Ideology for Legitimacy, Citizenship for Control: Rwanda from the 1959 Revolution to the mid 1980s

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The First and Second Rwandan Republics, spanning the early 1960s to the early 1990s, have been the subject of little core academic attention. Prior to the early 1990s war and the 1994 genocide, most scholarly work focused on 'Ancient Rwanda', the kingdoms and societal structures that existed before colonisation.[1] Work on the First and Second Republics tended to be limited to technical, often sectoral, analyses of development in Rwanda.[2] Post-genocide literature, on the other hand, has centered overwhelmingly on the genocide itself, on its proximate causes, actors and dynamics. More recently, new work has turned to the study of post-genocide Rwandan society, peace building and reconciliation strategies, as well as current state-society relations and power differential within the country. Overall, in what has been published in the last 15 years, very little new material on the times from 1959 to 1985 has been produced.

This is not to say that the First and Second Republics are ignored completely by scholars. It has become common in contemporary work on Rwanda to devote a few paragraphs or pages to the period, particularly as it is antecedent to the gruesome events of the early 1990s. However, in the absence of strong literature on the period, constant referral to secondary sources and 'inter-citation' within the community of Rwanda focused academics or conflict and genocide scholars has led to the loss of 'historical texture and richness' in understandings of the time.

An even more problematic trend has been the tendency to understand the First and Second Republics through the lens of the genocide. Reading back from events of the early 1990s, some authors have conveyed distorted perceptions of the period and led to biased interpretations of their events and structures. Overall, the two Republics are often depicted as authoritarian, highly controlling and therefore strong regimes.[3] An additional common misrepresentation pertains to regimes' public ideology. A good number of commentators maintain that the First and Second Republics conveyed an openly noxious anti-Tutsi ideology. Though less common, a final belief can still be found in the work of some analysts. For these authors, First and Second Republic incumbents were unquestionably obeyed or followed by the Rwandan population, either out of a natural Rwandan predisposition to obedience or because Rwandans were socially programmed to a *culte du chef*.[4] Considering the overwhelming nature of the Rwandan genocide, and considering as well the fact that the events of the early 1990s have become the single most prominent defining element in most work on Rwanda, such misconceptions are not surprising. Reading back from the genocide ─ reading history from the wrong arrow ─ means projecting back a stark ethno-politicization, as well as clear public obedience, large

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[1] For classic examples of this literature, see for example the work of Marcel d'Hertefelt, Jacques Maquet and David Newbury.

[2] A notable exception is René Lemarchand's *Rwanda and Burundi*. Lemarchand's work provided an in-depth political history of the 'birth' of the First Republic and the consolidation of its structures. However, given that the book was published in 1970, it does not cover the demise of this First Republic or its successor regime, the Second Republic. René Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi* (London: Praeger Publishers, 1970). Filip Reyntjens, for his part, wrote a political and legal history of twentieth century Rwanda. Unfortunately, his book unfortunately does not cover the Second Republic. Filip Reyntjens, *Pouvoir et droit au Rwanda: Droit public et évolution politique, 1916-1973* (Tervuren: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, 1985).

[3] Peter Uvin, for example, explained that "Rwanda was in every meaning of the term a strong state, both in its capacity for effective and uncontested control of its entire territory and in the muscled nature of the exercise of this power." Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford, Conn.: Kumarian Press, 1998), p. 22.

[4] Gérard Prunier, for example, argued for the existence of a "systematic, centralised and unconditional obedience to authority" in Rwanda. As he further explained "there had always been a strong tradition of unquestioning obedience to authority in the pre-colonial kingdom of Rwanda. This tradition was of course reinforced by both the German and the Belgian colonial administrations. And since independence the country had lived under a well-organised tightly controlled state. When the highest authorities in that state told you to do something, you did it, even if it included killing." Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (London: Hurst and Company, 1995), pp. 141 and 245.

scale popular participation encouraged by authorities being one of the main characteristics of the Rwandan genocide.[5]

This paper seeks to redress the gap on literature pertaining to the First and Second Republics and to confront misreadings of the period. As the task of writing over thirty years of Rwandan history is considerable, this paper narrows its focus to the political regimes of the First Rwandan Republic, under Grégoire Kayibanda, and the Second Republic, under the Presidency of Juvénal Habyarimana. More specifically, the paper looks at official ideology from 1959, the year of the Hutu 'social revolution', held by many to be the founding moment of the Republic, to 1985, a time at which the Second Republic, began unravelling.[6]

The paper begins by looking at political developments under the two Republics. It argues that a feature of both regimes was the questionable legitimacy of their origins and the recurrent destabilisation they faced throughout their rule. Next, the paper undertakes an analysis of the uses of the regimes' ideology as a strategic political tool to bring stability to their rule. Studying both regimes individually, the paper illustrates how ideology was used to help establish regime legitimacy and promote a citizenship regime stressing 'good civic behaviour'. Though structures of oppression directed at the Tutsi existed, far from the simplistic anti-Tutsi ideology often attributed to the First and Second Republics, the two successive regimes built a subtle and complex ideology. The First and Second Republics were based on a rejection of the decadent 'feudal-colonialist' regime of the past, which was presented as an absolute wrong righted by the Hutu struggle to bring democracy to all, Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. This ideology served to ground, or shroud, the Kayibanda and Habyarimana regimes in a form of 'revolutionary legitimacy'. The ideological edifice of the two Republics therefore also marked the difference between bad and good citizenship. Bad citizens involved a reversion to 'ways of old', understood as selfishness, intrigue, corruption and the hunger for power. Good citizenship meant remembering the wrongs of the past, the virtue of the Revolution and its heroes, knowing one's place and praising the Republican regimes. Shedding light on the 'obedience belief', this program of citizenship illustrates how Rwandans were made to understand the consequences of disobedience, though the choice remained theirs.

<center>For the rest of the paper, contact the author directly.</center>

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[5] While pressure from authorities is given as one cause for participation in the genocide, numerous other causes exist: belief in ethnic divisions, fear, peer pressure, economic gain, etc. Motives varied from person to person, town to town and region to region.

[6] According to Mayer Zald, ideology can be defined as "the set of beliefs that are used to justify or challenge a given social-political order and are used to interpret the political world." Mayer N. Zald, "Culture, Ideology and Strategic Framing," in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 262.