

## Regional Conflict Formation and the “Bantu/Nilotic” Mythology in the Great Lakes

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*Cartoon from Le Grognon (Kinshasa), circa 1997, showing Kabila, and a physiognomically stylised Tutsi behind him (Kagame?) bent on destroying Hutu, Kivutiens, and Kinshasa.*

*‘Thus, for example, in seeking a solution to the Burundian problem, or Rwandan, or the Congolese or Ugandan problem... it is necessary to analyze the meshing together of these particular crises! This is all the more true since the Tutsi rulers of the region share amongst themselves the same hegemonic vision, all dreaming of the same Hima/Nilotic Empire in Central and East Africa, which they intend to realise through sundry plans, of which the most murderous are the ‘SIMBANANIYE Plan’, the ‘Elephant Plan’ and the ‘Plan for the Colonization of Kivu’<sup>1</sup> (Rwasa, ‘De la crise burundaise ou crise des Grands-Lacs’, no date:2).*

*‘There is a difference between a difference and a dichotomy. The first is a comparison and it relates; the second is a severance, and it isolates’ (Geertz, 1995:18).*

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Ainsi par exemple, en cherchant à résoudre le problème burundais, ou rwandais, ou celui congolais ou ougandais... faudrait-il analyser l’enchèvement qui existe entre les crises en question! Ceci est d’autant plus vrai que les dirigeants Tutsi de la région partagent entre eux la vision hégémoniste et rêvent tous de l’empire hima / nilotique de l’Afrique Centrale et Orientale qu’ils entendent réaliser en appliquant divers plans dont les plus meurtriers comme le plan SIMBANANIYE, le plan Eléphant et le Plan de colonisation du KIVU ...’

## Introduction

This paper complements previous analyses of the regional conflict formation (RCF) presently gripping the Great Lakes region of Central Africa by examining the regionalization of structured – and structuring – identity-based hatred.

RCFs are “sets of violent conflicts – each originating in a particular state or sub-region – that form mutually reinforcing linkages with each other throughout a broader region, making for more protracted and obdurate conflicts” (Center on International Cooperation, 2001). This paper examines the historical origins and political potency of a “mythology” in the Great Lakes concerning ethnic, or more properly quasi-racial, distinctions between “Bantu” and “Nilotic” peoples. Its origins forgotten in the colonial encounter, this mythology embraces stylized, epic readings of remote history, present-day stereotypes of ethnic characteristics, entitlements and motivations, and paranoid prophesies about the future.

The mythology adds energy to a variety of different conflicts in the Great Lakes and beyond. Its “regionalization” is multiform. If the principle direction of causality in the RCF model is upward – that is from apparently discrete national conflicts to a regional formation – here, it is multidirectional. First, the mythology has **diffused** across a very wide region, going well beyond the Great Lakes to animate tensions as widely separated as southern Nigeria, Somalia and Burundi. Second, within the Great Lakes, the targets of stereotypes **invert** them, celebrating as sources of pride, strength and counter-exclusion what others use to marginalize them. Third, stereotypes attached to one ethnic group in one area transmigrate, **grafting** onto perceptions of other unconnected groups. Finally, through **infusion**, local entrepreneurs of exclusion “connect the dots” of apparently discrete conflicts, fusing them into the collective narrative of “mega-ethnic” (Appadurai, 1999) cleavage between population blocs, harnessing the popular energies this releases to infuse their own highly localized conflicts.

All these forms of regionalization are ongoing and are of concern. However, the last is most immediately troubling because of its rampant success.

This paper begins with a brief historical review of the origins of Bantu/Nilotic mythology in the colonial encounter and its reinforcement by postcolonial states, before a summary of the mythology as presently constituted. It then examines the intensity of the mythology across sub-Saharan Africa. The crucible remains Rwanda and Burundi, where the mythology remains the principal pivot of political organization. The mythology operates at a second level of intensity in the DR Congo and Uganda through grafting and infusion and has diffused to a large number of other contexts where it remains a potential source of great harm.

The paper then reviews evidence for the currency of the four forms of regionalization. It turns to some of the mechanisms – as old as rumor, as new as the Internet – through which regionalization happens, before concluding with the inevitable but vital question: what is to be done?

## Origins and the Nature of the Mythology

### *Colonial Origins*

The dramatic and mountainous Great Lakes region of Central Africa – comprising, in the present day, Burundi, Rwanda, southwestern Uganda and the eastern DR Congo – was amongst the last parts of Africa to be penetrated by European explorers. Their encounter with elaborate and highly centralized polities – precolonial Kingdoms such as Bunyoro, Buganda or Rwanda, with developed courts and diplomatic circuits – caused astonishment. Unwilling to accept that Africans could attain organizational sophistication on their own, the explorers argued there must necessarily have been outside influence. Tribal monarchies were not indigenously African but had been “introduced into the Dark Continent by pastoralists originally hailing from Egypt and the Nile Valley” (Miles, 2000), the nearest locus of recognizable civilization.

This theory tied in with 19th century scientific racism and the biblically-inspired tripartite division of the earth’s races based on imputed descent from the three sons of Noah – Semites (Arabs and Jews, sons of Shem), Yefites (Europeans, sons of Yafet) and Hamites (black Africans, sons of the cursed Ham) – which had already granted theological imprimatur to the slave trade and Dutch Calvinist colonization of South Africa. By elision, Central Africa’s ruling elites were now rechristened “Hamites,” racially distinguished from the more primordial (and assumedly still more primitive) “Bantu” – a term common to many regional languages, simply meaning “people” – by their “greater height, finer lips, and narrower noses” (Miles, 2000:108). Amongst the first promoters of this “Hamitic Hypothesis” was John Hanning Speke, English explorer of the Nile. It found favor with Rwanda’s first European colonizers, Germany, and with Germany’s Belgian successors after the First World War. Rwanda and neighboring Burundi became the colonial crucible out of which an explosive model of eternally opposed mega-ethnicities would emerge. Grafted with anti-Semitic tropes, colonists perceived the Rwandan nobility, or “Tutsi,” as a quasi-Jewish minority, their beauty (“Caucasian skulls and beautiful Greek profiles side by side with Semitic and even Jewish features, elegant golden-red beauties in the heart of Ruanda and Urundi (*SIC*)” [Missionary Father van den Burgt, cited in Miles, 2000:109]) and their avarice (“their intelligent and delicate appearance, their love of money, their capacity to adapt to any situation seem to indicate a semitic-origin” [Monsignor le Roy, cited in Miles, 2000:109]) exciting equal comment.

The hypothesised distinction between Hamitics and those from “Africa proper” was further propounded in linguistic typologies. Colonial researchers sought etymological evidence for a historical southward migration, invasion and conquest from the Nile region to the Great Lakes. The term “Hamitic,” indeed, gradually gave way to “Nilotic.” Unfortunately – for scientific racism – no such evidence could be uncovered. As Jean-Pierre Chretien mordantly notes, for the Tutsi (“Nilotic”) and Hutu (“Bantu”) “ethnic groups” who share Rwanda, Burundi and parts of eastern Congo,

“here are ‘ethnicities’ who are not distinguished by language, nor by culture, nor by history, nor by the geographic space they occupy.” (Chrétien, 2000)<sup>2</sup>

The Rwandan language is closely related in all aspects to neighboring languages and bears no trace of influences from the Nile region<sup>3</sup> (Vansina, 1990). On the basis both of forensic linguistics and of archaeology, “the putative racial dichotomy between Bantu and Nilotes does not make any sense and cannot possibly be upheld” (Goyvaerts, 2000). In fact, the Great Lakes region of central Africa was always a region of considerable in and out migration, an African frontier (Kopytoff, 1989) in which many different culture groups intermingled, contending for power and space (Newbury, 1992).

