

“The one who refuses to work is harmful to society”, Juvénal Habyarimana, 14 October, 1973

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Abstract of the paper

Analyzing interviews with and speeches by the former president of Rwanda, Juvénal Habyarimana (1973-1994), this article finds that three elements constitute his ideology: (1) A Malthusian element. Habyarimana was very preoccupied with the equilibrium between population growth and food production; (2) A rural element. Rwanda should remain an agrarian nation of moral and hardworking peasants who remain in the rural areas; and (3) A missionary element. All Rwandans should be integrated in the unique party MRND headed by the ‘Father of the Nation’, Habyarimana himself. His views on the food-population equilibrium, on the peasantry and on his Moral Revolution constitute the core thinking of the president regarding the organisation of Rwandan society. This article investigates these core elements and finds that Habyarimana’s peasant ideology masks a racial prejudice behind a class analysis.

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“Some societies have, in the past, opposed manual and intellectual labour with the latter giving in general more prestige to its performer. Such a concept not only seems outdated but also unacceptable because it is not realistic. In fact, manual labour, especially agricultural labour is the basis of our economy. We want to repeat that agriculture will remain the essential base of our economic system for the years to come.

In order to attract the attention of the Rwandan population for this reality, We have named the year 1974 the national year for agriculture and manual labour. We take this opportunity to thank and to encourage everybody who understood Our attitude and who supported our action by practising one day of manual labour themselves every week.

Remember that this is the way we want to fight this form of intellectual bourgeoisie and give all kinds of physical labour its value back . And we think that in all programs, the brightest, must be the example for their countrymen. Action is thus called for. “

Message of the Head of State,
Major-General Juvénal Habyarimana, 1 May, 1974,

1. An unconventional source of information

Was Juvénal Habyarimana only a military strong-man or was he also an idealist, a sophisticated leader who contemplated about the organisation of Rwandan society? In this paper, evidence will be brought to bear arguing for the latter. The paper takes a close look at the ideology of the Habyarimana regime (1973-1994) as it is represented in the interviews with and the speeches by the president. These speeches and interviews were published during his reign by his office and the Office of Information of Rwanda (ORINFOR). The speeches and interviews are the primary source of information regarding Habyarimana’s political thought. His speeches from the years 1973, 1974, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988 were analyzed to determine

Habyarimana's ideology.¹ The focus is on the speeches he gave on the many occasions of celebration in Rwanda. These speeches, contrary to those he made abroad, are directed at the Rwandan population and, as such, reveal the way the dictator saw his country, its population and his own task as leader. Over the entire period of his reign (1973-1994), three themes dominated his speeches and interviews. These three themes are the food-population equilibrium in Rwanda, the role of the peasantry as the foundation of society and his own role as the leader of the Nation. Given the return of the same themes and the repetition of the same ideas and the same views expressed by Habyarimana regarding these themes, I believe that we can speak of a coherent ideology.

The focus of my analysis here is on the ideology of Habyarimana and on his adherence to a development model based on 'Rwanda's own forces', as he put it. It will be demonstrated that his ideology served as a legitimation for the policies Habyarimana advocated and especially for his personal hold onto power. The topics under discussion in this paper are: population, self-reliance, ruralisation, umuganda and peasant ideology. The treatment of these concepts has a double reason: first, they have all been a part of several speeches of Habyarimana and often constitute the main subject of a speech. They are obviously very important in the understanding of his ideas and second, they are often neglected by scholars of Rwandan history and the Rwandan genocide. The treatment of the speeches will be thematically (following the three themes mentioned above) as well as chronologically (following the years of his reign).

This paper was written to fill a gap in the literature on the Habyarimana regime. The past 10 years we have seen the emergence of a vast literature on Rwandan history and the history of the genocide in particular. It is not the purpose of this article to review that vast literature. In order to situate the article in the literature, it may suffice to refer to two well-known books, *Leave None to Tell the Story* (Human Rights Watch, 1999) and *Aiding Violence : the development enterprise in Rwanda* (Peter Uvin, 1998). Other publications will be referred to throughout the paper. The first book, written by Alison Des Forges, offers a very detailed and very rich account of the implementation of genocidal policies in Rwanda from 1990 to 1994. The main thesis of the author is that the political elite in Rwanda chose genocide as a political strategy to remain in power. The second

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I was unable to locate the speeches for the other years of his reign. It is not the case that I was denied access to them. I just could not find them. The publications of ORINFOR can be accessed in a major library specialising in African Studies, but it is not easy to find a complete series. However, in his speeches and interviews, Habyarimana repeats himself often. It is thus very unlikely that the ORINFOR publications which I did not consult would change my analysis presented in this paper. The pages used in the footnotes of the sections where I cite from Habyarimana's speech, refer to the pages in the publications by ORINFOR. The speeches of Habyarimana that are used in this paper were published in Kinyarwanda as well as in French. The author translated them from French to English.

book is a careful analysis of the impact of development aid in Rwanda. It is a harsh critique of the way the Rwandan state, the NGO's and the international donor community organized development projects in Rwanda before the genocide. The main thesis of P. Uvin is that the developmental process in Rwanda humiliated, frustrated and infantilized the Rwandan peasant. He offers interesting insights and reflections on the relationship between this developmental process and participation in the genocide by the peasants. The arguments that I will develop in this paper do not question the analysis of the above mentioned authors, but focus on a neglected characteristic of the genocide, namely the underlying peasant ideology. Des Forges stresses the intentions of the political elite but does not talk (or not much) about the economic conditions of the country, nor does she discuss Habyarimana's peasant ideology. This is a shortcoming of her book since Habyarimana himself often spoke on the economy and especially the economic-demographic equilibrium in Rwanda. The economic conditions are emphasized by Uvin, but he did not take a look at Habyarimana's speeches either.

Uvin's book is referred to for a discussion on the regime's development policies and how they were misjudged by the donor community. The question of whether or not Habyarimana 'developed' his country depends to a large extent on the definition of development one is using. In order to understand the actions of dictatorial regimes, one should not only look at their 'developmental' outcomes, but also at the intentions of the regime. What particular kind of development did they want to achieve for their country? In order to discover the intentions of the regime, 'development' in Rwanda is studied in part as an ideology.

2. Habyarimana was a Malthusian

2.1 Population

Rwanda was one of the most densely populated countries in the world, yet developed no family planning policy. In 1973, at the beginning of his dictatorship, Habyarimana told his audience that Rwanda had a demographic problem :

*"We are aware of the problems caused by the demographic growth of the Rwandan population and they should be getting our permanent and serious attention. We believe however that the people who seem to advocate fast solutions, resulting from a certain literature whose authors do not hide their egotism, should be more reserved. The solution that we are looking for shall be Rwandan, taking our mentalities, our moral values, our culture, our possibilities and human solidarity into account."*²

² Habyarimana, J., Discours-programme, August 1, 1973.

During his reign, Habyarimana gave different reasons to explain the absence of family planning. At one point he argues that the Rwandan family wants to have a lot of children. On other occasions he said that his scientists were looking for the best way to prevent population growth and that he is awaiting their answer. At yet another day he appealed to the Church to tolerate family planning. This makes clear that Habyarimana sought excuses to explain the absence of family planning. Local level church initiatives as boarding schools and workshops for young women postponed the age at marriage and thereby, deliberately, the number of children. In fact, as is clear from his speeches, Habyarimana himself was not in favour of family planning. Rwanda had a population bureau, but it was a sham. Prunier (1995, p.88-89) writes that the Ministry of Interior allowed Catholic pro-life commandos to attack pharmacies that sold condoms.

