

## The devils from the Thousand Hills

### Racial and religious fictions in the genocide of the Tutsi

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**Although the massacres in Rwanda did not take place in the context of a religious war, religion did play an important role: identifying the Tutsi with the devil caused violence to spread throughout society.**

The perpetrators of the mass killings of Armenians during WWI, the extermination of the European Jews during WWII, and the destruction of the Muslim community in Srebrenica in 1995 did not share the same religious beliefs as their victims. The absence of shared religious practices and therefore of the sense of a shared humanity must have heightened the intensity of the violence involved. However, the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994 tends to invalidate this explanation: 800 000 Tutsi were killed by practising Hutu coreligionists in less than three months.

According to standard political analysis, religious solidarity gave way under the pressure of a racist mobilization on the part of Hutu extremists against the Tutsi. Since 1990, President Habyarimana had been grappling with the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), an armed movement largely composed of Tutsi refugees who had fled to Uganda. These « rebels » contested the legitimacy of the Hutu-led government that came to power during the « Social Revolution » of 1959. In this context of civil war, Hutu extremists encouraged the mobilization of the Hutu community by deliberately amalgamating people of Tutsi descent and RPF soldiers.

This classical explanation fails to take into account some disturbing specificities of the Tutsi genocide: a very large number of victims were killed inside church premises. According to estimates of the Tutsi death toll provided by the Rwandan government, church buildings were identified as the main killing grounds with far more casualties even than the notorious roadblocks that were set up across Rwanda for the Interahamwe<sup>1</sup> to identify people according to their ethnic background<sup>2</sup>. Besides, a significant number of clergymen and women took part in the massacres. Several of them were convicted: Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, a pastor, Athanase Seromba, a priest, Sister Gertrude and Sister Kizito, nuns. The mass slaughter of the Tutsi population between April and July 1994 should therefore be described as a « Holocaust », a biblical term that is usually associated with the genocide of the Jews during WWII.

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<sup>1</sup> The word *interahamwe* originally referred to the young militiamen of President Juvénal Habyarimana's party, the MRND (Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement). Following the assassination of the President in a plane crash on April 6<sup>th</sup>, the word referred to all the militiamen taking part in the extermination of the Tutsis.

<sup>2</sup> *Dénombrement des victimes du génocide*, Ministère des affaires sociales, République du Rwanda, avril 2004, pp. 31-32.

Although the genocide of the Tutsi was not perpetrated on religious grounds, a significant part of the crimes was committed within a religious framework. At variance with the dynamics of Rwandan society, racism took hold of the religious sphere and led to murder while religious practises fuelled the murderous energy of the assassins. Obviously, it is essential to point out that the members of the clergy were not all involved in the genocide and that many of them sacrificed their lives trying to protect Tutsis. The purpose of this paper is not to study the divisions inside the Church, but to trace the connections between political racism and religious practise, which helped spread violence<sup>3</sup>.

Alison Des Forges gave evidence that the genocide of the Tutsis was prepared and carried out by the state and that the Hutu extremists who were in power at the time used every available means to perpetrate their crimes<sup>4</sup>. The presence of the transitional government on the site of the plane crash as well as the dismissal of the prefect triggered the first wave of killings in several provinces. In the wake of the research carried out by Rwandan academics, more recent research on the local dynamics of the genocide gave proof that neighbours were a key element in the spread and perpetration of violence<sup>5</sup>. On this account, it might be relevant to point out that the Gacaca courts, set up to prosecute the perpetrators of the genocide at community level, tried nearly two million people across the country<sup>6</sup>. By emphasizing the religious aspect of the violence, this paper solely aims at shedding light on one of the ways in which these two logics combined.