The present consensus of anthropologists and historians is that Hutu and Tutsi emerged as castes or social strata from within the same culture (Lemarchand, 1994; Maquet, 1961; Newbury, 1993). Notwithstanding, a belief in an absolute racial distinction between Hutu and Tutsi locally, Bantu and Nilotic regionally, endures tragically in the Great Lakes, the bedrock of “mythico-histories” (Malkki, 1995), which narrate to Hutu extremists centuries of dispossession and subjugation by alien invaders, or, by contrast, speak of natural supremacy and primacy to Tutsi ideologues. Credence in the Bantu/Nilotic distinction “pervades all layers of society, affects many actions and dominates the thoughts of the average person in the street” (Goyvaerts, 2000:301). It overlaps and is accreted with other stereotypical dichotomies: agriculturalist/pastoralist, indigenous/foreigner, citizen/non-citizen. Despite the evidence against it, it also continues to dominate Western interpretations of the ongoing crisis in the Great Lakes—e.g., reacting to the 1994 Genocide, the *New York Times* deplored a “Rwandan Tribal war between Bantu and Nilotes.”

### ***Postcolonial Reinforcement***

Postcolonial politics embedded the mythology in power structures after independence. In Rwanda, colonial power had long used Tutsi as intermediaries in indirect rule. By independence, it had realigned to Hutu interests because of growing nervousness towards pro-independence Tutsi royalists and a creeping realization by Flemish Catholic missionaries that Hutu subjugation bore some resemblance to the Flemish position at home. The “Social Revolution” of 1959 saw the PARMEHUTU (Party for the Emancipation of the Hutu People) take power as an independent government after last minute colonial horse-trading. Perhaps 10,000 Tutsi were killed in the ensuing violence (Hutu/Bantu associations with “peasantry” made it easy to style this an ‘agrarian revolution’), with a great many others fleeing to long-term refuge in neighboring countries. Three subsequent decades of Hutu power in Rwanda saw earlier systematic discrimination simply inverted, with anti-Tutsi ideology now deployed by governments

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Voici des ‘ethnies’ qui ne se distinguent ni par la langue, ni par la culture, ni par l’histoire, ni par l’espace géographique occupé’.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Vansina, pre-eminent linguistic historian of Central Africa, notes that Kinyarwanda and Kirundi are simply languages of the Eastern Bantu branch whereas those of the Equatorial Rainforest are predominantly Western Bantu

to distract the population. In 1994, following an invasion from Uganda by Tutsi exiles, this “state racism” (Uvin, 1998) exploded into Genocide, claiming nearly a million lives before the installation of a predominantly Tutsi government under President Kagame.

In Burundi, an “extraordinarily rapid and thoroughgoing” transformation followed independence and the death of the prime minister designate, Louis Rwagasore (Lemarchand, 1994:59). A sharp polarization of ethnic identity stemmed from three interlinked crises: the “demonstration effect” of the Rwandan ‘Social Revolution’ next door; an increasingly ethnicized power struggle within the single ruling party, UPRONA; and a legitimization crisis which resulted in abolition of the monarchy<sup>4</sup> following a Tutsi-led coup within the army. Tutsi minority rule has continued almost uninterrupted since; inter-ethnic violence has been a constant feature, with the bloodshed of 1972 and 1993 particularly standing out.

The eastern Congo saw successive waves of Banyarwanda (Tutsi and Hutu) migration over two hundred years, accelerated in the 1930s when colonial labor shortages demanded organized resettlement (Willame, 1997). After they achieved independence, numbers were large, and their nationality (or lack of it) in the new Zaire became a political football for postcolonial power (Mamdani, 2001). Locally, despite their claim to majority status in some areas of the Kivu provinces, they remained excluded from customary political authority as “non autochthons.” Politically disenfranchised, Banyarwanda nonetheless prospered economically under Mobutu, particularly acquiring land. That political power and economic clout remained out of kilter created mounting resentment on both sides of the divide, exploding as early as 1992, but radically accelerated by Rwanda’s 1994 Genocide and the two subsequent “Liberation Wars” in Zaire/DR Congo.

In Uganda, longstanding political rivalries between the north and south of the country – played upon by successive occupants of the Presidency – acquired something of a “Nilotic/Bantu” overtone. The overthrow of President Obote by Yoweri Museveni’s NRM was due, in part, to the military role of Rwandan Tutsi exiles (so-called ‘59ers) in southern Uganda. Museveni’s later support to the RPF invasion of Rwanda was in part a quid pro quo, but also evidenced Uganda’s own citizenship crisis, during which criteria for nationality reverted from a progressive ten-year residency requirement (thus entitling Rwandan exiles) to the retrogressive but more usual citizenship on the basis of ancestry (thus excluding them). Thus, the RPF needs to be understood “as both an invasion of Rwanda and an armed repatriation from Uganda” (Mamdani, 2001). Either way, strong popular credence in the Great Lakes in a Nilotic conspiracy joining

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<sup>4</sup> Lemarchand emphasises the vital point that the origins of the monarchy were in an entirely separate status group, the *Ganwa* or “princely elites,” “whose identity is distinct from those of both Hutu and Tutsi” (1994:6) but who gradually disappear from officially ethnicized Burundese political demographics. These status group identities were far from immutable – Hutu could become Tutsi through wealth (though Lemarchand suggests the reverse almost never occurred). Equally, “downward mobility, on the other hand, threatened all *ganwa* at one time or another. They lost their princely status and became Tutsi whenever a king bearing their dynastic name ascended to the throne – a phenomenon known as *gutahira*, loosely translated as ‘social demotion’” (1994:8).

Rwanda/Kagame/Tutsi and Uganda/Museveni/Hima<sup>5</sup> seems to have survived the confounding evidence of subsequent and violent political divergences between the two in the DR Congo. Meanwhile, ongoing political insurgencies in what is otherwise Museveni's southern heartland have deployed increasingly Niloticized propaganda against him and his government, vilifying it, interchangeably, as a Hima or Tutsi elite.

### *Contemporary Stereotypes*

To begin, a paradox: if there is no objective distinction between “Bantu” and “Nilotic,” that difference has still, by now, become embedded as a politico-cultural reality to be contended with, triggered by successive waves of violence in the Great Lakes and represented now by strongly held positions. It is not that identity categories have made violence inevitable, but the reverse: violence, deploying an ethnic vocabulary, has made belief in ethnic division inevitable. Since the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, which targeted all Tutsi and many moderate Hutu, the predominant difference between Hutu and Tutsi has become attitude to that difference. The majority of Hutu (and by now, many other self-styled “Bantu” ethnicities in the region) believe the difference a fundamental cleavage of long date; while the majority of Tutsi (but by no means all) believe it to be a tragic mystification created by colonialism and manipulated by postcolonial elites for divide and rule purposes. The primary indicator of ethnic difference has become, paradoxically, the collective attitude towards the salience (or not) of ethnic difference. With some additional looseness, this same “difference in attitude to difference” extends to the wider Bantu/Nilotic cleavage.

Thus, the stereotypes discussed below are predominantly to be heard in political discourse emanating from the Bantu side of the divide. However, though the official line of the predominantly Tutsi government in Rwanda is that the Hutu/Tutsi divide is nothing but fabrication, there is increasing evidence that on the fringes of political power in Rwanda, Burundi and Congo, extremist Tutsi minorities do exist who have bought into their side of the mythology. This will be discussed below in the section on *inversion*.