One also observes a certain evolution in Habyarimana's population thinking: in 1973 he advocated a Rwandan solution - in line with Rwandan culture - to the population growth (see previous citation). In 1979, he continues along the lines of Rwandan tradition, stating that

*"I have already affirmed in other occasions, that the number of inhabitants of our country should not always be presented as excessive, nor always be presented as a constraint on development. That development is exactly the fruit of people's work."*³

In 1980 he refers to the Rwandan desire to have children

*"A Rwandan by nature wants to have a lot of children because he considers his children a source of protection, a source of production to secure his living. The Rwandan family wants to have children and it is a disaster when it does not have children."*⁴

Such a position on population may not be problematic or exceptional in an African context, many African leaders took it at that time. Rwanda however was the most densely populated country of the continent. The average Rwandan woman had 8 children at the end of the seventies. And there is more to this.

In a 1985 publication celebrating the 10th anniversary of the foundation of the MRND, we read – under the section demographic growth - that

³ Habyarimana, J, Discours-programme du 8 Janvier 1979, Discours et Entretiens de Son Excellence le Général-Major Habyarimana Juvénal Président de la République Rwandaise, et Président-Fondateur du Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement, ORINFOR, Rwanda, 1979, p.23

⁴ Habyarimana, J., interviewed by Yuki Sato, July 12, 1980, Discours et Entretiens de Son Excellence le Général-Major Habyarimana Juvénal Président de la République Rwandaise, et Président-Fondateur du Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement, ORINFOR, Rwanda, 1980, p.243

*« The population is the first force of a nation, but its large size can become a handicap in particular when the production sector cannot follow the rhythm of population growth. The demographic problem is very real in our country where the annual population growth is 3.7% and the annual production growth is only 2.7%, with the risk of an even larger disequilibrium if the proposed strategies do not reach their objectives. »*⁵

A clearer demonstration of the Malthusian viewpoint is hard to find: according to the MRND, Rwanda has an economic-demographic problem because annual population growth is higher than the growth of production, resulting in disequilibrium.

In 1986, the Central Comite of the MRND decided to refuse the return of the 1959 refugees, stating that the country was overpopulated. In 1987, Habyarimana said that

*“We believe there is a real problem. If the population grows faster than the economy, we have a problem. And nevertheless, we must reconcile two things, on the one hand, the more numerous we are, the stronger we are, because we have more arms and more brains, but the more numerous we are, the more we have to produce for that population in order to have enough food, to have education, to have clothes. We must reconcile these two parameters: population and growth.”*⁶

Three years later, on August 2nd, 1990 Habyarimana said that

*«Rwanda could, statistically seen, only feed 5 million of the 7.5 million inhabitants adequately»*⁷

From his speeches, I conclude that Habyarimana was extremely preoccupied with the food-population equilibrium in his country. Moreover, he held a Malthusian viewpoint, believing that Rwanda could only feed part of its population because the latter was growing more rapidly than food production.

In May 1990, the National Population Office published four volumes titled “The Demographic Problem in Rwanda and the Framework of its Solution”. This publication is a very detailed study of the relationship between population and development in Rwanda and lists a large number of measures to be taken immediately. They include family planning, schooling for women, industrialisation and urbanisation, the creation of off-farm jobs. All sorts of measures that were not only costly to the state, but, as we will see in subsequent sections of this paper, ran opposite to the regime’s ideology.

⁵ Ten years MRND, 1985, p.342-343

⁶ Habyarimana, J, interview given to ZDF, German Television Channel 2, September, 29, 1987, ibidem, ORINFOR, Rwanda, 1987, p. 258

⁷ De Standaard (leading Flemish newspaper), 3/10/1990, p.1, translation by the author.

2.2 Food self-reliance, endogenous development and the organisation of the economy

Habyarimana was convinced that the Rwandan economy should be agriculturally self-sufficient, making import of food unnecessary. In his speeches, which can be considered official statements, he stresses that the development of Rwanda is the foremost goal of his economic policy, and that auto-development and food self-reliance were the methods to be used to meet that goal.

“If it is true that the first objective of a national economy is to be able to feed the country at the service of the ones it works for and is organized for, and if it is true that the priority of priorities of Rwanda is just to build the national economy around this major imperative, meaning to give it a solid base to allow it to respond to this fundamental demand, one must absolutely be able to identify clearly the key factors our economy needs in order to attain the objective of a well understood food self-reliance.”⁸

And

“Auto-development is not a slogan for us, it is not an effort to theorize, it is not a vain aspiration to embrace a doctrine or a school of thought. No, for us, auto-development is our conviction that progress needs to come from our own forces, that we cannot live beyond our means and that the solutions of our problems need to come from us.”⁹

Habyarimana’s stated policy priority was to make Rwanda food self-sufficient. For many years, Rwandan farmers had been able to increase food production because Rwanda was blessed with fertile soil. At some point however, all available land is cultivated. After reviewing his speeches, one infers that Habyarimana wants agricultural production to increase. In particular, he presents increased production of food crops as the one and only solution to overcome the problems of the Rwandan economy:

“In the coming twenty years, the population of Rwanda will be doubled. We thus have to make sure that we have enough food. Our food strategy gives absolute priority to our peasants and to the production of food crops that are most important to solve our food crisis. The establishment of a policy of increased production demands a profound internal transformation and a continuous effort for a long period.”¹⁰

In 1985, Habyarimana told his audience that culture is the basis of development and that he really wants an endogenous development of Rwanda, i.e. coming from one’s own forces:

“What was and what is the foundation of our economic policy of development that we have pursued, thanks to the principles and ideas of our National Revolutionary Movement for Development ? Our economic policy, Militants, is one for an auto-development that we really want, endogenous, to wit one whose core can be found in the living forces of the country, in our culture, in the valorisation of our own

⁸ Habyarimana, J., speech ‘Youth and Development’, May 21st, 1986, p. 49.

⁹ Habyarimana, J., speech on July 1st, 1987, pp. 205-206.

¹⁰ Habyarimana, J., Speech for July 5th, 1983, p. 220.

resources in order for us to satisfy, with our means, our elementary needs, in order for us to survive physically because of our national food production, in order for us to look to the future with confidence because we were able to show that our country, the beautiful Rwanda, holds riches which allow its daughters and sons to find a raison d'être and to prosper for ever more".¹¹

In 1988, Ferdinand Nahimana, close associate of Habyarimana and later ideologue of the genocide, wrote a book conveying and explaining Habyarimana's ideology and the foundation of his policies. Commenting on the 5 July 1985 speech, he writes that culture is not limited to artistic activities, literature and history. Such limitation prevents one to consider it from a global perspective, to wit the whole set of capacities that constitute the national patrimony established over time and still in evolution. He writes that endogenous development and development based on one's own culture is one and the same thing.¹² On page 51 in Nahimana's 1988 book, a photo is published of peasants working in the field with Habyarimana watching from the nearby road. The subscript to this photo reads:

"Gradually but steadily, the Rwandan population has been prepared and accustomed to appreciate its own capacities, to be proud of its own values and to energize itself relying first of all on the forces and realities intrinsic to its society".

Development, Habyarimana explains, is not a stationary state of affairs, but a permanent process, where every day one has to set a step forward in the good direction, as signified in the expression "AMAJYAMBERE, GUTERA IMBERE MU MAJYAMBERE".¹³

The very modest Rwandan efforts towards industrialization were undertaken only after intense outside pressure. The development of small handicraft enterprises for example, was only allowed in 1985 after a campaign by the ILO, the Young Catholic Workers of Rwanda and the special representative of Switzerland.¹⁴ According to Habyarimana, industrial development should always be auto-centred and endogenous. This is exactly how Nahimana explained it in his 1988 book. Endogenous development is development based on one's own culture and one's own forces.