### **A racial policy going against the tide of society**

Historians have pointed out the role played by a racist ideology in gearing people for the unspeakable crimes they were about to commit. Jean-Pierre Chrétien and Marcel Kabanda have traced the genealogy of the racism against the Tutsi, from its origin in the colonial era down to the political foundation of the Republic of Rwanda<sup>7</sup>. There is indeed a political continuity between the regime proclaimed by Grégoire Kayibanda in 1959 and the regime Juvénal Habyarimana established in 1973: both were based on the principle of “*rubanda nyamwinshit*”, which means the “majority people” and suggests that on account of their demographic superiority, the Hutu should rule the country. According to the census conducted in 1994, approximately 84% of the Rwanda population were Hutu, 15% were Tutsi, and 1% were Twa. Under both Republics, a system of quotas ensured that only 12% of the positions of authority – the percentage of the total population they were supposed to represent – could be held by Tutsi, which implied that the Hutu had demographic as well as political majority. In his testimony (reported by Jean Hatzfeld), Englebert Munyambonwa describes the

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<sup>3</sup> The author is an assistant researcher at the Paris Tribunal - Crimes against humanity and War crimes Unit. This paper benefited from the seminar held by Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Hélène Dumas at the EHESS and the views expressed in this paper are the author's own and do not engage the institution he has been associated with. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the symposium organized by Ch. Litwin, M. Siegelberg, J. Thakkar (The Society of Fellows in Liberal Arts, Princeton University), « Wars of Religion ».

<sup>4</sup> Alison Des Forges, *Aucun témoin ne doit survivre : le génocide au Rwanda*, Paris, Karthala, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Rutazibwa, Privat, Rutayisire, Paul, *Génocide à Nyarubuye*, Kigali, Éditions rwandaïses, 2007; Kimonyo, Jean-Paul, *Rwanda, un génocide Populaire*, Karthala, Paris, 2008 ; Dumas, Hélène, *Le génocide au village : le massacre des Tutsi*, Le Seuil 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Service national des juridictions gacaca, Rapport final, Kigali, juin 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Chrétien, Jean-Pierre; Kabanda, Marcel, *Rwanda, racisme et génocide, l'idéologie hamitique*, 2013.

frustration this racist policy caused among the Tutsi community<sup>8</sup>. However, the bitterness at the insurmountable obstacles opposed to the Tutsi by the regime was low key compared to the murderous repression they had to face at the hands of the government led by Kayibanda between 1959 and 1973, as well as by Habyarimana as from 1990.

As a matter of fact, the configuration of Rwandan society made it particularly apt to resist any racist policy. Just like under the French Third Republic, social mobility was very limited. Most people in Rwanda were farmers with only a primary education. Consequently, the quota system had a stronger impact on the Tutsi, whom it prevented from accessing positions of authority, rather than on the Hutu, who were unable to take advantage of it. In the hills, Hutu and Tutsi shared the same rural type of life. The evidence gathered by H el ene Dumas on local life in the Shyongiri sector shows that the community had to face the same type of economic challenge and relied very much on solidarity regardless of their ethnic background<sup>9</sup>.

Historical research has pointed out that the number of inter-ethnic marriages between Hutu and Tutsi started to increase in the 1980s. And the research carried out by Jean-Paul Kimonyo on Butare, the district capital city, highlights the fact that there were a very large number of mixed marriages. Although ethnic identity was still defined by patrilineal transmission, in his study of the Kigembe commune, the author claims that social distinctions between Hutu and Tutsi became gradually blurred thanks to mixed marriages<sup>10</sup>. It may be added that these inter-ethnic unions were further strengthened by the blessing given by the holy sacrament. In a wider context, parish life gave Tutsi and Hutu multiple opportunities to develop ties, which they celebrated with exchanges of beer and cows, when a child was born for instance<sup>11</sup>.