In its contemporary form, the mythology has a number of mutually reinforcing components. First, it contains compressed – and contested – notions of history, asserting distinct cultural trajectories for different population blocs over the *longue durée*, which come into contact with one another either through historical migration or colonial plantation. These are ‘megaethnicities’ (Appadurai, 1999) claiming an underlying unity for groups otherwise conceiving of themselves as distinct. This unity can then be mobilized for cultural identity projects taking their cue from studies of Bantu linguistics or art history.

Cultural identity projects seldom remain apolitical. The mythology also contains discourses of authenticity, indigenusness and sovereignty. For those perceiving

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<sup>5</sup> Understood variously as a separate Ugandan ‘Nilotic’ ethnic group (the popular Congolese view), a clan or one of two status subgroups within Tutsi identity (Lemarchand, 1994:11). The term “Hima” is sometimes further confused with the “Hema” people of Ituri, northeastern Congo, about whom Nilotic stereotypes also proliferate.

themselves part of the Bantu bloc, opposition to Nilotics redresses historic dispossession of land and power through precolonial military conquest. Bantu people are styled as the “autochthonous,”<sup>6</sup> those who came first, in opposition to the Nilotic “invader” or “colonist.” For those on the Nilotic side of the divide, opposition to Bantu may assert the inverse: that Nilotics have a natural right to hold power.

Third, the mythology picks up centrifugal energy by overlapping and blurring with other potent and prevalent cleavages. One is agriculturalist versus pastoralist: Nilotic peoples are stereotyped as cattle-keeping by nature while Bantu are naturally agriculturalist, even though many supposedly “Bantu” peoples have raised cattle historically in Zaire, for example. This distinction animates fights over land and also associates Nilotic peoples with heights of wealth and economic domination in the popular mind. A second is indigeneness/foreignness: the political discourse of autochthony<sup>7</sup> (the popular Great Lakes term) argues for Bantu pre-eminence based on the rights of the first-come. The literal meaning of autochthon – “sprung from the ground” – has a “son of the soil” connotation reinforced by the Bantu connection with agriculture. Third, lurking behind each of these is the ghost of the oldest stereotypical cleavage of them all: “nomad” (Nilotic/Pastoralist) versus “settled” (Bantu/Agriculturalist) – though beyond transhumance, there is no evidence of migratory behaviour on the part of the supposedly “Nilotic” ethnic groups of Central Africa at all.

Finally, the mythology contains flexible and adaptable stereotypes pertaining to each bloc. As with any stereotypes, these are vague and multiform, drawing potency precisely from their ambiguous content and flexible targets. They crop up in everyday conversation but also in political discourse, oral and written. To illustrate some of them, I draw here from ethnographic materials collected in eastern Congo between 1997 and 2002. These consist, among other things, of interviews with activists and a collection of some 15 underground “tracts” most likely written by intellectual cadres aligned with the *Mayi-Mayi* militia movements. Such documents appear sporadically and enjoy enormous circulation, photocopied and passed from hand to hand until they dog-ear and fade.

A recurring stereotype of Nilotic people is that they are covetous, given to passionate desires and all-consuming lust for territory and power. This is “mad lust,” a crazed dreaming to which Nilotic peoples are given. Stereotypes suggest Nilotes see themselves to be superior to Bantu, superhuman:

‘They aren't like us in some respects. You could cut off the arms and legs of a Rwandan and he would never let out a single cry’ (*Mayi Mayi* militia activist, interviewed Bukavu, April 2002).

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<sup>6</sup> That claims to autochthony co-exist seemingly without difficulty with the admission that the true first inhabitants of the Great Lakes are pygmoid peoples such as the Twa or the Buti is a curiosity beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>77</sup> Though claiming indigeneness, Bantu activists are usually quick to recognize that the truly indigenous people of Central Africa are the (non-Bantu) pygmy populations. However, this does not prevent claims for autochthony or the exercise of indigenous rights by those same activists.

Such themes connect to hyper-rationality, cunning, cruelty and ruthlessness. Nilotes lay traps for Bantu, tricking them through gifts of cattle or women: the first, a Central African Trojan horse, mythologizes traditional forms of cattle-clientship; the second, a Delilah-like image of Nilotic women as wily seductresses, is unpleasantly paralleled in European anti-Semitism. Nilotic plans are hard to detect, subtle: they unfold slowly, with elaborate preparation and infinite pains. Rather than open conquest, they favor proxies, intermediaries, puppets. They prefer “infiltration” to invasion – hence the derogatory Kinyarwandan nickname, *Inyenzi* (“cockroaches”) for the (Tutsi) Rwandan Popular Front rebellion from Uganda in 1990. Nilotes perennially dissemble; they “will never tell you what they think. There is no dialogue, they just listen and give you no feedback...” (Congolese businessman to author, April 2002). Falsifiers of history, they ‘destroy colonial archives in order to erase evidence that shows them as interlopers’ (Anti-Tutsi activist to author, September 2001).

Contrasted to all this is the Bantu, imagined as lowly peasant, oppressed and dispossessed. To Bantu activists, the trustworthy but ultimately gullible Bantu has been taken in too often. Too open, the Bantu cannot hide what is in his heart and so is easily betrayed. By contrast, to Tutsi extremists, this same lowliness fits them for their position as underlings.

Mythologically overlaid on these psycho-cultural traits are physical stereotypes. Bantu are short, thickset, darker of skin, flatter of face, laborers, sons of toil. Nilotes are regal, aquiline, tall and thin, lighter of skin, haughty. Anthropologist Liisa Malkki calls these “necrographic maps” (Malkki, 1995): victims have been slaughtered or spared based on this kind of calculus during waves of killing by both “sides.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Regionalization of the Bantu/Nilotic Mythology**

As suggested in the introduction, worrying signs of four related forms of regionalization of the Bantu/Nilotic distinction can be detected across contemporary African politics and culture.

#### ***Diffusion***

Recent developments as far from the Great Lakes as southern Nigeria illustrate that the effectiveness of the Bantu/Nilotic mythology for political mobilisation has been well

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<sup>8</sup> Lemarchand (1994:7) notes that an “entirely plausible” ethnic ambiguity (“physical characteristics may sometimes send the wrong ethnic message”) should undercut “the extraordinary amount of nonsense that has been written about the ‘short and stocky Hutu’” and the “tall, lash-thin and graceful” Tutsi. Quite so; it should. But I suggest it achieves, tragically, exactly the reverse... From a psychoanalytical perspective one can argue that it is precisely the inability of physical stereotypes to live up to their supposed determinacy – too many Hutu “look like” Tutsi and vice versa – which feeds the group paranoia about “threatened identity,” “infiltration,” “duplicitous nationality” (a startling phrase which cropped up in the course of my own fieldwork in the Kivus) and the ‘clandestine’ aspects of Nilotic machinations. This point goes somewhat beyond the scope of this paper, but intellectual equipment for developing it are to be found in such diverse places as (Appadurai, 1999) and (Zizek, 1990).

learned.<sup>9</sup> Its popular energies are now being harnessed politically in countries as disparate as Nigeria, Somalia, Kenya, Angola and Zimbabwe.