¹¹ Habyarimana, J., Discours, Messages et Entretien, 1985, pp.35-36

¹² Nahimana, F., Conscience chez-nous, confiance en nous. Notre culture est la base de notre développement harmonieux, Ruhengeri, 1988, p.52.

¹³ Habyarimana, J., Discours, Messages et Entretien, 1986, p.61.

¹⁴ Willame, J.C, *Au sources de l'hécatombe Rwandaise*, Cahiers Africaines, 1995, p. 154.

Importantly, industrial development should be organic:¹⁵

“Our strategy for industrialization will not have two heads (= formal and informal sector) ; it will be an organic strategy coming from a global vision of the problems and the needs. Such a strategy will encourage industrial units of national dimension, but who will not be defined separately, or independent, but organic and in line with what is done for the small enterprise, in order for large enterprises to come to support the small ones and not to destroy them.”

The use of the word ‘organic’ normally refers to the anatomy of the human body. In a 1981 speech, we find more evidence for the analogy between the economy and the human body:

*“The commune must remain a body constitute of several cells, lively and dynamic. And as every living body, the commune needs several elements to be able to render service to its population. The commune, the basic cell of our development and of our economy, has been restructured in order to fulfil better its mission i.e. to energize the living forces of the country for their well-being.”*¹⁶

In this speech, Habyarimana thus viewed the economy as a human body where all organs should function together for the well-being of the whole. This fits perfectly into other parts of his ideology: he frequently repeats that the individual is subordinate to the collective. The 1975 MRND party manifest is very clear on this, it reads:¹⁷

“Our Movement is a popular movement and it requires unconditional adhesion, in other words, the People and the Society as a whole speak with one mouth, resulting in a unity of vision, harmony, cohesion from the cell up to the top of the pyramid of the 'Movement', in other words the entire Nation. No individual or group can escape the control of the 'Social Body' in motion, meaning the People in search for a better social, economic, political, intellectual and moral life".
(capitals in original)

The idea put forward in this Manifest is that the MRND is a Movement to which all Rwandans owe unconditional adhesion. This Movement is seen as a pyramid and it represents the entire Nation, it embodies the will of the People. The idea that the top of the pyramid knows, represents and executes the will of the People will resurge in the period leading up to the genocide. Top military officers will appeal to this idea.

In July 1992, Colonel Nsengiyumva, head of military intelligence had already addressed a letter to Nsabimana (army chief of staff) and Habyarimana in which he openly wrote that discontent in the army was so great that the country risk a coup d'état. Claiming that “the people” were asking

¹⁵ Habyarimana, J., Speech 1986, p. 41-42.

¹⁶ Habyarimana, J., Speech on the occasion of the first session of the National Development Council, p.119, 1981

¹⁷ Manifeste et Statuts du MRND, July 5, 1975, preamble, p.88

the army to act and save the nation, Nsengiyumva warned Habyarimana and proposed that the coalition government, responsible for negotiations with the RPF as well as for changes inside the administration and the armed forces, be removed (Des Forges, 2003, p.11).¹⁸ It is worth citing a full paragraph of Des Forges' paper (2003, p.11-12) here because she uses secret briefings and letters from top military commanders showing how they used 'the people' to advocate their case:

“ In two remarkable passages, Nsengiyumva foreshadows further the events of April 6, 1994. He writes that discontented soldiers may be forced to flee before the RPF and that before they do so, officers ‘ will settle their account with those of our leaders who would have been at the root of that disaster in naively accepting all the claims of the ENI (enemy) who is fighting us ‘. Elsewhere in the same letter he writes ‘ the people ‘ fear the RPF and would flee their advance and that ‘ before fleeing, they are first going to massacre the Tutsi ‘. In addition to these specific warnings, Nsengiyumva added a more general prediction that insisting on fusing the RPF with the Rwandan army (proposed in the negotiations) would result in a civil war even more murderous the war until then. He also added that unless the opposition parties, and particularly the Liberal Party – that generally identified with Tutsi – changed their behaviour, ‘there was a danger that the people themselves would act ‘. And, he cautioned, ‘action by popular masses can be hard to keep under control ‘.”¹⁹

Interestingly, in the 1975 Manifest the military already is assigned a popular role. The Manifest explains what the objectives of the Movement are and how they can be reached (p. 91). Key is that all sons and daughters of the Nation join forces:

*“In order to attack the problems of development and to get rid of the evil forces, we have to rise, march and act as one person and the results will be even more spectacular.
The armed forces, for a long time held outside the economic and social activities of the Nation will from now on be integrated in the frame of the general mobilisation of the popular masses. From now on, all patriotic and progressive forces must feel more concerned. “*

The idea that the entire population should be mobilized and act as one person is not limited to the military but also expressed by ordinary perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide. We refer to a recent book by Jean Hatzfeld.²⁰

¹⁸ Des Forges, A.(2003), The striking force: Military and Militia in the Rwandan Genocide, paper presented at the conference ' The Unfolding of genocide ', Butare, November 2003, p.5-6

¹⁹ Lt.Col.Anatole Nsengiyumva, (1992), Note au Chef EM AR, « Etat d'esprit des militaires et de la population civile, Kigali, July 27 », cited from Des Forges (2003).

²⁰ Hatzfeld, J., (2003), Une Saison des Machettes, Editions du Seuil, Paris.

3. Habyarimana pictured himself as a peasant

3.1 The glorification of the peasantry

In 1986, Habyarimana said at two occasions that the peasants were the real employers of Rwanda, because they allowed the State to function.²¹ On the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the existence of the Rwandan Republic, on July 1st, 1987, Habyarimana devoted his official speech to the glorification of the Rwandan peasant. He said that

“If in the 25 years of our independence Rwanda has known a lot of success in its struggle for progress, if it has been able to take a number of important steps, it is in the first place our farmers who made this happen (...) it is their total devotion to the work, every day (...) their fabulous capacity to adapt, their pragmatism, their genius, their profound knowledge of our eco-systems that allowed them to extract an amazing degree of resources from their plots of land (...)”

At the time, a commentator wrote that never before such honor was given to the Rwandan peasants.²² Four months later, at the occasion of the Government Council of November 13th, 1987, Habyarimana ennobled the Rwandan peasant by extending the term ‘peasant’ (*Umuturage*) to all Rwandans.²³ The term ‘Umuturage’ was commonly used in opposition to the civilised, educated, urban or bourgeois person. Umuturage was the term used in a pejorative sense for the downtrodden, the uncivilised, the rural population. By using and ennobling the term Umuturage, Habyarimana wanted to invert the common meaning of the term. From now on Umuturage would be a noble term, all Rwandans should be Umuturage (peasants) and they should be proud of that.

In December 1987, Habyarimana declares the year 1988 “*The year of the protection of the peasant revenue*”. These kind of slogans were launched every year and were intended to mobilise the population for a specific activity. Other slogans include « *the year of the increase of production* » (1975), « *the year of the protection of the soil* » (1980), « *the year of the tree* » (1983).

These slogans and decisions did not receive real attention from researchers, from western politicians or from the international press. Habyarimana was considered a president who did not fall victim to the urban bias in his policies, he was considered a peasant friendly president. With

²¹ Habyarimana, J., Discours et Entretien, 1986, p.85 and p.143-144.

