



AFRICA

A BIOGRAPHY OF THE CONTINENT

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ALFRED A. KNOFF NEW YORK 1998

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On Sunday mornings, Witwatersrand gold-mine labourers perform a programme of "native" dances for visitors to the mines

CHAPTER 51

The Invention of Africa

BETWEEN THE FIRST AND THE SECOND WORLD WARS, colonial governments accepted more responsibility for the welfare of the African colonies than ever before. Establishing effective administrations tacitly amounted to redefining the continent, however. The constantly changing institutions of non-literate societies were set in the written word of law; origin myths were transformed into tribal histories; socio-economic distinctions made one tribe better than another.

Peace. After the centuries of cruel travail which culminated with the ravages of the First World War, the 1920s did indeed bring a semblance of peace to Africa, permeating the history books and contemporary accounts of the period with a sense of a continent resting; its human population exhausted but recuperating, and preparing to pick up the pieces and build a history of its own. Of course, this impression may be only a reaction to the apparently unending litany of distress that went before. Certainly, oppressive regimes of forced labour, famine, and untimely death continued during the 1920s and '30s, but not even the most avid anti-colonialist could deny that many parts of Africa enjoyed a period of continuous peace and security once the First World War was over and the various colonial administrative systems began functioning more effectively.¹

Peace was secured by the new map of Africa. The colonial partition had simplified political relationships on the continent. Where formerly there had been hundreds of independent clans and lineages, putative city states, king-

doms and empires with shifting and indeterminate frontiers, there were now just fifty or so states with fixed boundaries and capital cities. The colonial boundaries divided many communities (see page 575), sacrificing their liberties and rights to the "dead hand of colonialism and international law,"² it is true, but whatever the iniquities of the colonial boundaries, they also contributed to peace on the continent. Virtually all the wars that have flared up in Africa since the colonial period have been fought within national boundaries, not across them.

Peace and security greatly facilitated economic activity and social and physical mobility within each colony, stimulating a diffusion of new ideas, new techniques, new tastes and new fashions which accelerated the pace of modernization throughout the continent. Each colonial government introduced a judicial system based on European law (complete with wig and gown in the British colonies), and established a civil administration. Furthermore, the establishment of an economic base in the colonies, plus famine relief and campaigns against epidemic diseases, stimulated a 37.5 per cent increase in the population of Africa (from 120 million to 165 million) between 1880 and 1935, despite a net loss during the early colonial period.³

Prior to 1914, it was primarily the fortune-seeking speculator who was attracted to the idea of investing large amounts of capital in Africa. After 1918, by which time many ambitious dreams had turned into expensive nightmares and speculators had woken up to the realities of African economics, the colonial governments were obliged to accept responsibility for the welfare and development of their African colonies, though enthusiasm for the undertaking was not widespread at a time when Europe itself was struggling to repair the devastations of war.

The overriding priority of governments was to make the African colonies economically self-supporting, which meant developing export trade, and the prospects were not encouraging. In 1913, for example, Africa as a whole had accounted for about 7 per cent and 10 per cent respectively of the external trade (excluding gold) of Britain and France. But most trade had been with South Africa, Egypt, and Algeria. Tropical Africa had accounted for less than 2 per cent of Britain's trade, and less than 1 per cent of that of France. The Belgian Congo in 1912 had contributed only 1 per cent of Belgian trade, and in 1910 Germany's African colonies had accounted for less than 1 per cent of Germany's external trade.⁴ Clearly, achieving economic self-sufficiency in the colonies would be a long haul, twenty to thirty years in most cases, with deficits in the meantime supported by imperial grants-in-aid, grudgingly given.⁵

But the obligation was inescapable. The mandates under which the League of Nations had assigned the German territories in Africa to the colonial powers

after the First World War stipulated that they should be governed as "a sacred trust of civilization" until they were able "to stand on their own feet in the arduous conditions of the modern world."⁶ In other words, the colonial powers must not merely govern, but must also develop the colonies into functioning members of the world community—economically and politically—according to the prevailing capitalist model of the nation state.