In the “Niger Delta” region, ethnic nationalism and simmering resentment against the Nigerian Federal Government’s appropriation of oil revenues have revived a secessionist bloc, the ‘Niger Delta Congress’, which attempts to unite the ethnic nationalities of the Niger Delta Region [inhabitants of present day Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States] with a population of over 30 million people] (Niger Delta Congress, no date). Signed by the Congress’s President, Chief Mpaka Princewill, the Bill of Rights (made on “the anniversary of the judicial murder of [Ogoni activist] Ken Saro Wiwa”) argues that southern peoples are “culturally different ... to... any other nationality within the framework of the Republic of Nigeria,” “independent nationalities with their own traditions, customs and forms of Government before the Berlin Conference of 1884” who were “coerced in to the colonial State of Nigeria in 1914 against their wish, fundamental rights and beliefs” and who have seen their oil resources plundered and have suffered enormous environmental damage “with no equitable remedy.” Concluding, the Bill of Rights calls for “the immediate and unconditional withdrawal from the Niger Delta Region of all forces of occupation controlled by the Nigerian State” and a plebiscite of self-determination “as guaranteed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.”

This invocation of the rights of indigenesness coincides, dangerously, with ongoing archaeological excavations in southern Nigeria, and particularly the area of Calabar (Cross River Estuary, Southeastern Nigeria), positing this area as the point of origin of “Bantu migrations” to the rest of Africa. Terracotta figurines discovered there by University of Maryland archaeologist Ekpo Eyo “prove that the Bantu, long thought to occupy all of southern Africa, also migrated north of the excavation site into parts of Nigeria” (University of Maryland, 1999)<sup>10</sup>. Secessionists are starting to borrow from such work the idea of Bantu indigenesness to southern Nigeria, and counterpose it to ‘Nilotic dominance’ by Northern Nigeria, a construction with unsettling echoes of Great Lakes mobilization strategies.

In Somalia, relations are starting to politicize around indigenesness. A substantial minority of people identified, and self-identifying as “Bantu” have lived in the Shabelle and Juba valleys of southern Somalia since the 19th century. Their ancestors are thought by anthropologists to have been slaves brought to the area by raiding Somali clans (Besteman, 1993; 1995; Cassanelli, 1982). Relations between these populations and the majority Somali clans have often been fraught: agriculturalist/pastoralist relations and land ownership providing points of friction. Relations were considerably worsened by the onset of civil war and famine in 1991, in which the Bantu minorities are thought to

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<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to Prof. Jan Vansina for directing my attention to a number of these developments.

<sup>10</sup> The University of Maryland Art History Department also hosted a conference in 1999 entitled “Whither Bantu Studies: Investigations of an African Identity.”

have suffered disproportionately<sup>11</sup> (Kusow, 1992). A 2002 joint fact-finding mission between the immigration services of the Danish and British Governments interviewed elders from these communities in Nairobi and were told that

“Bantu identity is being suppressed because the 'Cushistic'<sup>12</sup> Somalis' want to deny the original ownership of Somalia by the Bantu, who are the true indigenous people and original inhabitants of Somalia” (Udlaendinge Styrelsen, 2000).

Ongoing discrimination against “Somali Bantu” – a term which itself seems only to have come into use in the 1990s is captured in various pejorative terms used by mainstream Somalis against them: *mushunguli* or *adoon*, both of which connote slavery<sup>13</sup>, and *gosha*, which means “forest people.”

It is difficult to prove a causal link between recent history in the Great Lakes and the emergence (or resurgence) of discourses of racial difference and indigenosity in such widely separated cases as Somalia and Nigeria. However, the Great Lakes have, unfortunately, provided clear examples to ideologues in other environments that such discourses are a potent tool for mobilization. It will be important to monitor in the immediate future, therefore, the degree to which political discourse across these countries experiences a diffusion not just of the fundamental Bantu/Nilotic pivot but also the cultural stereotypes that accompany it.

Regional powers backing Kabila's forces in the DR Congo's present war have also begun to make use of the Bantu/Nilotic mythology to rationalize their support. Some Angolan leaders appear to have “discovered their ‘Bantuness’ and expressed concern over Nilotic hegemonies” in the region (Cogen and Reyntjens, 1999). Meanwhile, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe justifies his troops' presence in the DRC as an effort to prevent the “rebirth of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Tutsi-Hima Empire.”

### ***Inversion***

Most stereotypes are bivalent, and those attaching to this particular mythology are no exception. Easy to invert, activists can quickly recast a loathsome characteristic as an

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<sup>11</sup> This disproportionate impact of the 1992-3 Civil War and famine on the Rahanweyn and Digil clans in Southern Somalia is sometimes explained by other Somalis with an appeal to a Bantu/Nilotic logic. Collectively, both clans, rather than being known as *Samaale* people, construct a different ancestry for themselves and are known by the others as *Sab*, which carries the connotation both of dirty and menial (thus paralleling some of the agricultural serf stereotypes of Bantu). According to some Somalis, the Rahanweyn are not a ‘real clan family’; etymologically Rahan Weyn means simply big group and this point is used to argue that there is no proper Somali kinship structure amongst *Sab* people that could have prevented the outbreak of civil war. Instead, Rahanweyn are alleged to be simply a ragtag agglomeration of clanless individuals who had inter-married at some early point with Bantu immigrants and slaves from the area that is now Kenya

<sup>12</sup> Another term from linguistics fast becoming a mega-ethnic synonym for Hamitic or Nilotic.

<sup>13</sup> While the Somali Bantu seem to have historical roots in slave raids, the convergence between Bantu and notions of slavery are more widespread. Malkki's Burundian Hutu informants, indeed, suggest that this is the literal meaning of the word “Hutu” which is drawn from the “Kihamite” language (Malkki, 1995).

admirable trait, and vice versa. Evidence from contemporary Rwanda and DR Congo suggests some Tutsi activists, long accustomed to being on the receiving end of propaganda portraying them as “foreigners,” “ruthlessly cunning,” “usurpers” and “African Jews,” have inverted these same stereotypes for their own purposes of political mobilization. For some Tutsi – as yet, mercifully, a minority – Tutsi need to resume the “natural leadership” over Bantu that is theirs by destiny. For some others, Tutsi are indeed a lost Hamitic, or indeed Semitic tribe in need of salvation.

Representatives of the first tendency can, for instance, be found amongst some of the more extremist, proliferating political parties engaged in Burundi’s on again, off again conflict. Meanwhile, in eastern Congo, Banyamulenge (Congolese Tutsi) loyalties are presently split into at least three tendencies – pro Rwanda, anti-Rwandan Congolese nationalist, and a small but still significant tendency committed to “Tutsi power,” who resent both Kabila and Kigali for “not allowing us to be like we should be, [overlords] in Rwanda and Burundi, like the Bagaza of South Kivu” (activists interviewed by the author, Bukavu, April 2002). Some observers suggest that such activists are indeed forming links with “extremist Hima” in Kampala – though it is some distance from this observation to the conspiracy theories of a “Hima-Tutsi Empire” of which rumors incessantly whisper in the Kivus. The second tendency – for Tutsi (and other ‘Nilotes’) to reverse the mythology and cast themselves as a ‘lost Tribe of Israel’ – for now also is found amongst only a tiny minority, but one with international links. The American-based organisation *Kulanu* is “dedicated to finding and assisting lost and dispersed remnants of the Jewish people” around the world. In a web article, *Kulanu* co-founder Mel Laney describes how

“One of my ‘assignments’ as a founder of *Kulanu* is to interface with and assist some of the undocumented remnants of the House of Israel (Igbo, Ashanti, Pathans, etc.), including those living in the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa. These tall, muscular, highly intelligent, and arrogant warriors claim to be remnants of Israel and are variously known as the Watutsi, Tutsi, and Banyamulenge. Obviously, I make no claim that the following information that I've gathered is absolute fact...