²² Ntamahungiro, J., Eloge du Paysan Rwandais, *Dialogue*, n.130, Sept.-Octo. 1988, p.5

²³ Ntamahungiro, J., Eloge du Paysan Rwandais, *Dialogue*, no 130, sept.-octo. 1988, p.6

the advantage of hindsight however, one can observe that the rhetoric was peasant-friendly, but As Ntamahungiro wrote in 1988,

« To give a medal of honor to each and every peasant. To decorate some peasants as Model Farmers. To give decorations at certain officials considered close to the peasantry. To baptise a street, a place, a hotel, a day in the name of the peasants. To compose a song in their honor. To organise popular parties in each commune or sector. There is no shortage of ideas and we can count on the creativity of certain minds to supply tailor-made expressions(...)

We know however, how much this part, the majority of the population, suffers. The visits of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communal Development and of the Minister of Justice have shown us some of these injustices. From her side, the national press regularly provides²⁴ evidence of the poverty in the rural areas and in the cities. »

Whether we take population policy, *umuganda*, tax policy, coffee policy, food price policy, education policy, exchange rate policy or land policy, we consistently find that policy measures favour the importers, the whole-sale traders, the construction companies, the state-owned companies, the elite. The rhetoric was that of a regime caring for the peasantry, but the policies where benefiting elite interests, they were not advancing the well-being of the peasantry.²⁵

There is however, more to say about this peasant-friendly rhetoric. In his 1998 book, Peter Uvin comments the 1987²⁴ decision to ennoble the term « peasant » as follows :

« if all Rwandans were peasants, there would be no more classes, no distinctions – except, of course, between Hutu and Tutsi, the only allowed and never forgotten distinction » (Uvin, p.24)

I believe this interpretation is only partly correct, and I want to advance another element in the interpretation, namely that, in Habyarimana's ideology, the Tutsi were not real peasants, they were always considered the bourgeois or feudalists. Habyarimana never said explicitly that only the Hutu were the real peasants of Rwanda, meaning that I cannot prove my statement directly. My interpretation is thus a hypothesis and I hope other researchers will take up this discussion. I have to following arguments to make my case:

- *if one believes that my interpretation is not correct*, why then would Habyarimana use a so-called non-ethnic, all-inclusive peasant rhetoric and talk about the equality of all Rwandans when at the same time he vigorously maintained an ethnic identity classification and registration system? Exactly, I argue, because his rhetoric indeed was exclusive and ethnic;

²⁴ Ntamahungiro, J., *ibidem*, p.8 .

²⁵ For a discussion of the effect of these policies on the peasantry, I refer to Uvin Peter (1998), *Aiding Violence: the Development Enterprise in Rwanda* and to Verwimp, Ph., (2003), *Development and Genocide in Rwanda: a political economy analysis of peasants and power under the Habyarimana Regime*, Leuven.

- From oral history and anthropological field work, we have learned that the term Tutsi was associated with a life-style detached from manual, agricultural labour. Indeed, in popular thinking as well as in the revolutionary ideology the Tutsi were considered a bourgeois class that lived of cattle and banana beer. (De Lame, 1996, p.74);
- The term 'Tutsi' in Rwandan history was not a term denoting a racial group of people. Depending on the social and political situation, on personal economic progress or decline, a Hutu family could, over time become Tutsi or visa-versa. During colonialism, the terms Hutu and Tutsi were racially interpreted and categorized. In stead of the individual chance of social mobility became a rigid system of ethnic classification;
- What is the point of calling your entire population 'peasants' and glorifying to cultivation of the soil if you know very well that many Rwandans do not have enough land to make a living? Indeed, most Rwandans, at least for part of their time, have other income generating activities besides the cultivation of crops (see Verwimp, 2003). They just have to, because they need money. They cannot live of their small plot of land alone. In stead of acknowledging the variety and diversity of jobs undertaken by Rwandans to earn incomes, the president considers his countrymen as peasants.

Therefore, I argue that the peasant rhetoric of the regime masks in fact an anti-Tutsi agenda behind a class analysis. It is true that, as Uvin says, when all Rwandans are peasants, there are no classes anymore, but, it also means that there are no Tutsi anymore. When only the Hutu are considered Rwanda's peasants, there is no place for the Tutsi. The Hutu-Tutsi distinction is not forgotten in the peasant rhetoric, it is at the core of this rhetoric.

At the same time however, and this makes an analysis of the Habyarimana regime so complicated, observers indicate that the president often spoke about reconciliation and national unity in Rwanda. This is indeed the case, in a number of speeches after his takeover and during his reign, the president speched on the need for national unity between all groups in society. Evidence suggests that the fate of the Tutsi in Rwanda between 1974 and 1990 was much better compared to the Hutu in Burundi : no Tutsi was killed for political or ethnic reasons, Tutsi were represented at the National University, they were allowed to go into business and some Tutsi became wealthy businessmen. It is in that respect that we must look at Habyarimana's approach: to speak about reconciliation while cementing his own power at the same time.

3.2 Ruralisation

Habyarimana followed a consistent policy to make the peasants stay in the rural areas. Rwandans could not migrate to the capital Kigali, they had to remain in an agricultural setting. This anti-urban policy benefited people already living in the cities, the so-called 'elite'. This explains why in 1973, 95% of the population lived in the rural areas and in 1993, 90% still lived in the rural areas. The dictator considered cities places of immorality, theft and prostitution. This 'moral stand' closely resembled the teachings of the Catholic Church in Rwanda which also considered the cities as dangerous places which young people should be kept away from lest they be contaminated by the cities' immorality. Prostitutes or so-called prostitutes (among them Tutsi girlfriends of expatriates) in Kigali were sent to a re-education camp in Nsinda in the prefecture of Kibungo. In an interview in 1980, Habyarimana stated that he had eight children himself and that his character was strongly influenced by his parents and by his life on the farm:²⁶

“My parents were cultivators, simple peasants thus, they are dead unfortunately and it is really in this point in life in the countryside, on the hills, in life with the land (soil), that they have influenced me the most, and they were simple peasants, they were not part of the leadership at the time and also the fact that they were Catholic. Many points that one could underline for the part of my parents and that have influenced my character and my own life.”

It is highly unlikely that a son of 'simple peasants' could first go to study medicine at Louvanium University in Kinshasa and later enroll in the military academy in Rwanda. Habyarimana is not the first dictator to ennoble peasants because of his regime's ideology. The Cambodian mass murderer Pol Pot also pretended to be a simple peasant. Hitler declared the farmer “the most important participant” in the Nazi revolution. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler linked German peasant farmland with German racial characteristics.²⁷ According to Chrétien, several copies of films about Hitler and Nazism were found in Habyarimana's home.²⁸ In a 1997 book, David Large reminds us not to forget rural Germany and especially Bavaria (the NSDAP hot spot) during the rise of Nazism.²⁹

²⁶ Habyarimana, J, interviewed by Yuki Sato, July 12, 1980, p.236.

²⁷ Kiernan, B., 'Genocide and "ethnic cleansing",' in *The Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion*, ed. Robert Wuthnow, Washington, D.C., Congressional Quarterly, vol. 1, p. 298.

²⁸ Chrétien, J.P., *Les Médias du Genocide*, 1995, p. 256.

²⁹ Large, D. *Where Ghosts Walked : Munich's Road to the Third Reich*, Norton, New York, 1997, taken from a review by Tom Nairn 'Reflections on Nationalist Disasters', p. 151.