Viewed with hindsight, the paternalistic conceit of the colonial authorities is breathtaking. Africa was looked upon as the neglected child of the modern world, who must be nurtured and "civilized" as a child is reared to adulthood. And the men (always men) performing this task were the product of an educational system that considered itself supremely suited for the job. The headmaster of Harrow (second only to Eton in the British educational hierarchy) declared that:

An English headmaster, as he looks to the future of his pupils, will not forget that they are destined to be citizens of the greatest empire under heaven; he will teach them patriotism . . . He will inspire them with faith in the divinely ordained mission of their country and their race.⁷

Edward Lumley, who spent twenty-two years delivering Britain's "divinely ordained mission" to the people of Tanganyika between 1923 and 1945, has noted: "The District Commissioner had to be a man of many parts." To qualify for the post he had to have an honours degree from a good university (most came from Oxford or Cambridge, or Trinity College Dublin, in Lumley's day) and was also expected to have some kind of athletic record. "Bookworms were not considered good material for a job that called for great physical endurance."

During the course of up to ten years in junior positions the aspirant District Commissioner was required to become fluent in the native language of the territory and to pass an examination in the criminal code. On appointment, he became the de facto ruler of his domain. He tried all court cases that were within his capacity as magistrate and occasionally was given extended jurisdiction by the High Court. He advised the tribal chiefs on political matters, supervised their administrative functions, and checked the finances of the native treasuries.

"The D.C. was also responsible for the economic well-being of his Africans," Lumley wrote in his memoir published in 1976.⁸

He had to see that they planted enough food crops for their needs. He also had to assist them with advice as to the best means of earning the money to pay their taxes. This might take the form of encouraging them to plant cot-

ton or coffee, or even [as Lumley once did] instruct them on preparing beeswax and extracting it from the hives of the wild bees.

The colonial assumption of superior knowledge in all things was based first on the convictions of late-nineteenth-century Europe, and second on the belief that Africa had had no history or culture worthy of the name until the European colonizers accepted the "sacred trust of civilization."

It was not without consequence that "the European movement into Africa coincided with the nineteenth- and twentieth-century peak of racism and cultural chauvinism in Europe itself."⁹ The combined achievements of commerce, Christianity, and military force had given Europe a very high opinion of itself, which even some scientific thinking was persuaded to support. Social Darwinism put Europeans at the top of the evolutionary ladder; Africans were close to the bottom, a rung or two above the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego and Tasmania. Authoritative history books disseminated the view that

the main body of the Africans, the Negro peoples who remained in their tropical homeland between the Sahara and the Limpopo, had . . . no history. They had stayed, for untold centuries, sunk in barbarism. Such, it might almost seem, had been nature's decree . . . So they remained stagnant, neither going forward nor going back. Nowhere in the world, save perhaps in some miasmatic swamps of South America or in some derelict Pacific Islands, was human life so stagnant. The heart of Africa was scarcely beating.¹⁰

Given that Africa was assumed to have had no history before the arrival of the Europeans, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Europe *created* the image of Africa that the colonial period bequeathed to the world. Having drawn the boundaries of nation states and undertaken to establish a civilizing government in each, with hierarchical administration and military support, Africa and the lives of its inhabitants were restructured to fit the European idea of how it should be.

In their efforts to establish nationwide government, colonial administrators effectively "set about inventing African traditions for Africans" that would make the process more acceptable to the indigenous population.¹¹ Kingship was a classic example. Africa possessed dozens of rudimentary kings (or so the colonizers believed), and the "theology" of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent "Imperial Monarchy" readily took root in the British colonies.¹² The Kaiser acquired similar status in the German colonies. Faced with the more difficult task of incorporating Africans into a republican tradition, the French abolished kingship in their territories and invited Africans to declare their allegiance to the motherland, La France.

The nation state itself was still a relatively recent phenomenon when the colonizing process got under way. Likewise, the traditions of king and country, of church, school, and regiment, were also artefacts of European social restructuring of the late nineteenth century. But the First World War had given all these things a patina of use that was readily interpreted as a sign of enduring antiquity. Respect for the traditional was probably at its height in the aftermath of the war, and the colonizers were predisposed to look favourably upon whatever they took to be traditional in Africa. They began to codify and promulgate the traditions they identified.