The role of the Church was even more important than the role of cabarets and football fields in bringing people together. Indeed, a career in the Church was almost the only one a Tutsi could still embrace. Obviously, the government supervised appointments in the higher tiers of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but it could not however impose quotas on pastors seeking local church ministries. Although the Tutsi came up against a stained-glass ceiling and could never hope to gain a position within church leadership, they were overrepresented in the Church and were sometimes at the head of local parishes. According to *La Croix*, 70% of the 400 priests in Rwanda were Tutsi while 7 bishops (out of 9) were Hutu<sup>12</sup>. As Timothy Longman pointed out, religious life in rural Rwanda was part of a much richer social experience than we can find in today's Western countries. Churches were very much involved in education, in the transmission of modern farming techniques and in the distribution of a whole range of public goods.<sup>13</sup> Besides, priesthood actually gave the Tutsi the opportunity to exercise recognised social functions.

Before the war began in 1990, ethnic tensions between Hutu and Tutsi had reached a historically low level. And yet, within a few years, the extremists managed to mobilize the

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<sup>8</sup> Hatzfeld, Jean, *Englebert des Collines*, Gallimard, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Dumas, H el ene, *Juger le G enocide sur les collines, une  tude des proc es Gataca au Rwanda (2006-2012)*, PhD in history, 2013, pp.351-366. During the genocide, the Hutu ceased showing solidarity with the Tutsi and "social ties were abruptly overturned".

<sup>10</sup> Kimonyo, Jean-Paul, *op. cit.*, p. 255-259.

<sup>11</sup> H el ene Dumas reported that a large number of the killers she had interviewed in prison declared they had a Tutsi godfather or godchild. See Dumas, H el ene, *ibid.*, p. 362, footnote 1146.

<sup>12</sup> « L' glise se penche sur la saintet  d'un couple rwandais », *La Croix*, le 16 septembre 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Longman, Timothy, *Church Politics and the Genocide in Rwanda*, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 31, Fasc. 2, Religion and War in the 1990s (May, 2011), pp. 163-186.

Hutu and lead them to murder their closest neighbours. How could such a racist ideology take hold of a society that had been making progress towards greater integration? Even if various factors were at play, I would like to emphasize the fact that the Hutu extremists made use of religion to break up the relationships between Hutu and Tutsi by arousing hatred on the very grounds that had brought them closer together.

### **The religious mode of existence of racial hatred**

The racist ideology that led to the genocide described the Tutsi as a foreign race that had invaded Hutu territories and imposed its rules on the indigenous Hutu. It was claimed that their physical appearance was proof that unlike the Hutu, they were not of Bantu origin. Their height and slender build, their light skin and delicate features were assumed to be the indelible mark of their Hamitic descent, a people that had come from the Nile area to enslave the Hutu. Just like the leaders of the 1959 “Social Revolution”, the leaders of the “Hutu-Power” party made use of this theory to launch their hate campaign. Between 1959 and 1990, a racist ideology pervaded the Rwandan society with variations in its register. The comparison between the two landmark manifestoes of 1957 and 1990, the Bahutu Manifesto and the Hutu Ten Commandments respectively, highlights the fact that the fulcrum of the racist ideology shifted between the two crises. The titles of these documents themselves are significant in that the first refers to the Manifesto of the Communist Party by Marx and Engels while the second one is a clear reference to divine law. The Ten Commandments add a religious dimension to the socio-racialist discourse.

An open letter to the vice-governor general of Rwanda, the Bahutu Manifesto had several authors, among whom two future presidents, Grégoire Kayibanda and Juvénal Habyarimana. Its political agenda included the promotion of equality through emancipation and the end of exploitation, and its language was progressive:

« We would therefore be happy to see the establishment of trade-unions in a very near future, which would help and contribute to the formation of a strong middle class. The fear, the inferiority complex and an “atavistic” need for a tutor that are attributed to the Muhutu, in as much as they are real, are the by-products of a feudal system. Supposing they were real, the type of civilisation the Belgian brought would not lead to any progress, unless positive efforts were made to effectively lift the obstacles that prevent the emancipation of an integral Rwanda. »<sup>14</sup>

However, the denunciation of exploitation is tied up with racial oppositions between Tutsi and Hutu, Hamites and Bantu, Tutsi colonizers and colonized Hutu.