Other dictatorships favoring ruralization instead of urbanisation have been studied. For instance, on the reason why the Khmer Rouge evacuated the cities, Ben Kiernan writes that it became far easier to control the population:³⁰

“From now on, there would be no more assembled constituency to whom dissident or underground political activists could appeal or among whom they could quietly work. No human agglomeration facilitating private communication between individuals. Nowhere that the exchange of news and ideas could escape tight monitoring that reduced it to a minimum. No venue for a large crowd to assemble except on CPK initiative, no audience for someone like Sihanouk to address. No possibility of pressuring the nerve center of the regime by means of popular demonstrations in the capital. And no chance for an orthodox marxist or other dissident faction to develop a base among a proletariat.”

The difference between Pol Pot and Habyarimana is that, during his reign, Habyarimana did not have to cleanse the cities in order to control the population. Nearly everybody was already living in the rural areas and he only had to make sure that they stayed there. However, the comparison with Pol Pot becomes chilling when one realizes that the capital Kigali was the first place that was cleansed of Tutsi and politically moderate Hutu at the start of the genocide.

In 1994 report, the World Bank condemned the restrictions on population movement because they impeded the development of market centers essential for developing a market economy. The World Bank added that this policy reduced the potential for economic growth. This means that Habyarimana’s migration prohibition policy was considered an impediment to development by one of the world’s leading development agencies. Of course, one could disagree with the World Bank on the grounds that it has an ideological bias toward free market economics. In the same document, the World Bank added that these migration restrictions increased poverty by limiting the options of the poor. From the development economics literature we know that migration, trade in small market centres and especially temporary employment in cities, are important strategies to cope with poverty. The Bank does not go as far as saying that this restrictive policy was a means to control the population. When we look at this policy from a dictatorial point of view, the motivation behind the policy becomes clearer.

Habyarimana espoused a development ideology. His speeches reveal his vision for Rwanda. Unspoken, but just as important, is that this ideology served as a legitimation for his dictatorial power. As G. Prunier writes

³⁰

Kiernan, B., *The Pol Pot Regime, Race, Power and Genocide under the Khmer Rouge 1975-1979*, Yale University Press, 1996, p. 64.

“The MRND was a truly totalitarian party : every single Rwandese citizen had to be a member, including babies and old people. All bourgmestres and prefects were chosen from among party cadres. The party was everywhere.”³¹

Prunier also writes that the MRND was not supposed to be a ‘political’ party:

“Indeed, the word ‘politics’ was almost a dirty word in the virtuous and hard working world of Habyarimanism. Every effort was made to forget- at least officially – that politics existed.”³²

Having one single party was the right choice for Habyarimana given his ideology and his desire to stay in power: he could control the entire population, outlaw political opposition and implement his vision of society. In so-called animation sessions, the population had to glorify Habyarimana.

In Prunier’s words,

“Along the somewhat reminiscent lines of eighteenth century European theories of ‘benevolent despotism’, President Habyarimana had decided to take upon his shoulders the heavy burden of the state so that his subjects could devote themselves entirely to the business of agriculture.”³³

Prunier also wrote about the ideology of Habyarimana, but he did not go all the way. Prunier believes the system worked at the economic level, but he does not consider the dictatorial logic behind the agricultural and peasant ideology (see pages 76–80 of his book). It is possible to see that the policies he adopted were designed to further both the adoption of his ideology by the population AND his dictatorial power. Habyarimana’s policies were expressed as “peasant-friendly”, that is, they were presented as helping peasants improve their lives. However, closer examination of several of these policies -- including population policy and *umuganda* -- indicates that these policies were in fact not promoting the well-being of the peasant population at all.

3.3 Umuganda

Umuganda, the Kinyarwanda word for the wood used to construct a house, was one of Habyarimana’s favorite speech topics and one of the regime’s most influential policies, both in economic and in ideological terms. On February, 2^{ed}, 1974, the President ordered that every Rwandan perform unpaid collective work one day per week. This was stressed in a speech given

³¹ Prunier, D. *The Rwanda Crisis, History of a Genocide*, 1995, p. 76. The opinion that the MRND was a totalitarian party is shared by other authors, see J.K.Gasana, *La Guerre, la Paix et la Démocratie au Rwanda*, 1995, in A. Guichaoau, *Les Crises Politiques de 1993-1994 au Rwanda en Burundi*, chapter 14.

³² Prunier, G. *ibid*, p. 77.

³³ Prunier, G., *ibid*, p. 77.

by Habyarimana at a seminar for Burgomasters in August 1975, after the creation of the MRND (Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement):

“The doctrine of our Movement is that Rwanda will only be developed by the sum of the efforts of its own sons and daughters, the product of their efforts belongs to them. That is why it has judged the Collective Works for Development a necessary obligation for all the inhabitants of the country.”

In his 1988 book, the intellectual and later ideologue of genocide Ferdinand Nahimana, writes that the development strategy chosen by Habyarimana was neither communist nor capitalist, but was specific to Rwandan culture and traditions and that it relied on Rwanda’s own forces.³⁴

The *umuganda* policy was presented as the re-establishment of an institution that had long existed in Rwandan culture but that had been suppressed by the colonial economy. *Umuganda* was, according to the MRND, a reaction against the monetisation of the Rwandan economy, the introduction of formal education and the development of off-farm labour under colonialism.³⁵ All Rwandans ‘HAD TO VOLUNTARILY’ contribute their labour to the weekly collective works. Economically, *umuganda* was very important for Rwanda since it made an enormous amount of unpaid labour available to the state. During *umuganda*, the Rwandan people built such things as schools, roads, sanitation facilities, health centres and anti-erosion ditches. The latter gained central place in 1986-1987 when a national plan to combat erosion was launched.

Arguably, the political and ideological functions of *umuganda*, were even more important than its economic benefits. Ideologically, *umuganda* was explicitly designed to make sure that all Rwandans would do manual labor. The local politicians and administrators were responsible for the organization of the weekly *umuganda*, which gave these officials great discretionary power. They could decide who did and who did not have to participate. Not surprisingly, the cronies and friends of the regime escaped *umuganda*. Hatzfeld (2003) writes that one could pay a sum of money to a group leader during the genocide in order to avoid being enlisted as a member of a killer group.

³⁴ Nahimana, F., *Conscience chez-nous, confiance en nous, Notre culture est la base de notre développement harmonieux*, Ruhengeri, 1988, p.33-55.

³⁵ *L’Umuganda dans le développement national*, Présidence de MRND, Affaires Economiques, Janvier 1990, p. 10. In this respect, *umuganda* is copied from communist-type countries as China. Also neighbouring countries as Tanzania under Nyerere knew such work parties. The Habyarimana regime explained these policies as if they had always existed and as if they belonged to Rwandan tradition. They were endogenized so to speak. Needless to repeat that Habyarimana continued and intensified the policy of coffee cultivation, which is one of the few ways to monetise a rural economy and get foreign exchange. This shows that the president did not fully demonetise the Rwandan economy when such policy would run counter to other, more worldly objectives, such as getting foreign exchange. He added another source of tax, non-monetary in nature, namely a tax on labour (*umuganda*). Both taxes existed in the colonial period.

The Manifesto of the MRND says that *'it is a man's labour that constitutes the essential source of wealth in the country and from there the basis of economic accumulation'*³⁶ On many public occasions, Habyarimana expressed his low esteem for intellectual work and his high esteem for manual work. He instituted the *umuganda* policy by cultivating a plot of land together with his close friends.