Between 1905 and 1914 about eighty books on African ethnography had been published in Europe;¹³ most were devoted to particular groups and written by serving administrators. During that same period, Germany had sponsored ten ethnographic expeditions which visited most parts of tropical Africa. The Belgians had sponsored a study of the Zande (in the south-western Sudan), and Belgian sociologists had devised a questionnaire to elicit a series of ethnographies from missionaries and others. The British had also been active. The Sudan government had commissioned ethnographic surveys from C.G. Seligman (who subsequently became professor of ethnology in London) in 1909–12, and the Colonial Office had appointed Northcote Thomas to make a series of ethnographic studies in southern Nigeria and Sierra Leone. An expedition to the Congo by the Hungarian Emil Torday in 1907–9 had been made at the behest of the British Museum (whose ethnographic collections had been compared unfavourably with those of the Berlin Museum). In French West Africa a number of officials had made a speciality of ethnographic studies, and in 1917 a committee for historical and scientific studies in the French territories was established in Dakar.¹⁴

In the post-First World War years, African studies moved on from the mere recording of "primitive" peoples and their physical characteristics to the study of their institutions, customs, beliefs and modes of livelihood. In British West Africa three "government anthropologists," R.S. Rattray, C.K. Meek and P.A. Talbot, were appointed to make studies in the Gold Coast, Nigeria and Central Africa respectively. On a more purely academic level, Bronislaw Malinowski, whose work among Pacific islanders had pioneered a new concept of field work, was a formative influence on the study E.E. Evans-Pritchard was to make of the Nuer people in the Sudan; linguists investigated the grammatical structure and phonetics of African languages; agricultural experts assessed African food-production capabilities.

Collectively, administrators and academics identified the "traditions" of social practice which supposedly distinguished one group from another and drew lines on maps which assigned each group to a particular territory. They

wrote down names and addresses and dates of birth, and set in print the laws by which people must conduct their lives.

In this way literacy transformed the flexibility of customary practice into hard, immutable, prescriptive law. Customary law had always taken contemporary assessments into account when making its judgements, but once a particular set of interpretations was codified in colonial law it became rigid and unable to reflect change in the future. In land-tenure disputes, for instance, "colonial officers expected the courts to enforce long-established custom rather than current opinion."¹⁵ Common official stereotypes about African customary land law thus came to be used by colonial officials in assessing the legality of current decisions, and so came to be incorporated in "customary" systems of tenure.

The most far-reaching inventions of tradition in colonial Africa probably occurred precisely when European administrators believed they were respecting age-old African custom, whereas "What were called customary law, customary land-rights, customary political structure and so on, were in fact *all* invented by colonial codification."¹⁶

The colonizers claimed that they were merely confirming the significance of existing traditions, but traditions in Africa (and everywhere else for that matter) are merely accepted modes of behaviour that currently function to the benefit of society as a whole. They persist so long as their benefit is evident, and fade away when it is not. No tradition lasts for ever. Change and adaptability is the very essence of human existence—nowhere more so than in Africa. The paradox is painfully evident: by creating an image of Africa steeped in unchanging tradition, the colonizers condemned the continent to live in a reconstructed moment of its past, complete with natives in traditional dress, wild animals, and pristine landscapes. The paradox could not stand unresolved for ever, but it hindered development for decades.

TRIBALISM IS THE MOST PERNICIOUS of the traditions which the colonial period bequeathed to Africa. The word "tribe" has been in use since Roman times, when it referred to any one of the three families that originally lived in Rome, but the Oxford English Dictionary asserts that the word "tribalism" was coined only in 1886, in a reference claiming that "no national life, much less civilisation, was possible under the system of Celtic tribalism." Be that as it may, any reference to tribalism in the twentieth century immediately brings Africa to mind.

There are ethnic groups living in close proximity in other parts of the world who are highly antagonistic towards one another—the Serbs and the

Croats, the Israelis and the Palestinians—but their aggressions are attributed more readily to religion than to tribal differences. Tribalism, by contrast, has a distinctly dark and nasty African connotation: the Maasai and the Kikuyu in Kenya; the Zulu and the Xhosa in South Africa; the Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo in Nigeria; the Hutu and the Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi. These and other groups have at times seemed determined to eliminate each other simply because they claimed differences of birthright.

But the different groups often have more in common than separates them. The Xhosa and Zulu languages, for instance, are 70 per cent concordant. "If they were writing sophisticated poetry maybe they would be unintelligible to one another," a linguist has remarked,¹⁷ "but in general speech they can understand each other perfectly." Furthermore, the norms and values which govern the social interaction, marriage and family, and belief systems of the two groups are essentially the same.¹⁸

Research on Zulu ethnicity has shown the concept of the Zulu as a discrete ethnic group did not emerge until the 1870s.¹⁹ This was the period when British forces were fighting Africans they identified as "Zooloos" in Natal, and it is not inconceivable that Xhosa identity may have been forged in similar fashion during the wars fought between settlers and Africans on the frontier of the Eastern Cape in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

In Kenya, the conviction that the Kikuyu and Maasai were sworn enemies, which had motivated a good deal of colonial policy, was a fiction, invented by the colonial administration for their own convenience.²⁰ There was sporadic fighting, but the Kikuyu fought among themselves as much as they fought with the Maasai. The Kikuyu traded with the Maasai, they intermarried and shared important aspects of social and ritual practice; the Kikuyu language is heavily indebted to Maasai, all the words relating to cattle, for instance, are taken from the Maasai. And even the word for God is shared: Ngai in Kikuyu; Nkai, or E'Ngai in Maasai.