« We feel however that we ought to alert against a method which, while it tends to suppress white colonialism, is likely to establish a worse type of colonialism: the colonization of the Muhutu by the Hamitic. First and foremost, it is necessary to tackle the issues that might result from Hamitic monopoly over other races that are more numerous and have lived for a longer period in the country.»<sup>15</sup>

By availing themselves of a progressive rhetoric, the authors aimed at tapping the revolutionary energy of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial forces. And judging by the

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<sup>14</sup> *Le Manifeste des Bahutu, note sur l'aspect social du problème racial au Rwanda*, 24 mars 1957, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

continued anti-Tutsi violence carried out in the name of the Social Revolution in the 1960s, we must admit they were successful.

Published in an extremist newspaper, *Kangura*, in December 1990 – the year it was founded by Hassan Ngeze – *The Hutu Ten Commandments*'s racist discourse seemed to have drawn on a new source: the progressive discourse on the exploitation of the Hutu by the Tutsi gave way to a more individualistic analysis. The first five commandments focus on the moral unworthiness of the Tutsi.

1. Every Muhutu must know that the Umututsikasi (Tutsi woman), wherever she may be, is working for the Tutsi ethnic cause. In consequence, any Hutu is a traitor who: acquires a Tutsi wife; acquires a Tutsi concubine; acquires a Tutsi secretary or protégée.
2. Every Hutu must know that our Hutu daughters are more worthy and more conscientious as women, as wives and as mothers. Aren't they lovely, excellent secretaries, and more honest! Hutu women, be vigilant and make sure that your husbands, brothers and sons see reason.
3. Bahutukazi, be vigilant and bring back your husbands, brothers and sisters to reason.
4. All Hutus must know that all Tutsis are dishonest in business. Their only goal is ethnic superiority. In consequence, any Hutu is a traitor who:
  - forms a business alliance with a Tutsi;
  - invests his own funds or public funds in a Tutsi enterprise;
  - grants favors to Tutsis (import licenses, bank loans, land for construction, public markets...)"<sup>16</sup>

In this text, not only has the popularized emancipatory ideology been replaced by a liberal ideology, but its fundamental originality, and also its abjectness, lies in the close association of three elements: racism, sexism and religion. It targets Tutsi women in a particularly aggressive way. According to the text, Umtutsikasi are endowed with the contradictory attributes of the devil: lewdness, treacherousness, beauty and deceitfulness.

The description of Tutsi women as diabolical characters echoes the way RPF soldiers were systematically presented on the radio and in countless caricatures published in newspapers: as envoys of the devil. The RPF itself was often portrayed through the figures of soldiers of the Apocalypse carrying out the most wicked atrocities. In his book on the media and the genocide, Jean-Pierre Chrétien devoted a chapter to the use of religion as an alibi and included several pictures showing scenes of torture with soldiers of the RPF featuring as devils.<sup>17</sup>

Insérer image 1

The power of those images can be best appreciated in the light of the fact that survivors of the genocide sometimes fled before the arrival of the RPF soldiers, which means that they preferred to escape from Rwanda with the killers rather than running the risk of falling into the hands of the devil. In *Le Livre d'Élise*, the author explains why she hesitated: "We did not

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<sup>16</sup> *The Hutu Ten Commandments*, *Kangura*, December 1990.

<sup>17</sup> Chrétien, Jean-Pierre (dir.), *Rwanda, les médias du génocide*, Khartala, 1995. The above caricature features on page 363).

know whether they would save us or kill us. On the radio, they said that the Inkotanyi had tails, that they were evil.”<sup>18</sup>

In extremist caricatures, the fight against the soldiers of the FPR, the fight against the devil and the fight against the Tutsi all hinged on an obsession with Tutsi women. In the drawing below, an innocent Hutu farmer, Adam-like, is being led into temptation by a seductive woman in a scene that is full of religious overtones.