“The Banyamulenge of South Kivu Province, Congo, have told me the following: They came from Ethiopia in ancient times to protect the high holy places on Mt. Kilimanjaro, and secret gold and diamond mines, for the House of Israel. They came long before their Watutsi brothers who also migrated to the Great Lakes region from Ethiopia. They claim their ancient sacred calling was the basis for the first legends of King Solomon's lost mines. IF THIS IS TRUE --- then there is some possibility that the claims of the Banyamulenge to be pre-Rabbinic Jews could also be true --- because the remnants of the House of Israel living in Ethiopia have traditionally been, and in Israel today they are officially accepted as Jews.”

Laney inscribes the 1994 Genocide into a broader narrative of Jewish suffering: “I sometimes joke with my Tutsi friends that they must be from the House of Israel, because they're so 'arrogant/royal,' so highly talented, and 'boy' do they suffer.”

This is a view strongly shared by one of Kulanu's counterparts in the Great Lakes, the organization *Havila*, which calls itself "La Coordination Mondiale de la Diaspora Hebraique Tutsi." Havila is "the historical and geographical land pointed out by the Zephaniah prophecy ... identified by prestigious learned Jews and Talmudists, like Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Ben Yisthak), as the White Nile Basin. The biblical name of that land is Havila according to Genesis indications (Gn 2,11)." Director Jean (or Yochannan) Bwejeri, argues that "during these last forty years, the Batutsi have been exterminated, and till now they are being exterminated, because of their Hebraic identity and their Salomonic legacy."

It would be too easy to dismiss this Judaic identification as merely the lunatic fringe of post-1994 Tutsi activism. While there is, as yet, no unambiguous evidence that it finds favor within the ruling elites around the Rwandan or Burundian presidencies, the increasing consolidation of ethnic hardlines in both countries suggests the ground may be fertile for such a development. Certainly, anti-Tutsi tracts in the Kivus frequently advert to clandestine support for Tutsi irredentism and empire-building not just from the US and the UK but Israel too, while Bantu resistance is compared to an "intifada."

### ***Grafting***

Within the DR Congo, stereotypes attaching to Tutsi have begun to migrate to other ethnic relationships, such as attitudes towards peoples such as the Bashi in South Kivu ('almost Rwandans' as far as many Kivutiens are concerned) or the Nande in North Kivu. While popular antipathy to these three groups goes back, in each case, to the colonial period, the heightened climate of anti-Tutsi propaganda brought on by Rwanda's war in the DRC since 1998 has enabled anti-Tutsi stereotypes to spin off, coloring perceptions of these other groups as well.

The Bashi likely form the demographic majority of South Kivu – though detailed censuses have been impossible for decades. Based in part on their numbers, Bashi have long enjoyed relative economic dominance and political power in South Kivu, contributing to animus against them from other ethnic groups. That their history, language and culture have points of tangency – though often conflicted – with Rwanda and Rwandans makes them susceptible to the anti-Nilotic and anti-Rwandan discourse prevalent in the Great Lakes<sup>14</sup>:

"Do I think of myself as Tutsi? Oh yes, up to a point! You see, the Rwandans and we the Bashi have the same origins. There was the same mother and the same father, and they had five sons. One of them produced the line from which Ngeshe and Kabale [Bashi monarchs] come, another the Rwandan Mwami and so on. I

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<sup>14</sup> Newbury presents a strong case that the origins of the Bashi were in "refugee populations" moving westwards from what is now Rwanda, fleeing the increasing power of the Rwandan court. Inhabitants of an indeterminate frontier zone, they were "not strictly speaking Rwandan," but with "cultural characteristics similar to those of the Rwandan Centra Court" they "shared attributes which made them appear Rwandan to the peoples of the highland areas" of the Kivus amongst whom they settled in the eighteenth century (Newbury, 1989:170-171).

forget the other two. There is a book we all have to read as children - 'Three Centuries of the Bashi' - I have it back in my village, and I can show you. It tells you all of this. Anyhow, that's how we are related... The true pastoral peoples of this region are the Tutsi, the Bashi and the Hema. But no, we don't consider ourselves Nilotic. We don't use the terms Nilotic and Bantu at all. In fact, if you did, you risk creating a problem within the Bashi people itself because there might be some [clans?] that consider themselves one or the other." [Louis – Bashi *Mayi Mayi* fighter, in interview with the author, April 2002].

Popular identification of Bashi with “Rwandanness” and “foreignness” has particularly accelerated because of their prominence as intermediaries in the lucrative commodity chain around tantalum, a major factor in the Congolese war economy since 1997 (Jackson, 2001).

In North Kivu, the demographically dominant Nande suffer suffusion with subtle differences. In the popular mind, Nande have never been thought of as Nilotic. However, some of the same tropes of economic domination normally applied to Nilotics have grafted on to long-standing resentment at the prominence of the Nande as powerful traders (in an astonishing economic circuit linking the Great Lakes, via the Persian Gulf, to the Far East (Vwakyanakazi, 1991; MacGaffey, 1991) Similarly, popular rumors of a Nande/Ugandan secessionist alliance to split the “Grand Nord” from Congo as a “Nandeland” parallel the fears further south of Tutsi/Rwandan secessionism for the rest of the Kivus.

### ***Infusion***

“Attention Zaireans and Bantu people! The Tutsi assassins are out to exterminate us. For centuries, the ungrateful and unmerciful Tutsi have used their powers, daughters and corruption to subject the Bantu. But we know the Tutsi, that race of vipers, drinkers of untrue blood. We will never allow them to fulfil their dreams in Kivuland.” [Notice at the Cyanguu/Bukavu border, 1994 – from Leslie Crawford, “Hutus see France as their Saviour,” *Financial Times*, 27 June 1994, cited in *African Rights, Death, Despair and Defiance*, 1994:59].

Across the Great Lakes region, local political leaderships with inter-communal axes to grind have noticed how effective Bantu/Nilotic has been as a political cleavage and have infused their own conflicts with this mythology. By inscribing local conflicts into a larger narrative of Bantu resistance against Nilotic machinations, they can draw on considerable mobilizing energies.

In Uganda, for example, the Bantu/Nilotic mythology is regularly used to galvanize opposition to President Museveni’s one-party state. The Uganda Democratic Coalition (UDC), in its online UDC Newsletter of November 1997, asserts that “Uganda is totally a colony of Tutsis.” The newsletter lists high-ranking Ugandan officials who “disguise as Banyankole or Bakiga but the truth tells otherwise” – two “pastoralist” Ugandan ethnic groups viewed as crypto-Tutsi. Tutsi in Uganda are said to be part of a regional conspiracy to construct an “Empire.” In Uganda, they are

“usurping land from the citizens through a number of clandestine schemes. After deliberately impoverishing the nationals, Tutsis have been scooping millions of shillings from local Ugandan banks in the form of soft loans. The only collateral needed is proof of one’s ethnicity.”

In a similar vein, the long-running ADF insurgency in southwestern Uganda – which drew financial and logistical support from Mobutu before his demise – attacks Museveni as a “Rwandan.”<sup>15</sup> According to a “Memorandum of Detailed Grievances” posted to the ADF/ADM website, Uganda’s

“most sensitive ministries especially in the Defence and security sectors are occupied by Museveni’s tribesmen. This he does in order to centralize Defence powers for fear of true patriotic Ugandans to oppose him because he is an alien... For sure, Museveni dreams of Re-establishing a HIMA-TUTSI Empire. This is revealed by his closest aides and also by his efforts to finance Tutsi Rebellions against their rival Hutus, in Rwanda, Burundi and now in Zaire the next step will see its way to Tanzania.”

