for the benefit of administrative efficacy (...). One has the impression that when appointing someone in a responsible position the staff attached to him are there to control him and to jeopardise all his initiatives" (Assemblée Nationale, 1964:58). The municipal administrations were often paralysed by conflicts of interest and personality, by waste of public money and by abuse of power (idem:59). In a number of municipalities of Gitarama *préfecture*, for instance, "the feudal spirit is still alive, manifesting itself in internal struggle, interclan antagonism and intrigue of all kinds" (idem:6). The *préfet* of Gisenyi "forces his clients (sic) to sit on their knees for him, and to clap their hands"¹⁶ (Idem:27). The general impression was that the leadership increasingly was becoming "an oligarchy which cumulates all posts in the Party and the administra-

16. Slowly clapping one's hands for someone was, under the monarchy, a sign of high respect, usually reserved only for the Mwami and the chiefs.

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA
Filip Reyntjens

tion, thus transposing at another level the functions of the former chiefs, at the same time administrator, judge and legislator" (idem:67).

The 1968 Report was even more critical of the way the country was being run. It said among other things:

Unity, concord, mutual support, confidence, co-operation, patriotism all have lost their meaning and have ceased to exist. These values have been replaced by condescension, hatred, egoism, antagonism, dishonesty, race for money, dissension and regionalism. The popular masses feel that their leaders have betrayed them when saying that the revolution of 1959 would free them from injustice. They realise now that this was merely a way of getting hold of functions; once these were occupied, injustice became worse than before. They are not afraid to say that the old system to invest chiefs was better than the present electoral system, the latter meaning in practice that meritorious people are debarred and those not worthy are nominated as candidates. (Assemblée Nationale, 1968:101)

The President of the Supreme Court, although sitting in the South of the country (Nyanza), played a major role in the political life of his home *préfecture*, Byumba in the North. With the support of the local *préfet* his faction dominated the region and punished those "on the other side" (idem:9-10). Some burgomasters organised or at least presided over the 'parade of the cows', to which local MP's were invited (idem:32). The annual presentation of the cows to the chiefs and to the Mwami was an old Tutsi custom, which symbolised the principle that all cattle belonged eventually to the Mwami. Such a parade was of course highly contrary to the spirit of the Republican régime since the Hutu had insisted on (and obtained) the abolition of the cattle clientship relationship.

Just as in traditional Rwanda the offices of chief and subchief were inseparable from ties of clientship, today the tenure of local officials depends on how successful they are in building up a personal following among their constituents (Lemarchand, 1970:275) and on the support and protection they can generate from above. Lemarchand (1970:274) has rightly argued that the relations between the *préfets* and the central government on the one hand, and between *préfets* and burgomasters on the other, bear some resemblance to the relations between the chiefs and the Mwami and between chiefs and subchiefs. Thus, for instance, the *préfet* attempts to inform the central government only partially and intermittently: the chiefs' past

tendency to shield themselves from criticism from above by withholding or distorting information has not disappeared. Vis-à-vis burgomasters the *préfet*, sitting in a council not unlike that of the chiefs (*conseil préfectoral*), has the last word on virtually every aspect of administrative life, at both prefectoral and municipal level. There is evidence that the functioning of prefectoral and municipal administrations has in fact become less 'bureaucratic' and more 'traditional' than that of chiefdoms and subchiefdoms under Tutsi rule in the 1950s. Despite its clear intentions upon seizing power the republican regime appears unable to have norms of efficacious, unpersonal and honest government implemented throughout the country. This is all the more remarkable since one of the causes of the revolution was precisely the arbitrary, nepotistic and clientship based behaviour of the Tutsi incumbents before 1959.

