

Opinions

Beatification of Baudouin: Ndahiro asks relevant questions but fails to provide a decolonial reading of Belgian King's responsibilities

Privat Rutazibwa

The New Times, December 28, 2024



King Baudouin of Belgium meets with Mwambwa III Rudahigwa in Rwanda

I refer to the articles by Tom Ndahiro, 'The oxymoronic beatification: Saints, sinners, and the church's selective morality', and 'Denial as devotion: A king's legacy and the ghosts of colonial Africa'.

The author asks very relevant questions to the Roman Catholic Church concerning the beatification project of the former King of the Belgians Baudouin. But when he ad-

dresses the latter's responsibilities, particularly in Rwanda, Ndahiro seems to, surprisingly, play it lightly.

In both articles, Ndahiro places the greatest blame on 'PARMEHUTU, the party that spearheaded anti-Tutsi pogroms in the 1960s' and on 'Gregoire Kayibanda, Rwanda's first president and founder of PARMEHUTU', whose 'policies institutionalized ethnic hatred' and whose 'anti-Tutsi ideology escalated, culminating in the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi' (see 'The oxymoronic beatification'); and whose regime 'pursued a genocidal agenda against the Tutsi population, resulting in massacres during the Kayibanda era (1960-1973)' (see 'Denial as devotion').

The only blame Ndahiro attributes to King Baudouin is 'his complicity in Rwanda's racial policies'; the fact that he 'maintained a close friendship with Gregoire Kayibanda'; and his 'silence on these atrocities, despite his

influence in Rwanda' (see 'The oxymoronic beatification'). In 'Denial as devotion', the author adds that 'the Belgian trusteeship in Rwanda supported the rise' of Kayibanda's regime with its genocidal policies and massacres; and describes Baudouin as 'a monarch who failed to distance himself from these acts of terror, much less seek forgiveness for his implicit approval'.

Recent research actually shows that the responsibilities are reversed. It was Belgium under the reign of Baudouin which conceived, implemented and supervised the first genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda from 1959, in very close complicity between its colonial administration and the missionaries of Africa (aka White Fathers).

Kayibanda and his PARMEHUTU, as well as Joseph Habyarimana Gitera and his APROSOMA, were initially only very modest collaborators without their own agency, recruited and used by the two instances which were the real actors and which chose to use genocidal anti-Tutsi racism as an effective instrument to destroy Rwandan nationalists from different 'ethnic groups' who were demanding independence.

This truth has long been veiled and obscured by the colonial and missionary narrative which has long praised the so-called 'Hutu social revolution' as synonymous with democracy and social justice, when in reality, it was the first genocide against the Tutsi. Historical research from the 1980s, notably with the Frenchman Jean Pierre Chrétien, began to reveal the racist foundations of post-independence 'Hutu' republics rooted in Hamitic ideology, and after the 1994 genocide

against the Tutsi, further attention has been given to this racist and genocidal ideology. But the tactic of missionaries and the Belgian colonial administration of highlighting 'Hutu leaders' to mask their own criminal responsibilities in the first genocide against the Tutsi continued to influence research circles, the media and public opinions to this day; and it is into this trap that Tom Ndahiro fell despite his usual perspicacity.

If in other European countries with a colonial and neo-colonial past, remarkable efforts are made by politicians, researchers and other actors of civil society to deal with colonial past, this does not seem to be the case for Belgium, at least regarding Rwanda. This is how in his voluminous doctoral thesis in history of 2,300 pages presented at the University of Paris I – Panthéon Sorbonne in 2012, the Belgian Léon Saur could title one of his chapters: "La Belgique et le premier génocide" (Belgium and the first genocide), not to evoke that of 1959 to 1962 when the country was still under Belgian colonial administration, but that of December 1963 under the Kayibanda regime!

However, recent research based on various sources including Belgian colonial archives, those of the United Nations, the memoirs of certain leading Rwandan actors as well as other testimonies make it possible to establish that Belgium under the reign of King Baudouin has indeed committed the first genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda from 1959.

I tried to take stock of this research in two publications: The genocide against the Tutsi: the establishment of the genocidal

policies since 1959, and Rwanda: How the post-independence regimes from 1962 to 1994 were neo-colonial, racist and genocidal.