Infusing local conflicts with Bantu/Nilotic mythological energies is also a regular aspect of political mobilization in the DR Congo. Evidently, it has formed one major component of the Kabila Government’s resistance to the RCD/Rwandan/Ugandan invasion since 1998. From day one, government officials urged the local population to genocidal violence against all Tutsi, using language playing on prevalent stereotypes:

“If the rebels come here, there may be another genocide, a spontaneous rebellion. They come with a virus. We know who the Rwandans are just by looking at them. In the case that they win, life for them will be impossible. You may see something not at all planned.” (Human Rights Watch, 1999)

But by 2000, more local conflicts were borrowing from the mythology too. Long-running tensions between Hema and Lendu populations in the northeastern zone around Ituri burst into open violence – killing thousands and displacing many times that number – with both sides borrowing from the mythology to justify their positions. Lendu propaganda depicts Hema as “Nilotic” invaders, in league with (Ugandan) Hima and (Rwandan) Tutsi to dominate the region. The identification of Hema with Nilotic origins relies on little more than the consonance between the names Hima and Hema, and on the pastoral activities of the Hema. Equally, some Lendu activists have attempted to link their own fate with that of other Bantu, a move that was then reciprocated in anti-Tutsi tracts in the Kivus:

“They [the RCD] use on average a few cents on every dollar to massacre your brothers at KASIKA, MAKOBOLA and most recently in the region of ITURI where our Bantu brothers must pass the night under the night sky.” [Underground tract, circulating in the Kivus, 2000]

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<sup>15</sup> Discrediting the nationality of candidates for or occupants of African presidencies has become an all too frequent political tactic of late, seen in Côte d’Ivoire and Zambia, to name but two examples.

By 1999/2000, reports were circulating of a shadowy ‘United Bantu Liberation Front’ (F.U.L.B.) operating around Ituri.

Hema activists denounced plans for genocide against them, and countered with their own ethnology in a war whose very substance is taxonomic:

“The Lendu are Bantu: this lie, which has been spread on both international and national radio channels since the start of the Hema-Lendu war, was in fact intended to place the Hema of Ituri in a minority position and attract the sympathy of the whole Congolese people, in reality and by majority Bantu, towards the Lendu, who falsely give themselves out to be Bantu for the purposes of their cause despite the fact that they are from a Sudanese branch...” (Ente a.s.b.l., 2002))

But in fact, both ”sides” were incurring great losses in the fighting – the invocation of the term “genocide” by Hema propagandists was cleverly ambiguous, superficially denouncing the parallels being made between them and Tutsi while indirectly invoking it themselves.

A final example of infusion, taken from Burundi, is the propagandizing of Agathon Rwasa and the militant CNDD-FDD Hutu rebels. In the lengthy quote taken from the Rwasa tract that opens this paper, Rwasa is deftly positioning the Hutu fight against Tutsi power in Burundi. Temporally, he cites the “Plan Simbananiye” (a supposed plan from the 1970s “explaining” the extreme violence in Burundi in 1972 as an anti-Hutu Genocide intended to “kill enough Hutu to achieve ethnic parity in the countryside” (Lemarchand, 1994: 26-28)) to style the contemporary campaign as inheritor of a longstanding struggle. Spatially, he sees the various separate crises in the Great Lakes countries “meshing together” because the “Tutsi rulers of the region share amongst themselves the same hegemonic vision, all dreaming of the same Hima/Nilotic Empire in Central and East Africa, which they intend to realise through sundry plans”(Rwasa, no date:2). By connecting his struggle in this way, he accesses considerable symbolic capital.

### **Contemporary Mechanisms of Stereotype Propagation**

A number of different mechanisms have assisted in propagating the Bantu/Nilotic mythology widely across sub-Saharan Africa. These include academic research, official political discourse, underground political discourse in the form of written tracts and oral rumor, and newer media such as “hate radio” and the Internet. While all assist in spreading the mythology and permitting its political instrumentalisation, they vary in the degree of their intention. Some are deliberately constructed to promote exclusion; some may have honest enough goals but are hijacked by others for the same purpose.

### ***Academic Study***

Various streams of academic research – innocent in themselves? – have provided ammunition for those promoting Bantu identity politics. Already alluded to at earlier points in this paper, “Bantu Studies” are alive and well within African Studies proper – indeed, the journal *African Studies* was formerly entitled *Bantu Studies*. Contemporary Bantu Studies comprises archaeology, oral history, comparative linguistics and philology, and art history.

Bantu Studies was given a fillip by the foundation, in Gabon in 1983, of CICIBA – the Centre International de La Civilisation Bantue. Ten member countries came together to “revalorize the culture of the Bantu peoples” and construct not just a “grand cultural ensemble” but a “socio-political force of some size” since “the Bantus represent close to 250 million people” (Bonny, 1999). CICIBA maintains a large publishing list and is increasingly active on the Internet, promoting broad projects of Bantu cultural salvage in the arts, languages and traditional medicine. How easily these researches may spin off in more political directions can be demonstrated by an apparently throw-away comment by CICIBA Director General Vatomene Kukanda:

“Many words have already been surveyed in diverse Bantu languages and we have been able to recover their original meaning. Thanks to these terms, CICIBA is able to rewrite the history of the Bantu peoples and bring forward proof of the resemblances which make up Bantuism. One could, for example, cite the term ‘Ongola’, which became the name Angola. It means ‘union’, and not ‘King’, as the Portuguese denaturalised it.” (Bonny, 1999).

Within the DR Congo, academic debates over Bantu legacies rapidly politicize. A recent conflagration occurred over the publication of the compendium “Histoire Générale du Congo” by Isidore Ndaywel e Nziem (Ndaywel e Nziem, 1997)<sup>16</sup>. Ndaywel’s thesis is that underlying Congo’s apparent ethnic heterogeneity is an overall cultural unity that is “Bantu” in nature. He argues that the majority of the present population has its origins in Bantu migrations while the various other minorities – Pygmoid, Nilotic or Sudanic in origin – were all “Bantuized” by the advent of the colonial period:

“The Bantu predominance in this [Congolese national] space is an undeniable fact, despite the cultural graftings of Sudanese and Nilotic origins. These were belated and only succeeded in producing a handful of mostly ethnically hybrid societies, drawing their sources as much from Bantu culture as from their cultures of origin... There only exists in Zaire Bantu-Sudanese cultures (Ngbaka, Ngbandi, Zande) and Bantu-Nilotic (Alur). There are no pure Sudanese or Nilotics.” (Ndaywel, 1997:254)

Based on this reading, Ndaywel is confident that “Congolese unity is not an artificial creation of the Colonial period” as is frequently argued.

Ndaywel’s argument from precolonial unity follows natural enough nationalist urges. But its false premises create their own dilemma: either designate “non-Bantu” populations as previously “Bantuized,” or else as non-Congolese. To this reader, at least, Ndaywel’s course (Bantuized non-Bantu) shows a liberal, inclusionary instinct. The intention is assimilationist – but the text can be read differently. Kamanda Kola (2000), writing in response, accuses Ndaywel of

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<sup>16</sup> The first edition was published under the title “Histoire de Zaire” in 1996; it was quickly retitled for in a second edition in 1997 as a result of the unpredicted transition in the country’s political fortunes and subsequent name change.