## **Insérer image 2**

But the farmer in the caricature is able to unmask the snake’s subterfuge: Fred Rwigema, the main leader of the RPF, who died in the first offensive against the regime and was replaced by Paul Kagame, has come back from the fires of Hell under the guise of a Tutsi woman.

As it was increasingly at variance with society, the racist discourse found a way to gain a foothold in reality by slipping into the framework of people’s religious experience. *The Hutu Ten Commandments* or the caricatures may not make any direct references to religion, but they certainly bring out the Hutu extremists’ skill at using religious language when dealing with their favourite topics.<sup>19</sup> The repeated references to the Devil instilled the idea that the immediate social experience of a growing equality between Hutu and Tutsi was illusory and masked an ongoing war between the good Hutu and the cunning Tutsi. The description of a series of emblematic crimes during the genocide provides evidence that the religious slant of racist discourses had a very strong impact on a number of criminal behaviours.

## **Integrating religious practices into criminal practices**

The Tutsi thought they were safe in church buildings. During previous spells of persecution, those who had been able to find shelter in church buildings were saved. But in 1994, the killers had no qualms about perpetrating their irreversible crimes within church buildings: they even slaughtered people they had attended mass with since childhood. When the frontline came so close that a large number of Hutu had to seek refuge in church buildings along with Tutsi people, the assailants only carried out small-scale raids and selective kidnapping. But most of the time, those who sought refuge in church buildings were all Tutsi and as such, they were murdered in mass-slaughters. Security forces would shell the church buildings so as to make way for militiamen. This indicates that the presence of Hutu in the church was more effective in restraining the killers than the sacred character of the premises.

Attacks on church buildings seem to bear witness to such an intense political radicalisation that it obliterated all the restraints religion might have imposed on the perpetrators; these attacks may even be a sign of the killers’ overt political hostility towards the Church, which remained more accessible to the Tutsi than other areas of society. However, accounts reveal that the killers were convinced they were acting in conformity with their religious beliefs. Although there is little information on the behaviour of the assailants inside the church buildings, Timothy Long pointed out that people came to mass each day to pray before they went out to commit their crimes and in some cases, militia members even paused in the frenzy

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<sup>18</sup> Musomandera, Élise Rida, *Le Livre d’Élise*, Les Belles Lettres, 2014, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> For a further analysis of the distinction between « religious talk » and « religious language », see Latour, Bruno, *Jubiler, ou les tourments de la parole religieuse*, La Découverte, 2013.

of killing to kneel and pray at the altar.<sup>20</sup> The destruction of churches by police and militia was not meant to overcome the resistance of the Tutsi refugees, for these could hardly resist their attackers, but mostly to overcome the reluctance on the part of the militiamen to attack their coreligionists in places of worship. By wreaking havoc on church buildings, the armed forces turned churches into hell so as to create conditions conducive to the perpetration of crimes. Amidst the flames, the Tutsi refugees could be mistaken for devils to be fought and killed.

The participation of several priests in the genocide also accounts for the way religious practices became integrated into criminal practices. Among the clergymen found guilty of genocide, the most emblematic case must be that of Athanase Seromba. In April 1994, Reverend Athanase Seromba was the vicar of the Nyange parish in the municipality of Kivumu, and since the parson had left, he was fully responsible for the daily management of the parish. When the massacres began, some 2000 Tutsi sought refuge in Nyange church. After prohibiting the starving Tutsi refugees from getting food from the banana plantation belonging to the parish, he refused to celebrate mass for the Tutsi. In the testimony Bertin Ndakubana gave to African Rights, an NGO working on human rights issues, he repeated the words of the priest:

Someone asked him: “Father, won’t you pray for us?” Seromba replied: “Is the God of the Tutsi still alive?” Someone else said to him: “Aren’t you concerned about these children polluting the altar? Couldn’t you allocate some rooms instead of the church?” Seromba answered: “You can go and shit on the altar if you want to, because I won’t be celebrating mass on it ever again”.<sup>21</sup>