The 'Thermidorian Syndrome' occurred in a particularly striking way in the North and Northwest. The clientship system there had been based of old on the soil (as opposed to the other regions, where it was based on cattle). In the old days, when an agriculturalist decided to take soil from the forest, he simply occupied it without having to ask the permission of any political authority whatsoever. He merely paid a symbolic tribute (*urwugururo*) to the Twa whose hunting grounds it was. Established in the domain he had delineated and prepared for culture, the deforestator became *umukonde*, i.e. titleholder of *ubukonde* or the right to possession of soil. Thus Hutu lineages progressively occupied the forests of Northern Rwanda (Maquet and Naigiziki, 1957:356). This system of lineage appropriation was nothing special, as "the principle that he who clears land establishes rights of a permanent character has existed over the whole world from ancient times" (Meek, 1949:23). This system caused no problem as long as there was land to clear for everyone. The situation changed when the forest zone had been completely parcelled out and when newcomers, in order to find land, had to submit themselves to a clientship contract with existing *umukonde*. Thus the *ubugererwa* contract was born: while the *umukonde* gave land, the *umugererwa* became his client. We have seen that the North and Northwest had been effectively incorporated in the central kingdom under Belgian pressure in the 1920s. Imported Tutsi chiefs had modified the *ubugererwa* relationship by replacing, as much as they could, the local lineage-based and patrimonial characteristics with their own political conceptions. After the revolution the Hutu of the North and Northwest immediately did away with the political forms of *ubugererwa*, but they left the old, pre-Tutsi clientship system intact. The Northerners did everything in their power to avoid the abolition of their own *ubugererwa* by national authorities pursuing the

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA

Filip Reyntjens

revolutionary promise to abolish 'feudal' institutions. Parliamentary debates throughout the 1960s have been marked by conflict over the issue; parliamentary commissions were set up but, due to the obstruction from the North, were unable to submit reports and proposals, and up to the present day the matter has not received a formal solution. The question of course ceased to be debated after the military took power in 1973, installing a regime dominated by Northerners. This incident and many others show to what extent clan and lineage based allegiances still play a major role in the North and Northwest (for further information see Reyntjens, 1985:487-495).

Other forms of unbureaucratic behaviour are common at all levels of government and they affect most administrative business. One example is the way in which elections are organised. Even if the President, for the presidential elections, or the candidates, for the parliamentary elections, honestly wanted genuine elections to take place, this would probably be impossible due to the attitude of the local authorities. These want to return 'good' results, i.e. results they perceive as desired by influential personalities. The chairmen of ballot stations, the municipal councillors, the burgomasters and the *préfets* all have a profound tendency to rig elections in order to show the desired result for their station, their sector, their commune, their *préfecture*. In December 1978 a constitutional referendum was held, followed a week later by presidential elections. Although a 'yes' vote in the referendum was obviously seen as a vote favourable to the President, two *préfectures* returned a positive vote that was very low by African standards (60% in Gikongoro, 63% in Kibuye). The local politicians panicked and the ministers from these regions, the *préfets* and the burgomasters immediately started 'campaigning' on behalf of the President. A week later both *préfectures* returned votes of more than 99% in the presidential ballot. When I witnessed the 1983 presidential elections, the massive ballot fraud was all too apparent and no choice was offered to the electors (the President was re-elected with 99.85% of the votes cast). Day-to-day administrative behaviour is bathed in the same atmosphere. Obtaining of an official document, registering all sorts of legal transactions, securing a licence, etc. very often require either acts of clientship or petty bribery. At a higher level it is known that the President requires the advice of his family council before taking an important decision, and it is a well established fact that the former President, Gr. Kayibanda, did not hesitate to call upon a clairvoyant ('le devin de Ruhango'). Actually, most Rwandans still do this when needed, and Ministers are by no means an exception.

Conclusion

It is clear that, during both the colonial period and after independence, the process of change occurred in a rather unbalanced way. The faster and farther-reaching the change, the more important the disequilibria and problems caused by an incomplete articulation of both systems.

A number of examples I have discussed in this paper show how poor the integration of bureaucratic norms is, seventy years after the inception of Belgian colonial rule. There has, of course, been no question of a return to the 'traditional', 'functional' system of precolonial times. The poorly integrated mixed form that evolved during the colonisation period has subsisted, but after the fading away of colonial rule it has become increasingly clear how weak the institutionalisation of new administrative forms was. The official norms of the central authority - efficiency, integration, unity and nation-building - meet with resistances that are hard to fight. This discrepancy between the striving for modernisation and the weakness of the institutional framework to accommodate it resulted in forms of instability, which were kept more or less hidden during the colonial period, but which emerged sharply once the national leaders became themselves the agents of change.

CHIEFS AND BURGOMASTERS IN RWANDA
Filip Reyntjens

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