“profit[ing] from the deficiency of precise data before the nineteenth century in order to erase all traces of the Oubanguiens and the Nilotics, realising in this way his mega-project of making the entirety of sub-Saharan Africa a space uniquely inhabited by Bantus” (Kamanda Kola, 2000:15).

Is this really his intent? Whether or not, the danger is that Ndaywel’s history can be read as a prescription for ethnic purification of Congolese territory.

Other, older academic histories are already frequently re-read for this same purpose. Colonial-era ethnolinguistic maps – notoriously incomplete and conjectural - are regularly reproduced by contemporary activists in the Kivus in order to present the “definitive” demographic *status quo ante* of Bantu “autochthony” versus Nilotic “usurpation.” Photocopies of the 1954 “Carte Linguistique” of Van Bulck (of the Brussels Institut Royal Colonial Belge), for example, are enjoying renewed circulation in the Kivus, in part because of its (admirably ironic) reproduction in Willame’s *Banyamulenge et Banyarwanda* (1997). Taken out of Willame’s context, the Kivutien portion of the map as re-reproduced shows

“all the tribes who were here before 1945, thus, the autochthons. Certainly, there were no Rwandophones, according to the documents.” [Nande “researchers” who approached this author with tracts and pamphlets, July 2001].

Similarly, a pamphlet circulating in Bukavu in July 1999 harnesses a dubious and partial literature review to reject “Hamitic” claims to Congolese political or ethnic citizenship:

“the silence on the part of ethnologists of renown concerning the presence of Hamitic populations of Rwandan or Burundian origin in this Zairean zone between 1885 and 1973 demonstrates that they were numerically negligible” (*Banya-Mulenge* [sic]– *Immigrés de la Dernière Heure* [Last Minute Immigrants]).<sup>17</sup>

### ***Hate Radio, Newspapers and the Internet***

Modern media have played a prominent role in deploying the mythology for the purposes of mobilization. The role of the extremist anti-Tutsi Radio Télévision Milles Collines in fomenting the 1994 Rwandan Genocide is comparatively well-known. Less well known is the continuation of hate radio in the Great Lakes in subsequent years. “Voix du Patriote,” for example, broadcast messages of hate in the Bukavu area of the DR Congo during the early months of the Kabila/AFDL takeover. Programmes called on the “Bantu” population to make the “visitors return to their home, to “rise as one to combat the Tutsis” who were described as “Ethiopians and Egyptians” who do not belong in the region, once more calling upon the myth of Nilotic origins. “The country has been sold to the Tutsis,” said the broadcasts, and it was the duty of all Congolese to “help their Bahutu

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<sup>17</sup> This pamphlet, presented in academic form, copiously footnoted, provides more than a page of bibliographic reference at this point, beginning, a little pointedly perhaps, with “H.M. STANLEY. *Comment j’ai retrouvé Livingstone*, Paris 1884” and ending with “E DE JONGHE, *La mission d’études du R.P. van Bulck*, in *Bulletin de l’Institut Royal Colonial Belge*, Bruxelles, 1935, pp108-115,” van Bulck being, once more, the cartographer whose map is reproduced by Willame (1997).

brothers to reconquer Burundi and Rwanda,” again infusing Congolese resistance to the AFDL with a broader regional agenda (IRIN-UNOCHA, 1998).

In Burundi, since the mid 1990s, hate radio has been part of the political landscape. Radio Rutomorangongo, later Radio Democracy, paralleled the Rwandan Genocide by broadcasting its own anti-Tutsi extremism from eastern Zaire on behalf of Burundi's CNDD-FDD rebels until Kabila's arrival put a stop to transmission.

Newspapers and the printed word have also played a prominent role. The insurgency in northwestern Rwanda between 1994 and 1998 relied on leaflets calling for “renewed war against the Tutsi.” Photocopied tracts continue to repeat such messages in eastern Congo today, emanating “dans les coulisses” [behind the scenes, as Kivutiens say] in Bukavu. But printed hate is not by any means confined to the Hutu side of the equation. In 1996, Burundian authorities, acting under pressure from Reporteurs Sans Frontières, finally shut down the pro-Tutsi “newspaper” “Le Carrefour des Idées” (Crossroads of Ideas) after printing such luminary articles as “They (Hutus) want to roast us on skewers” and “Does the Hutu have a soul?”

Finally, the Internet plays an increasing role in promulgating the mythology across Africa and within the Great Lakes diaspora in Paris, Brussels, Montreal and elsewhere. Bulletin boards and newsgroups such as <http://www.congo-mai-mai.net> disseminate heavily ethnicized readings of military conflict in the Great Lakes, propagandizing for the “national resistance” to the “Hima-Tutsi Empire” and breathing new life into old conspiracy theories. A particular speciality of this medium is finding and alerting the public to “leaked” or “intercepted” Tutsi plans, such as the “THE TUTSI COLONIZATION PLAN OF THE KIVU REGION AND OTHER CENTRAL AFRICAN AREAS,” a “secret document which was uncovered and exposed to show the evil plans of these people.” In form and tone these resemble such icons of European anti-Semitism as the notorious forgeries the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, with their assertion of cabbalistic intrigues and diabolical scheming.

As a tool for spreading propaganda in the Great Lakes, the Internet has shown a number of advantages: speed, reproducibility, cachet and regionalism. Its speed is obvious: Internet cafés have proliferated across the Great Lakes despite (perhaps even because of?) the war in the DR Congo and the economic decline in Burundi caused by the international boycott against it. The Internet lends itself to reproduction of ideological materials and carries a certain cachet with consumers. Certain tracts take the form of emails; certain emails become tracts, printed at Internet cafés and then further circulated by hand. In either case, the sense of being in touch with the wheels of power communicated by use of the Internet adds value to the propaganda's consumers. Finally, the Internet facilitates easy exchange of materials amongst the ideologues of various otherwise distinct conflicts, allowing Congolese propagandists, say, to incorporate an anti-Museveni Op-Ed from Uganda into their own materials.

### ***Official Political Discourse***

All too frequently, public political discourse propagates the mythology, using it scapegoat populations in order to maintain power.

Anti-Tutsi rhetoric had been used against Kabila's AFDL during its takeover of Congo due to the AFDL'S Rwandan backing and the presence of Congolese Tutsi in its ranks. Once in power, Kabila put distance between his government and Rwandan interests. His immediate circle were not slow to use the same rhetoric themselves a year later against the new RCD rebellion. Kabila's cabinet director Abdoulaye Yerodia used national television for a thinly veiled call for ethnic attacks on Tutsis, instructing his "brothers" to "rise up as one man to kick out he who looks like the common enemy," using any weapons available, including hunting guns, machetes, axes, arrows, sticks and rocks (Human Rights Watch, 1999). "Look[ing] like the common enemy" meant targeting Tutsi (and many others) living peaceably in Kinshasa. Several hundred were hunted down and killed – some graphically burnt to death – in ensuing days. Similar calls came from Kinshasa Governor Théophile Mbemba, Minister of Information Didier Mumengi, and Minister of Transportation and Communications Henry Mova Sakanyi. Though Kabila subsequently made a conciliatory speech in response to international pressure, the damage had already been done. And afterwards, politicians continued with a lower intensity campaign of disinformation, portraying all Tutsi as evil and the common enemy, even publishing a document drawing parallels between the Hima-Tutsi phenomenon and Nazism.