Whereupon he opened the tabernacle and took away the chalices and the monstrance. This desecration ritual was a public statement that the Tutsi were henceforth deprived of any divine protection and that they were impious by nature. On April 14<sup>th</sup>, 4000 members of the civilian militia gathered in front of the statue of the Virgin at the entrance of the church and launched an attack on the desecrated building. A witness described Seromba standing on the presbytery balcony, watching the scene. And when the rain threatened to thwart the attempts of the assailants to set the building on fire and the local authorities decided to bulldoze it, crushing the Tutsi who had sought refuge inside, not only did Athanase Seromba give them his support but he also instructed them on the best way to bring the church down. A witness at the Trial Chamber, the bulldozer driver recalled repeatedly asking the priest for confirmation of his order to destroy the church.

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<sup>20</sup> Longman, Timothy, *ibid.*, ch. 1, p. 7. These acts of devotion performed by killers may seem to stand in sharp contradiction to the iconoclastic acts that have been reported by other authors. Actually, they are two facets of the same reality since the destructions appear as acts of purification made necessary by the fact that the presence of Tutsi had caused them to be desecrated. When the perpetrators at Kiyube slashed the nose of the statue of Virgin Mary, a barbaric crime they were used to committing on their Tutsi victims, their purpose was to restore the Virgin to her dignity and not to overthrow an idol. For further details about iconoclastic behaviours, see José Maria Abenza Rojo and Emilio Perez Pujol, *Mision en Rwanda : informe medico Forense*, Madrid, Ministère de la Justice, 22 November 1994, in Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Hélène Dumas, « Le génocide des Tutsi rwandais vingt ans après. Réflexions introductives », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 2014/2 (N° 122), p. 3-16.

<sup>21</sup> In her seminar at the EHSS, Hélène Dumas showed how religious practices became integrated into criminal practices through the analysis of the Seromba case. The account of the events come from the indictment delivered by the ICTR and available for consultation at <http://www.unict.org/sites/unict.org/files/case-documents/ict-01-66/trial-judgements/fr/061213.pdf>.

As shown in the extract quoted above, many survivors of massacres perpetrated in various circumstances report that as they were slaughtering their victims, who were praying on their knees, the killers would regularly declare that the « God of the Tutsi » was dead. Although the word is hardly ever uttered, certain criminal practices make it clear that the « God of the Tutsi » is the Devil. In a great number of murders perpetrated in various locations, the victims' bodies were "infernalized": as reprobates, they were made to endure the torments of hell.<sup>22</sup> The case of Pascasie Mukaremera, a woman who was brutally murdered in the Bisesero area, in the forest, on Rugona Hill, is just one example of the atrocities that were perpetrated. The fact that the participants are referred to by name shows that the crimes were committed by neighbours upon neighbours.

“Witness AW heard the Accused order the Interahamwe to scour the forest for Tutsi. In the course of the search, the Interahamwe caught Pascasie Mukaremera, who was pregnant. When they brought her to the Accused, he said, “I’m going to cut this woman, to disembowel this woman, to see the position of the foetus in its mother’s womb”. According to the witness, “Mika took a machete and he cut off (sic) this woman into pieces, beginning from her breast, right up to her genitals, and then he removed the baby from the mother’s womb and put it beside its mother. The baby cried for some moments and then died”. The Interahamwe then cut off Pascasie Mukaremera’s hands, sharpened a stake, and pierced it through her arms.”<sup>23</sup>

The violence involved in these massacres goes far beyond putting victims to death. What is at work here is genuine exorcism aimed at driving the Devil out of the victim’s body. During the genocide, the body of women became the target of the worst atrocities, on a par with the crucial importance it had been given in the racist propaganda.

