

# Opinions

## Demystifying the pre-Gasabo “Hutu” kingdoms myth

Amani Athar

The New Times, November 27, 2024



Etymologically, the name Rwanda derives from Ku-aanda, meaning “expansion or spreading out from the centre.” Internet

If you have been with us on this journey, you remember that in our very first article “Ndi Umunyarwanda a bond to heal wounds caused by a distorted history,” we promised that we will be walking together in a journey, where we will explore how one people was divided to the extent that Rwandan identity was close to its eradication.

So far, our journey had revealed to us how colonial scholars were sent to Rwanda to fulfill a project called “faire l’homme noir du Rwanda oublier ses ancêtres translated in

English as make the black Rwandan forget his ancestors. What they did so well and their works birthed two ethnic groups of the “Hutu” and the “Tutsi.” Painful to bear, but that is what colonialism made the people of Rwanda.

As we know, in ancient Rwanda there were no “Tutsi” and no “Hutu”, how then do we have the pre-Gasabo “Hutu” kingdoms? To get these “Hutu” kingdoms, there was a need to first have a conquering kingdom and a deceitful interpretation was given to the name Rwanda, with an expansionist label on it that corroborates the project.

Searching for the meaning of the word “Rwanda,” we came across three answers. The first one by a Rwandan Poet Sekarama was that the name Rwanda meant the first Ingoma (reign or drum) of Rwanda. The second meaning was given by another Rwandan, Gakanisha who said Rwanda means a country (Igihugu). The third one was from colonial scholars, who said that Rwanda comes from the Kinyarwanda verb ku-aanda, which means “expansion”.

Which one among the three meanings is

right? I can say without any shade of doubt that Sekarama and Gakanisha were right.

To understand that Rwanda means a reign or a country as Sekarama and Gakanisha said, there were other territories called Rwanda in the pre-colonial era, alongside the Rwanda rwa Gasabo.

These territories were named after prominent people of that time. We had U Rwanda rwa Kabeja or U Rwanda rw'Abarenge in Ngoma, U Rwanda rwa Binaga in Mubari, U Rwanda rwa Ndanyoye in Gikomero and U Rwanda rwa Gashara in Busoga, Uganda.

This clearly shows that Rwanda was a country, hence the country of Gihanga, the country of Kabeja, the country of Binaga, the country of Ndanyoye and the country of Gashara.

But colonial scholars rejected this meaning, provided by great names like Sekarama and Gakanisha, who were the informants of almost all the first colonial scholars. They refused their explanation and forged their own, which corroborates the project of their master.

That is how they said that etymologically, the name Rwanda derives from Ku-aanda, meaning "expansion or spreading out from the centre."

If really Rwanda meant expansion or spreading out from the centre, the other territories named Rwanda mentioned above would also have centres and would have expanded or spread out like the Rwanda of Gihanga and its center of Gasabo.

At this point, colonial scholars had a centre, and the explanation of the word Rwanda with an expansionism label on it. There was a

need to demonstrate which "Hutu" kingdoms these conquerors of "Batutsi" invaded from Gasabo. That is how they forged kingdoms said to belong to "Hutus" that existed before the arrival of the so-called "Tutsi," and that the Nyiginya dynasty invaded from Gasabo.

Kingdoms they said belonged to "Hutus" that "Tutsis" from Gasabo invaded included Bungwe, Rurenge, Mubari, Gisaka, Bugara, the Kingdom of Abungura, Nduga, the Kingdom of Abahondogo, Bugama-Kiganda, Buhoma, Bukonya, Bushiru, Bwanamwari, Cyingogo, Kibari, Ruhengeri and Rwankeri.

There is a question that needs to be answered. Were these kingdoms real or were they created by colonization? To respond to this question, we need to look at what the first writers on the history of Rwanda said.

Louis de Lacger, a priest from France, was invited to Rwanda by Bishop Leon Paul Classe. The reason for the invitation was to write the history of Rwanda. Priests around Rwandan parishes had collected information countrywide, and the Catholic Church was ready to publish their findings into a history book.

The work of writing this first book on the history of Rwanda was given to Louis de Lacger by his compatriot Leon Paul Classe. In 1939, he published a book titled "Rwanda," that we can give the title "the history of Rwanda according to the Catholic Church.

It is this book that will become the source of the history of Rwanda. It was like a Bible for colonial scholars, who just did what we can call today copy and paste, with some personal innovations. Even Father

Alexis Kagame who published in 1943, "Inganji Kalinga," did not go far from the Bible left by Louis de Lacger.

It was Louis de Lacger in 1939, who wrote for the first time about some territories belonging to "Hutus" and Father Alexis Kagame followed in the footsteps of Louis de Lacger and talked in Inganji Kalinga about these territories.

According to both Louis de Lacger and Alexis Kagame, these territories were not called kingdoms. They became kingdoms

gradually, through different authors, until Ferdinand Nahimana completed the work and made them 'real' kingdoms, in his book, "Le Rwanda: Émergence d'un Etat."

In our next article, we will delve deeper into what Louis de Lacger and Alexis Kagame said and look at the kingdoms attributed to Ababanda, because they were given five kingdoms, including Nduga, Buhoma, Bukonya, Bwanamwari and Rwankeri.

Until then, stay blessed and united.