In Nigeria, although broad cultural identities—pan-Igbo, pan-Hausa, and pan-Yoruba—had emerged before the missionaries and the British administration arrived to make their mark on the social landscape, they did not correspond to the colonial notion of static tribal identities. They were a reality, but they waxed and waned under changing conditions; they were units of inclusivity as often as of exclusivity, which embodied the notion of linguistic and cultural affinity rather than a rigid idea of shared descent.²¹

In Zambia, the chief of a little-known group once ventured to remark: "My people were not Soli until 1937 when the Bwana D.C. told us we were."²² Indeed, *ethnic thinking*—that is, the perception of unity as the inevitable outcome of common origin—was rare in Africa (though not completely

unknown) before it was applied by the colonial authorities.²³ Thus, ethnicity (meaning tribalism) was not a cultural characteristic that was deeply rooted in the African past; it was a consciously crafted ideological tradition that was introduced during the colonial present.²⁴

Colonial policies in Tanganyika exemplified the belief that every African belonged to a tribe, just as every European belonged to a nation. Tribes were defined as cultural units, with a common language, a single social system, and established customary law. Tribal membership was hereditary, and different tribes were related genealogically, so that Africa's history could be looked upon as a huge family tree of tribes.²⁵ Since the incoming British administration was convinced that the Germans had completely destroyed all pre-existing African social systems, their British successors devoted considerable effort to identifying tribes and finding the chief. "Each tribe must be considered as a distinct unit . . . Each tribe must be under a chief," one provincial commissioner told his staff in 1926.²⁶

These concepts bore little relation to Tanganyika's kaleidoscopic history, but they were the shifting sands on which the colonial administrators imposed a new political geography. And once the process was in motion, it was enthusiastically reinforced by the Africans themselves. They inhabited a world of social and economic uncertainty in which the invented histories offered at least a hope of order and continuity. Africans wanted effective units of action no less than the colonial administrators wanted effective units of government. And so, because "Europeans believed Africans belonged to tribes; Africans built tribes to belong to."²⁷

And with the tribes came the chiefs. There were always individuals with personal motives for collaborating with the identification of tribal units that they could lead. Throughout Africa, tribal identities were catalysts which enabled ambitious individuals and groups to achieve positions of status, dominance, and wealth that might otherwise have been unattainable. Tribes became the franchise from which politicians launched the drive for national independence. Tribes were also an ideological refuge in times of stress—during famine, elections, or even in the matter of getting a job—when ethnic sentiment polarized into a sense of "them and us" that often erupted in bloodshed.

IT IS NO ACCIDENT that Rwanda and Burundi are the most densely populated countries in Africa. They are also the most fertile. Tucked away at the very heart of the continent, at elevations that average about 2,000 metres above sea level and enjoy copious rainfall on soils of volcanic origin, this is exceptionally good farming country. In 1993, Rwanda and Burundi supported

312 and 233 persons per square kilometre respectively.²⁸ Burundi in particular had a greater proportion of its land surface under permanent cultivation and pasture than any other country in Africa: 87 per cent. Rwanda had less, 59 per cent, but even that was equal to the proportion of arable and pasture land in the Netherlands, Europe's most densely populated nation (with 448 persons per square kilometre).²⁹

Rwanda and Burundi were part of German East Africa until the end of the First World War. Neither territory had escaped the famine, rinderpest, and epidemics which ravaged tropical Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. Nor had they recovered fully when the Germans arrived to "pacify" the region and impose colonial rule, but both countries contained individuals and groups who were prepared to cooperate with the process in return for greater authority in local political and economic affairs.