*"I admit that I do not understand, that I absolutely do not understand, when listening to certain intellectuals, one is obliged to hear nothing but disobeying remarks and destructive criticism regarding some accomplishments, regarding certain political options taken that are not open for questioning. I take the example of Umuganda – our collective work for development, thanks to the manual labor of everybody. It is inconceivable that we could do without Umuganda. A country is constructed by hands, not by words ! Rwanda will be constructed by the sweat on our face and not by useless speculations ! The results obtained by Umuganda, its remarkable realizations that many countries envy us, constitutes the best proof that it cannot be separated from the progress Rwanda made in the last 10 years, that it is an essential part of that progress and that it corresponds with our ancestral values – to engage oneself – so that everyone, by individual effort, performs better in a collectivity always in progress. Each intelligent and honest Rwandan can see this. I can only regret, with my last effort, that there still are 'intellectuals ' who use their time to criticize, destroy, this institution with their words, in stead of telling us how to improve it, making it more performing, adapt it better to our needs."*³⁷

It is clear that he wants Rwanda's professors to stop criticizing him and to contribute to national development. In other words, the professors should do the same as the general population: do not discuss politics and work hard.

Umuganda gave the local party and state officials knowledge and experience in the mobilization and control of the labour of the peasant population. A skill that was to prove deadly during the genocide.

*"Umuganda must be planned in order to reach its objective, developing our country by building the necessary infrastructure for its economy and, allowing the new Rwandan to engage in his work. Because of this, it has to be oriented towards directly productive actions. In order to increase the development projects in the Umuganda framework, the mobilization and sensitisation of the popular masses is necessary and the MRND offers the appropriate way to do this"*³⁸

³⁶ Manifesto of the MRND, cited from *Umuganda dans le développement national*, 1990, p.5.

³⁷ Habyarimana, J., "Youth and Development", speech at the occasion of his visit to the National University of Rwanda, May 21, 1986, p.66.

³⁸ *L'Umuganda dans le Développement National*, Janvier 1990, p.39.

Guichaoua, in a 1991 article, writes that *Umuganda* successfully introduced the theme of militant mobilisation with a strong nationalist connotation in the population.³⁹ The fact that everybody was required to participate, peasants as well as administrators, workers as well as intellectuals, had an important role in the efforts undertaken to reach a general mobilisation. Umuganda is one of the prime examples of a top-down policy with an appealing development image that was designed to use and control peasant labour, to oblige the Rwandan intellectuals to do physical work, to give politicians discretionary power over labour and to indoctrinate the Rwandans with the regime's ideology.⁴⁰ Because of abuse, corruption and disbelief, *umuganda* was not popular among the peasant population. As soon as the power of the regime decreased, peasants did not show up for *umuganda* anymore. Uvin, writing on development aid, writes that Rwanda is a prime example of state-run, state-controlled, top-down development. Large development projects in Rwanda were controlled by the regime and the MRND party.⁴¹ On top of this, churches, development projects and civil organisations copied the umuganda model and asked peasants to perform unpaid labour on a large scale in their own projects. Guichaoua (p.566-568) writes that the peasantry did not really distinguish between the 'official' state-run umuganda and the 'church', 'white' or 'private' umuganda. It were all obligations to participate in unpaid work programs and the officials in charge of these programs were often one and the same person. For example, the targets for umuganda in the coming week, not only for the 'church' umuganda, were announced at the end of the sunday service.

4. Habyarimana had a Mission

4.1 "The one who refuses to work is harmful to society"

In a recent book, Mahmood Mamdani writes that Habyarimana was publicly committed to a policy of reconciliation between Hutu and Tutsi within Rwanda.⁴² According to Mamdani, official vocabulary in the Second Republic began to speak of Hutu and Tutsi as "ethnicities" and no longer as "races". The meaning of this, says Mamdani, was clear : "the Tutsi within were there to

³⁹ Guichaoua, A., (1991), Les Travaux Communautaires en Afrique Centrale, *Revue Tiers Monde*, XXXII, n°127, Juillet-Septembre, p.564

⁴⁰ I refer to the 1990 MRND publication on Umuganda p.20-32 for details on the organisational structure of umuganda. Although Umuganda was compulsory labour, the majority of the population may have believed in the intrinsic qualities of this policy, at least in the beginning. For an elaborate discussion of the beliefs and reservations of the population regarding Umuganda, I refer the excellent 1991 article by Guichaoua.

⁴¹ Uvin, P., *Aiding violence : the development enterprise in Rwanda*, 1998.

⁴² Mamdani, M, *When Victims become Killers, Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton University Press, 2001

stay”.⁴³ The new regime, he writes, rejected the “national Hutuism” of the First Republic and brought the Tutsi back within the political fold. I cannot agree with Mamdani, as one could expect from my analysis of Habyarimana’s speeches in this paper. According to me, Mamdani fails to discuss Habyarimana’s peasant ideology.

The nature of the Second Republic and the political ideology of Habyarimana are at the centre of this debate. In 1973 Habyarimana proclaimed his own coup d’état a “*Moral Revolution*”. Mamdani accepts the good intentions that Habyarimana claimed to have with his “*Moral Revolution*”. Mamdani writes that the name given to mark the day of the Revolution namely “a day of peace and reconciliation” was not just a rhetorical gesture. He gives examples in support of his argument, namely that Habyarimana included one Tutsi minister in his government. Mamdani’s interpretation of the morality of the “*Moral Revolution*” is however questionable. According to me, the fact that Habyarimana defined his revolution as a “*Moral Revolution*” reveals the missionary character of that revolution. This can be documented from the following excerpt from Habyarimana’s speech delivered at the National University in Butare in 1973:

*“The coup d’état that we did, was above all a moral coup d’état. And what we want, and we would consider our action as failed if we do not reach this goal, what we want, is to ban once and for all, the spirit of intrigue and feudal mentality. What we want is to give back labour and individual yield its real value. Because, we say it again, the one who refuses to work is harmful to society.”*⁴⁴

Where Mamdani believes Habyarimana was a president that promoted reconciliation, this 1973 speech advances another interpretation, to wit that Habyarimana wanted to go beyond the realizations of the First Republic. “*The spirit of intrigue and feudal mentality*”, “*the valuation of labour*” and “*the harmfulness of the one who refuses to work*” is, we believe, not directed to the Hutu extremists but to the Tutsi. It is exactly in this language, the feudalists in opposition to the peasants, that Habyarimana talks about Hutu and Tutsi. He makes use of a class analysis to mask his real conviction. Additional support for the authors’ interpretation of the 1973 coup d’état is found in a 1980 interview with Habyarimana. Asked by Yuki Sato how he judged the economic policy of President Kayibanda, Habyarimana replied :

“One cannot judge a regime that ruled for 13 years in a few minutes time. I think one could search in different official documents to have a correct judgement. What I can say about the First Republic is that I praise her effort to accomplish the Revolution and to devote herself to the development of the popular masses. I have to say that she

⁴³ Mamdani, *ibidem*, citation from p.140

⁴⁴ Habyarimana, J, Speech at the occasion of the opening of the academic year in Butare, October 14th , 1973, p. 44.

devoted herself a lot to domestic politics and it is therefore that she has neglected a bit the economic domain and certainly foreign policy. These shortcomings are something we can stress, but they do not diminish the merits of certain leaders of the First Republic. When we have been obliged to take action in 1973, it is because certain groups around the President started to defect from the road that was taken by the 1959 Revolution and by subsequent political activities. That revolution was undertaken to obtain equality between all the ethnic groups, all social levels, and towards 1973 one has raised the ethnic problem again. And that is why we were obliged to intervene to confirm the attainments of the Revolution and to confirm the principle of the equality of all the ethnic groups in our country, and to confirm also the primacy of the interests of the rural collectivity over individual interests. And what the economy is concerned, one has told you that Rwanda will always be handicapped by its geographical situation... ”⁴⁵