The mixture of racism, demonology and violence displayed in the genocide of the Tutsi immediately calls to mind the crimes that continue to be perpetrated today in the neighbouring Kivu regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The criminal practices associated with the Tutsi genocide may simply have been exported to Congo when the Hutu extremists fled to this country. However, those hateful ritualized crimes seem to fit better with the highly visible witchcraft in DRC than with the Church-controlled religious practises in Rwanda. One may wonder if, by deliberately amalgamating Tutsi people to the Devil, those who were peddling a racist discourse did not give a new legitimacy to religious practices that had long been marginalized in Rwanda. The extremists seem to have unleashed forces that were powerful enough to cause people to commit mass murder.

## Conclusion

Based on the capacity for Hutu extremists to mobilize everyday practices, the genocide of the Tutsi was carried out with great efficiency. It is a well-known fact that the local media in Rwanda, in particular Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) would broadcast calls to murder in coded messages: when the radio told people to “go to work”, it meant “get

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<sup>22</sup> Crouzet Denis. « La violence au temps des troubles de religion (circa 1525 - circa 1610) », *Histoire, économie et société*. 1989, 8e année, n°4. p. 507-525.

<sup>23</sup> Trial Chamber III, the Prosecutor v. Mikaeli Muhimana, Case No. ICTR- 95-1B-T.

your machete and kill Tutsi”. Besides, recent research by historians, and more precisely the meticulous description they have made of various crime scenes, has shown that farming tools became the prime instruments of killing during the genocide and that hunting techniques were used to track people down. In the same way, religious practices were harnessed for killing purposes and proved all the more efficient as they combined with other registers, especially hunting, in the hunt to root out the devil.

Among the wide range of racist acts that were perpetrated, religious practises were not just another way of mobilising civilian populations and goading them into committing mass murder. More than any other aspects of people’s lives, religious practices became the crucible in which racism was fostered before it spread. As Rwanda was becoming a place of growing ethnic intermingling, ordinary racism was losing its social relevance, if it ever had any. In the eyes of the killers themselves, the necessity to check identity cards at the roadblocks in order to differentiate Hutu from Tutsi was proof that the Tutsi were not instantly recognizable from their physical appearance. In this context of uncertainty, demonizing the Tutsi ensured the population was divided and provided an explanation for the difficulty in telling them apart: the Tutsi were inherently deceptive.

However, the importance of the religious register takes on its full significance if we shift our attention from the “logic of state massacres” to the “logic of the pogroms”.<sup>24</sup> In the villages, the common racist argument bandied about that the Tutsi belonged to the same ethnic group as the soldiers of the RPF had to vie with communities where relations were basically good. Demonizing the Tutsi was the only way to divide a population that had every reason to live in peace and this was done by shifting the notion of difference from the social context where it had become irrelevant on to the religious context. As the Tutsi were increasingly demonized, their being so well integrated into the rest of society became a source of anxiety.

The hijacking of religious categories by a racist discourse caused violence to penetrate the sphere of intimacy. What characterizes the mass crime that took place in Rwanda is that, more than in any other case, the victims were often killed by their own neighbours and that violence wreaked havoc within families themselves, with people killing their nephews or sisters-in-law, and even their own children.<sup>25</sup> The Tutsi came to be described as enemies inside the family, just like in the racist propaganda they were presented as enemies inside the country. Adding another layer of racism, the transfer of ordinary racism into the religious sphere turned the most intimate social ties into channels of violence.

There were no religious dissensions between the gangs of Hutu killers and their Tutsi victims. It would therefore be irrelevant to call the Tutsi genocide a religious war. The motivations behind the genocide were wholly related to the racial hatred fostered by the government despite the positive trends in society itself. However the Tutsi genocide was obviously conducted along the lines of a religious act. In so far as it intensified the racist discourse, the irruption of racism in a religious mode of existence brought violence into every reach of people’s lives.

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<sup>24</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Hélène Dumas, « Le génocide des Tutsi rwandais vingt ans après. Réflexions introductives », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 2014/2 (N° 122), p. 3-16.

<sup>25</sup> Violaine Baraduc, « Tuer au cœur de la famille. Les femmes en relais », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 2014/2 (N° 122), p. 63-74.

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