German ethnographic researches in the early 1900s³⁰ reported that Ruanda-Urundi (as the territories were then known) was inhabited by three ethnic groups: the Twa, the Hutu, and the Tutsi. The Twa were pygmy hunters and gatherers who were thought to have been in the region since time immemorial; the Hutu were Bantu-speaking agriculturists who came later, and the Tutsi were pastoralists of Hamitic origin, they declared, who were assumed to have invaded Ruanda-Urundi sometime later still. The penetration of the Tutsi was said to have been a slow and peaceful process, during the course of which the Tutsi adopted the Bantu language of the Hutu (as had the Twa), so that all three groups spoke the same language, with only minor local modifications.

In appearance, however, the three groups were said to be strikingly different.³¹ The Tutsi were reported to be tall, handsome, slender, and well-proportioned. The Twa were grotesque little creatures whom the Germans referred to as dwarfs. Between the two stood the stocky aboriginal Bantu, the Hutu. Though anthropologists have since shown that these physical characteristics are neither so general nor so sharply defined as described by the German ethnographers, they are persistently cited as fact.

The Tutsi comprised only about 12 to 15 per cent of the Ruanda-Urundi population, with the Hutu accounting for about 85 per cent (and the Twa making up the balance), but it was from among the Tutsi that the Germans sought collaborators to assist the colonization process.

The cattle culture, with its haughty conceit and dedication to the accumulation of wealth, gave the Tutsi an aristocratic demeanour with which the German colonizers readily identified. Their ethnographers were told that the Tutsi wielded almost total political and economic power over the Hutu (and of course the Twa), owning not only all the cattle but, theoretically at least, all the

land as well. The countries were ruled by princes, *gamwa*, they learned, who were in turn answerable to the *mwami*, the absolute and semi-divine sovereign whose symbol of authority was a drum hung with the genitals of slaughtered enemies.³²

The chiefs whom the Germans selected to hold positions of authority in the colonial administration were exclusively Tutsi.

The Germans were very impressed with the natural fertility of their jewel in the highlands of central Africa and its capacity to sustain large numbers of people, but their attempts to establish commercial crops such as cotton, tobacco, and rice were not a success. In 1913 Dr. Richard Kandt, the energetic senior administrator in Ruanda, decided that coffee would be the thing. Coffee, he said, grew well even on ground the Hutu considered uncultivable. Furthermore, coffee could be planted in the banana groves, where the soil was rich and moist and the bananas would provide protection from sun and wind. The cost of establishing the plantation would be high, he admitted in a lengthy memorandum.³³ But

should we be frightened because of the high costs? Brazil was also not originally a coffee country, Ceylon not a tea country, and the Malay states not a rubber country. This last example shows how with favourable conditions a completely new productive character can be stamped rapidly on a country.

Kandt proposed that with a determined concentration of energy and effort, 1 million coffee trees could be planted in 1914, and increased by 1 million a year; by 1920 there would be 6 million coffee trees in Ruanda-Urundi, producing about 1 kg of coffee per tree. Ruanda-Urundi would become the coffee farm of Germany, he said. Ruanda and Urundi alone could meet German demands, with enough left over for the world market. The economy of German East Africa would be diversified, and the enormous labour potential of Ruanda-Urundi put to good use at last. Coffee was the German vision of Ruanda-Urundi's economic future. Like many other visions, it was shattered by the First World War.

BELGIAN FORCES INVADED RUANDA-Urundi from the Congo in April 1916, and occupied the territories for the remainder of the war. In the preliminary round of negotiations to determine the fate of the former German territories, Belgium let it be known that "she intend[ed] to derive from her considerable military effort in Africa as great a benefit as possible." Ruanda-Urundi was "fertile, rich in cattle, and favourable for white colonization" and

the Belgians were not shy in acknowledging that they would use the territories they had occupied as a pawn to gain profit elsewhere—in either Europe or Africa.

What the Belgians wanted most was a slice of Angola bordering the south bank of the Congo River. The deals concluded at the Berlin conference of 1884–85 had denied Portugal sovereignty over the entire mouth of the river, and the Congo state had thus been guaranteed access to the Atlantic, along with a slender extension of territory bordered by Angola on one side and the Cabinda enclave on the other (see pages 541–42). "This compromise at the time seemed a victory," a Belgian diplomat subsequently noted, "not until later did we see its inconveniences."³⁴

The inconveniences were exactly those of a property-owner whose gate and driveway are too narrow for all the traffic that requires access. Security was a problem too: the neighbours were simply too close for comfort; from their territory the vital river access could be severed with ease.