This interview, suggests that Habyarimana directed his efforts against the leaders of the First Republic to safeguard the attainments of the 1959 Revolution and accused the leaders of the First Republic of jeopardising these attainments. Habyarimana namely suggests that the dignitaries of the First Republic had forgotten the objectives of the Revolution. In this interview Habyarimana says that ethnic problems constituted the reason for his coup d'état. He did not take power because he believed that the leaders of the First Republic were too racist (as one may infer from Mamdani's book), but on the contrary that these leaders had not fully implemented the objectives of the 1959 Revolution. Habyarimana wanted to consolidate the 1959 Revolution and believed that the leaders of the First Republic were off-track. Support for this interpretation is also found in a paper written by Guichaoua (1997). He writes that the coup d'état caused a reversal of power relations. The elite of the South (called *Nduga*), lost power to the elite of the North (called *Rukiga*).⁴⁶

One of the problems in the First Republic was that most university students were Tutsi (90% of university students according to Lemarchand). As Mamdani correctly points out (p.135), the leaders of the First Republic were criticised for not advancing Hutu representation in civil society in general and education and government employment in particular. This caused major disagreement among young Hutu. A 1966 law gave the State the control of the school system and by 1970, 60% of the students at the National University were Hutu. According to Mamdani the educated but unemployed Hutu ignited the movement to remove Tutsi from schools and public offices in 1973. Mamdani adds: “The context for the crises was created by the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Hutu by the mostly Tutsi army in neighbouring Burundi” (p.137). Claudine Vidal (1991, p.26-43), who was doing field research in Rwanda in the period leading up

⁴⁵ Sato, Y., interview with president J.Habyarimana, July 12, 1980, published in *Discours, Messages et Entretiens de Son Excellence le Général-Major Habyarimana Juvénal, Président de la République Rwandaise*, Edition 1980, p.238. Translation by the author.

⁴⁶ Guichaoua, A., *Les Antécédents politiques de la crise Rwandaise de 1994. Rapport d'expertise rédigé à la demande du Tribunal Penal International des Nations Unies sur le Rwanda*, Arusha, Avril 1997, p.12

to the coup d'état in 1972-1973, does not mention the Burundian context in her treatment of the 1973 coup d'état. She writes that it was especially the local elites (administrators, teachers and university students, businessmen) that organised the expulsion of Tutsi teachers, Tutsi students, Tutsi administrators from their jobs and from the schools.⁴⁷

The so-called "*Comités de salut public*" published lists of Tutsi who should be expelled from the university or from their jobs. Mamdani then concludes that the inaction of the Kayibanda regime, the agitation in the whole country and the power struggle between Hutu from the North and Hutu from the south prompted Habyarimana to take over power. Mamdani does not discuss Habyarimana's involvement or the involvement of any of his aides in the unrest that caused the fall of the First Republic. Mamdani accepts that Habyarimana brought peace back to Rwanda : "Thus was born the Second Republic, which immediately declared itself the custodian of the revolution and the protector of all its children, Hutu as well as Tutsi" (p.138). Why then, one should ask, did Habyarimana not allow the Tutsi expelled in 1973 to return to their jobs and to their classrooms? Before 1973, these refugees had not joined the 1959 and 1963 refugees in neighbouring countries and were willing to live with and co-operate with a Hutu leadership.

The point here is that all these jobs, together with the land of the Tutsi, was already distributed among Hutu, especially the Hutu radicals, members of the "*Committees of Public Safety*".⁴⁸ Interestingly, several of the members of the 1973 *Committees of Public Safety* were leaders of the 1994 genocide. According to Reyntjens, a historic line can be drawn between the activism of people like Leon Mugesera and Ferdinand Nahimana in 1973 and in 1994. Nahimana, as we have discussed already, is the author of a book titled « *Culture is the basis of our development in harmony* » which is a commentary on the ideology of Habyarimana. Instead of directing his 1973 speech at the National University in Butare against these radicals (as one would expect from a president who wants to reconcile), Habyarimana blames "*feudal mentality*", and considers "*the one who refuses to work as harmful to society*". In other words, he blames the Tutsi for the unrest, not the Hutu radicals. It may well be that we encounter here a practise that we will see more in the 1990-1994

⁴⁷ Maybe the question is not that the Hutu elite learned something from the 1972 massacre in Burundi, but what exactly did they learn ? That the Hutu Revolution was in danger ? Or that ethnic cleansing and massacres can be organised without international consequences or intervention ? I remark that Habyarimana does not mention Burundi either in his interview with Yuki Sato (p.30). He only cites internal reasons for the coup d'état.

⁴⁸ Reyntjens, F., Akazu : Escadrons de la mort et autres 'réseau zéro', un histoire des résistances au changement politiques depuis 1990, in Guichaoua, A., Les crises politiques de 1993-1994 au Rwanda et Burundi, 1995, p.271

period, namely that Habyarimana tells western journalists what they like to hear, to talk about peace and reconciliation, and that he reserves a different discourse for his domestic audience.⁴⁹

Several other elements should be added to this discussion. One is a biographical one: Habyarimana had been in charge of the army from the start of the First Republic. He graduated as the first and highest ranking officer from the first promotion of the Military Academy in 1962 and was given the command of the army right after. Under Kayibanda, he served as Minister of the National Guard and the Police. The single purpose of the army was to defend the country against attacks from Tutsi from neighbouring countries. In this period, in which a new leadership had to establish itself, attacks were also directed against Tutsi citizens residing inside Rwanda. An example is the massacre of several thousand Tutsi in 1963 in the prefecture of Gikongoro. In theory, it is possible that a military officer whose entire career-path coincides with the rise to power of the new Hutu elite and whose responsibility was to fight the Tutsi rebels, would become a peace-maker and a promotor of reconciliation once he is president. But one should look at the facts. It was the Hutu from the North, who had a history of resistance to colonial and Tutsi dominance, who mounted the 1973 coup d'état. Pottier, referring to food policy and to the land contract (*ubukonde*)⁵⁰ writes that :

“When the current (=Second Republic) Government of Rwanda took power, their ambition was to restore their own pre-Tutsi culture – a culture dominated by powerful landowners (*abakonde*) who attracted clients (*abagererwa*) through land “.⁵¹

Pottier considers the near absence of food market regulation of the Habyarimana regime as an illustration of the how policy makers regarded nutritional status as a by-product of agricultural strategies rather than a goal in its own right (p.27). Indeed, the whole complex of policies on land, food and agriculture under Habyarimana is not taken into consideration by scholars who see Habyarimana as a promoter of peace and reconciliation. In a chapter of the author's dissertation, the insights of Johan Pottier are used to analyse the 1989 famine in Southern Rwanda and relate it with Habyarimana's peasant ideology.

⁴⁹ Mamdani cites a journalist from *Le Monde* to support his point.

⁵⁰ In contrast to the cattle contract (*ubuhake*), the land contract was NOT abolished in the aftermath of the 1959 Revolution.

⁵¹ Pottier, J., *Taking Stock : Food Marketing Reform in Rwanda, 1982-1989*, *African Affairs* (1993), p.29.