But the criminal responsibilities of King Baudouin as a *genocidaire* are evoked in even clearer terms in a research document published last October in the form of a petition to world leaders.

And I will allow myself to quote it at greater length to close this article:

“The Germans initially envisioned to “destroy the power of the Watusi” as we saw above, but they did not carry out the threat. The Belgians planned and implemented the destruction of the Rwandan monarchy and the first genocide against the Tutsi starting in 1959. At the request of Vice Governor General of Belgian Congo and Governor of Ruanda-Urundi Jean Paul Harroy, Colonel Guy Logiest came from Stanleyville (Kisangani) and on 24 October 1959 developed a plan that he called “*Troubles généralisés*” (generalized disorders), a series of military operations which supervised and supported the APROSOMA and PARMEHUTU militias in the first phase of the genocide against the Tutsi that began on 1 November 1959.

In collaboration with Major Louis Marlière who served as his chief of staff and who had come from the Force Publique headquarters in Leopoldville where he had a reputation for being a specialist in the fight against “*guerrilla operations in the revolutionary wars*”, Logiest drafted a report on the state of affairs in Rwanda on 20 November 1959. They also outlined in detail the measures to be taken by Belgian colonial administration in order to defeat those striving for independence. In

their document, Logiest and his colleague say that “the authoritarian regime of monarchy [...] that the Tutsi ... representing 15% of the population ... want to maintain, has to be replaced by the democratic regime ... that the Hutu representing 85% of the population... want to establish. ... That is the only way to achieve lasting peace”. The document also states that “UNAR should be neutralized”. “The traditional regime must be dismantled along with the Tutsi militias, and the King because of his value as a symbol”.

After the November 1959 riots and after giving orders in a meeting of 17 November 1959 to continue replacing in the traditional administration the Batutsi who had not fled or been killed, Logiest went to meet with the King of Belgians Baudouin in Bujumbura on 18 November 1959. “The King listened to him attentively, without asking him questions, but nothing showed that he disapproved of what Logiest was doing”. Logiest also sought to get approval for his policy on Rwanda by the new minister for the colonies, August Edmond De Schryver, who visited Ruanda-Urundi in those days. Logiest explained to him the policy he had begun to implement in Rwanda and how he wanted it to continue as reflected in the above-mentioned document he had prepared in collaboration with Major Marlière.

When De Schryver left Rwanda, Vice Governor General Harroy sent a message to Logiest informing him that “the minister was surprised and very pleased with his policy. He told him on the plane that he planned to follow Logiest’s policy to the end, and that the solution would be to appoint Colonel

Logiest to the post of Special Resident of Rwanda, until the elections”. Harroy went on to tell Logiest that that very evening, Minister De Schryver immediately told it to General Janssens, the chief of staff of the Force publique in Léopoldville (Kinshasa) and persuaded him to ‘lend’ Logiest for six months to perform civilian duties. Harroy also confirmed this request in a letter to General Janssens. On 4 and 5 December 1959, Logiest received telegrams informing him that he had been transferred from Congo to Rwanda, in the duties of Special Civilian Resident. In those new assignments, Logiest was given extraordinary powers, so that General Janssens pointed out to the CSP (Conseil Supérieur du Pays) that “he has unlimited power, he is allowed to forbid any meeting, to imprison and hang whomever he wants”.

It is clear, then, that the policy pursued by Belgium in Rwanda at the end of colonization was a policy devised and agreed upon by var-

ious institutions, and supported by the highest Belgian authorities up to the monarch. Colonel Logiest as one of those who had conceived it and who was in charge of implementing it, was given full latitude to continue to persecute and attack UNAR members and the Batutsi without hindrance. Belgium should recognize its responsibilities in the first genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda from 1959, and clearly condemn as genocide perpetrators the personalities who were involved in it such as King Baudouin, Minister De Schryver, Vice Governor General of Belgian Congo and Governor of Ruanda-Urundi Harroy, Special Resident Logiest and others.

As in the case of the White Fathers, such a gesture will help to eradicate the ideology of genocide in the Great Lakes region if its current supporters see that the first to have developed and implemented this ideology in Rwanda are disavowed.’