Acquiring the southern bank of the Congo would solve all these problems but, since a victory against Germany in Central Africa in no way constituted grounds for claiming reparations from Portugal, some bold—not to say devious—negotiations were called for. In May 1919 Belgium proposed a three-way deal: Britain should take over Ruanda-Urundi from Belgium; Belgium should acquire the Congo south bank from Portugal; and Portugal should be given the south-east corner of German East Africa that Britain had conquered.

The British were embarrassed by the unashamedly acquisitive nature of the Belgian plans, but not averse to the suggestion that Ruanda-Urundi should become part of British East Africa. The first stage of the three-way deal was successfully accomplished when Ruanda-Urundi was formally ceded to Belgium by the Mandates Commission but, with the negotiating pawn firmly in hand, both British and Belgian expectations were scuppered by Portuguese intractability. The Portuguese could not be persuaded to exchange a slice of Angola for a chunk of the former German East Africa. Belgium was doubly afflicted by the outcome: she failed to ease the difficulties of access to the Atlantic, and she was burdened with the duty of governing Ruanda-Urundi as "a sacred trust of civilization" until the countries were able "to stand on their own feet in the arduous conditions of the modern world," as the League of Nations mandate stipulated.

Belgium's acquisition of Ruanda-Urundi was one of the greatest ironies in the history of Africa—and perhaps the greatest tragedy too. Belgian statesmen did not want the tiny landlocked territory—indeed, it could only add to their problems in the Congo—and they themselves admitted that the inhabitants would be better off if Ruanda-Urundi remained part of the former German

East Africa.³⁵ But this was Belgium's reward for victory. The green fertile hills, the tall slender Tutsi, the stocky Hutu and the dwarf-like Twa became Belgium's responsibility.

THE BELGIAN RESPONSE TO "civilization's sacred trust" concerning Ruanda-Urundi was to treat the territories as an extension of the Belgian Congo. The two tiny countries became economically subservient to the greedy monster on their western flank. There was no mineral wealth to be exploited in either Ruanda or Urundi, but high population densities made them a valuable labour pool for the copper mines in Katanga. In 1930, for example, more than 2 per cent of the entire able-bodied male population of Ruanda-Urundi was working in the Congo, most of them in Katanga.³⁶

Those who remained behind had a yearly quota of compulsory unpaid labour to fulfil; "only" twenty-nine days, it is true, and supposedly (but not always) to be set against taxes. Much of the compulsory labour was applied to the cultivation of crops, but in a highland landscape where communications were rudimentary, much more was engaged in simply carrying the produce from rural areas to the distribution centres. Ruanda-Urundi's natural fertility and success with introduced crops such as beans, sweet potatoes, cassava, and potatoes made it the "breadbasket" of the Belgian Congo.

Coffee, the dream of Ruanda's last German administrator, was introduced to Ruanda-Urundi by the Belgians in 1925, beginning with an experimental "coffee programme" which obliged each chief and sub-chief to cultivate a half-hectare of the crop. Encouraging results led to the systematic extension of coffee-growing throughout the territory. Ruanda exported fifty tonnes of coffee in 1929, and had increased its annual output to 2,000 tonnes by 1937.

By the 1930s the cash economy was a fact of life throughout colonial Africa. Only the most destitute or isolated individuals could escape the necessity to earn money. Wherever privilege could grant favours, tribal affinities became important: people holding positions of power and authority were morally obliged to assist their kin. In Ruanda-Urundi, favour was disproportionately in the hands of the Tutsi, and colonial rule had eroded the reciprocal balance of their relationship with the Hutu (and the Twa) into what was essentially no more than a master-servant attitude.

Writing in 1931, after seventeen years of intimate contact with the Hutu and the Tutsi, a Belgian missionary concluded that the two groups shared a common culture.³⁷ Nonetheless, the minority group was more beneficially placed in the colonial hierarchy. And how could you tell them apart? Those at either end of the physical continuum—the stereotypically tall slender Tutsi

and the short stocky Hutu—were easily identified, but between these extremes there were thousands, if not the majority of the population, whose physical appearance was no clue at all. Generations of intermarriage, migration, and changes in occupation and economic standing had blurred the tribal distinction. But no matter. In 1926 the Belgian authorities introduced an identity card to clarify the issue. By law, the card had to specify which tribe the holder belonged to. Where appearance was indecisive and proof of ancestry was lacking, a simple formula was applied: those with ten cows or more were classified as Tutsi, those with less were Hutu.³⁸