4.2 Adopting a romantic and mythical history of Rwanda

Other elements that highlight the missionary aspect of Habyarimana's ideology are found in a remarkable book published in 1987. The book, published by Omer Marchal, a maker of documentaries, is an Anniversary Publication for 25 years of Rwandan Independence.⁵² The whole book is a beautifully illustrated *mythical and romantic history* of Rwanda and was commissioned by President Habyarimana.⁵³ The book was distributed by Habyarimana to his honorary guests (heads of state, presidents, ministers...) at the 25th Celebration of Independence. The book features many beautiful pictures from the Rwandan landscape, its people, animals and plants. Rwanda is described as a one large village, stating that Rwandans do not like cities (p. 24). The reader is offered a history of Rwanda where the 1959 events are called a *peasant revolution* during which the *predominance of the cow was replaced with the predominance of the hoe*. On p.44 we read that man is *an eminent product of his soil*. The Abanyiginya dynasty had not recognised the legitimate aspirations of taking part in government and had not respected the land rights of the peasant masses.

On p.46, one reads that Rwanda is inhabited by *Hutu, Tutsi and Twa*. The first are Bantus, *cultivators* from the great forest of the Sahara. The second are Nilotics, *pastoralists* and great politicians from Egypt and perhaps from India. The Twa finally are Pygmoid people, the most frustrated group. At the same time the book honours the leaders of Rwanda, foremost president Habyarimana who is in office since 1973. The president is presented as *the child of God and the Apostle of Life* (p. 96 and p. 56), adding that he is *predestined by his name*, which literally translates "It is God who gives life".

In Marchal's book, it is further said that the president belongs to the *race* of people who cut the forest (the Bahutu) (p.88). President Habyarimana, the reader learns, brought peace to the country and is not the type of person that would *capture women from the noble classes* (the Batutsi) while contemplating their *extinction* (p.92). We remark that 'class' and 'race' are used interchangeably here. On page 92 one also finds Habyarimana's citation from a discussion with French and Belgian journalists saying that he is a "*Mubutu pur sang*" (a Muhutu from pure blood)

⁵² Marchal, O., *Au Rwanda, La Vie Quotidienne au Pays du Nil Rouge*, Didier Hatier, Bruxelles, 1987.

⁵³ Marchal, who thanks the staff in the Presidents' office in the pre-amble of his book, died in 1996. In a telephone interview with a person familiar with Marchal, the author was told that the Anniversary Book was commissioned by the President.

and that his parents were simple peasants.⁵⁴ The time he spent on the hills, on the soil has influenced him the most. On the same p.92 it is repeated that the family of Habyarimana belonged to the *race* of people who cut the forest. On p.97 Habyarimana is called « *the greatest adventurer of the end of the millenium* ».

When he took power in 1973, we read that Habyarimana said that « the Rwandan will *never spill the blood* of a fellow Rwandan anymore ». On p.100, Habyarimana is honoured for *not advocating birth control*, « *live is a gift of God* », which is considered very courageous in a very populous country. In the book, the question of the Rwandan refugees in neighbouring countries is linked to the demographic situation inside Rwanda : (citation, p. 108)

The Rwandans say : "When Obote has send us his refugees three or four years ago (a.1982), if we wouldn't be many, wouldn't he be very eager to send the refugees ?" It is true : the power of a people is also in their number. Recently, Jacques Chirac (a. then prime minister), cited the demographic growth of the French population in order to launch the promise to make France the first economic power in Europe. And the Russians, in Afghanistan, build their presence on the axiom: "One only needs one million Afghans to build Afghan socialism. " Put in other words, one only needs to make children.

From this quotation, we learn that "The Rwandans" did not oppose population growth, but moreover considered it as the basis of their political and economic power. In a previous section of this paper we already saw how Habyarimana regarded the population as the first force of the nation. Here, the size of the population as a force is linked to the potential return of the Tutsi refugees living in Uganda. In the citation, the Tutsi are not considered as Rwandans living in the diaspora but as Obote's refugees ("his refugees"). Consequently, the expression "if we wouldn't be many", has to be understood as the Hutu population of Rwanda.

On p.174 of the Anniversary Publication, it is said that Habyarimana avoided introducing political parties because their rivalries in other parts of Africa had lead to *fratricides* (meaning the murder of a brother). Habyarimana, page 174 says, had set up the MRND to introduce his ideas in the peasant masses.

One could question the nature of this Anniversary book and dismiss it as the independent opinion of the author in question (Omer Marchal). Marchal was indeed a romantic author, but it was the president who commissioned the book. The least one could say was that Habyarimana

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Rumor wanted that the ethnic affiliation of Habyarimana's father was debated, pushing the president to confirm his Hutu identity in public.

liked Marchal's writings. He namely commissioned the book for what was likely to be the most important celebration of Habyarimana's entire presidency. "The Rwandans" from the citation are in fact Marchal's contractors in the Presidential office.

There is more to it however. Marchal is not the founder of Rwandan mythology. What he writes about Habyarimana and "The Rwandans" can be found in other citations of Habyarimana himself. It is therefore highly likely that Marchal only wrote what Habyarimana liked to read. Describing Habyarimana as the child of God resembles the answer the president gave on the question why he was not in favour of a multiparty system. This question was asked in the mid-seventies after establishing the MRND. His answer was: "You also worship only one God".

Answering the question on how he became president asked by the Japanese journalist Yuki Sato during a 1980 interview, the president suggests that he had a mission in life:

*"...I would like to stress that I have served the First Republic since 1960 and I think of it now. Exactly at the date of Independence, the first of July 1962, was it a symbolic gesture? But I think of it now and you can interpret it the way you want. The first of July 1962, I was part of the March-past and in the troops that composed this March-past, there was a young under-lieutenant. That was me. And it was this under-lieutenant that was given the flag of the army by former President Kayibanda. A flag that we still have now. I think about it and maybe it was a symbolic gesture."*⁵⁵

5. Concluding remarks

In this paper, the ideological underpinnings of the Habyarimana regime were analysed. When one considers that (1) the president repeatedly stated that Rwanda has a demographic problem; (2) he does not install a family planning program; (3) he considers the population as a force; (4) he wants Rwanda to be self-sufficient in food and is very concerned with a disequilibrium between population growth and food production; (5) He said that development should be endogenous, culture-based and organic; (6) he believes that only manual labour is valuable; (7) he had peasants perform collective labour one day a week as an antidote to money, education and off-farm labour; (8) he glorified the peasantry and wanted all Rwandans to be peasants integrated in his Movement, the MRND; (9) he believed he had a mission in life, to wit to safeguard the attainments of the Social Revolution and to go beyond this with his Moral Revolution; (10) he celebrated the most important day of his presidency (25 years of Independence) with a book that

⁵⁵ Interview with Yuki Sato, *ibid*, 1980, p.237

presents a mythical history of Rwanda inhabited by two main groups, not only holders of different occupations or classes - Hutu as cultivators, Tutsi as pastoralists – but also two different races. The president, the books says, belonged to the race of people who cut the forest, the Bahutu.

I believe that these ten elements are key characteristics of the ideology of the Habyarimana regime and these characteristics help us to understand the regime. The president wanted Rwanda to remain an agrarian nation where a strong and virtuous peasant population tills the soil. A peasant population which devotes all its attention to food crop cultivation, which remains in the rural areas and which is firmly integrated in the unique party MRND. Habyarimana was named 'Father of the Nation' a term which personalised and incorporated the relationship between the peasantry, the state and himself.

But who, one must ask, who in Habyarimana's thinking, are the peasants of Rwanda? This paper finds that the president espoused a racial vision of Rwanda. His peasant rhetoric masks a racial prejudice behind a class analysis. The issue is not that the Tutsi were targeted because the regime specifically opposed pastoralists (a sizeable part of the Hutu population also held cattle, and, like many Tutsi, combined cattle-herding with agriculture), but rather that it claimed to favour Hutu peasants as the supposedly endangered, exploited class.⁵⁶

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I owe this conclusive insight to a particularly insightful discussion with Ben Kiernan, November 2002.

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