Evidence also suggests, however, that the RCD rebels may have used staged anti-Tutsi propaganda themselves in order to simulate an internal coup, thereby justifying a putsch against wavering elements within their own ranks. Only superficial details of what took place in Kisangani on May 14, 2002 are known with any certainty. According to the official account, RCD mutineers, calling themselves RCD-*Originel*, revolted against the RCD-Goma and seized the radio station in Kisangani early in the morning. According to a transcript of the subsequent radio broadcasts obtained by this researcher, they broadcast insistent appeals to Kisangani's population to "Go out and kill Rwandans! ... Go down, have no fear, take rocks, machetes, axes, all the weapons you can lay your hands on, take them all and hunt them! Hunt the Rwandans!" After a short period, RCD-*Originel* was repulsed from the radio station. According to a preliminary investigation by the UN military observer mission, MONUC, some six people lost their lives in lynchings in the town because "they were Rwandans, or thought to be so" (MONUC, 2002). But reprisals carried out by the main RCD involved "summary executions." MONUC initially suggested 53 deaths, but a subsequent investigation by a UN special rapporteur increased this to 150 or more.

Almost immediately after these events, a conspiracy theory circulated that the coup was imaginary, a staged performance to flush out elements disloyal to the RCD. Publicly, it was denounced as little more than a "set-up" by the Catholic Archbishop of Kisangani, Msgr Monsengwo. While conspiracy theories should normally be discounted, in the Great Lakes as much as anywhere, in this instance subsequent investigations seem to suggest some truth to it. A report by Kisangani human rights organization Groupe Lotus concluded that the RCD's inability to produce any mutineers for public inspection, and the absence of any apparent fighting during the "retaking" of the radio station suggest that the hate broadcasts were in fact a dangerous gambit by the RCD to justify taking action against disloyal internal elements such as remnants of the old Zairean army.

### *Instrumentality*

The foregoing examples place front and center two related questions about intention and instrumentality when it comes to the regionalization of the Bantu/Nilotic mythology in the Great Lakes and beyond. To what extent is the mythology being promulgated consciously or unconsciously, cynically or idealistically at present?

There seems little doubt that rational calculus of gain – political and indeed economic – accounts for some of the use made of the mythology by political leadership across Central Africa. As an effective divide and rule strategy, the mythology lends itself to the maintenance of power by narrow elites. Such outbursts of anti-Tutsi xenophobia as accompanied the threat to Kabila's regime in Kinshasa in 1998 or the Habyarimana regime in 1994 suggest an all-too conscious deployment of the standard clichés of racialised hatred. In the rather crude academic shorthand which has recently come to the fore, this is 'grievance' manipulated strategically for reasons of 'greed' (Berdal and Malone, 2000).

However this does not tell the whole story. Some of the new energy the Bantu/Nilotic mythology has picked up in Central Africa and beyond seems to be rooted in deep grievances, which need to be met on their own terms, however repugnant. And even where strategic manipulation of identity politics by narrow elites may be concerned, one always needs to raise the question "why this identity dichotomy? What makes this work, particularly?" The proliferation and hardening of the Bantu/Nilotic split suggests that it is somehow "good to think with" in Lévi-Strauss's sense of a mode of thought which is comfortably congruent with the cultural milieu in which it sits. To explore this point is beyond the scope of the present paper – but clues to why Bantu/Nilotic works so well to divide people in the Great Lakes can perhaps be found in Slavoj Žižek's psychoanalytical theory of ideology which suggests that "national paranoia" stems from nation's nervousness at not yet being constituted as "authentic states"(Žižek, 1989; 1990; 1994).

These questions return pointedly when once more considering Agathon Rwaswa's setting of his Burundian Hutu struggle within a broader temporal and spatial resistance against Tutsi/Nilotic machinations. Does his writing represent a genuine appeal to link the FDD resistance militarily to those others – *Interahamwe* in Rwanda, *Mayi-Mayi* in DR Congo, ADF in Uganda? Or is it merely rhetorical genuflection to a regional idea?

Whatever the intention, a mass uprising across the Great Lakes organized around the Bantu resistance to Nilotic dominance is, I think, unlikely. Though Rwanda and Burundi have seen their fare share of this kind of mega-violence over the last four decades or so, the more usual pattern seems to be that the mythology is periodically used to whip up smaller, deadly maelstroms of localized resentment. While different violent locales may influence each other for a while, the relationships are unstable and easily perturbed. Thus, military cooperation between *Mayi-Mayi* and *Interahamwe* rebels in eastern Congo against an RCD perceived as Tutsi is problematized by the emergence of "Tutsi *Mayi Mayi*," the anti-RCD Tutsi FRF forces rebelling at present around Minembwe: some "mainstream" *Mayi Mayi* tendencies are willing to see the FRF uprising as genuine since it is anti-RCD; other tendencies can not get beyond the Tutsi identity of the rebels against the rebels, considering *Mayi Mayi*/FRF alliances a "marriage against nature." A similar difficulty is posed by the emergence of *Mudundu 40*, a predominantly Bashi *Mayi Mayi*

faction operating in South Kivu. To some, *Mudundu 40* are part of the nationalist resistance. But fighting has occurred between *Mudundu 40* and Interahamwe (normally *Mayi Mayi* allies) in part at least because to the ultra-Hutu of the Interahamwe, Bashi are too much like Tutsi to be trusted.

## **Conclusions**

In sum, it is a strange, contingent and multi-form regionalization that the Bantu/Nilotic mythology is undergoing at present. It is as though major lightning storms of violence – particularly those in Rwanda and Burundi, but also including the various new wars in the Congo – have energized (or in some cases, re-energized) eddying pools of more local conflict by grafting onto them a meta-narrative of mega-ethnic distinction. Some of these eddies remain isolated; but others in turn return some energy to the central complex. All the while, the total geographic coverage of the mythology spreads a little each year.

Thus, while a “race war” is an unlikely outcome, the mythology acquires more and more energy, and its ability to claim lives in medium-level conflict is greatly enhanced.

How to combat it? Substantively, it is vital that academics and journalists continue publicly to undermine any lingering veneer of respectability that the Nilotic hypothesis may possess. Ethnolinguists must continue to stress that “the history of languages is one thing, that of populations quite another” (Kamanda Kola, 2000:12) and that the striking underlying structural similarity of Bantu languages says little enough about the homogeneity or otherwise of contemporary ethnic groups. Indeed, problematizing the whole notion of ethnicity should not be left as some post-modern exercise for narrow academe but should become a central area of international effort through education campaigns drawing inspiration from a rich historiography of Central African migration and mixing (see, for example, Kopytoff, 1989). This education needs to be addressed as much to audiences in the West as in Africa; Kaplanesque readings of ancient ethnic hatred and people “stuck in history” remain all too frequent in mainstream commentary on African politics (Kaplan, 1994).

At least two major impediments can be noted here. First, structural obstacles exist in several of the countries of concern. In Rwanda and Burundi, ethnopolitics have become entrenched by recent histories of violence. In the DR Congo, ethnic ways of organizing are embedded in a system of local administration and “ethnic citizenship” inherited unchanged from the colonial period. In all cases, playing on ethnic divisions continues to pay dividends to unscrupulous politicians. Second, development assistance to Central Africa – as elsewhere – continues to be underpinned by an unreconstructed Durkheimianism, believing that ethnic solidarity is an anachronism that will fall away with economic modernization: “ethnic animosities ... quelled by bourgeois prosperity” (Kaplan, 1994). Unfortunately, as Uvin’s pioneering study for Rwanda suggests, the reverse can be tragically true: aid to economic modernization administered with wilful blindness to the continuing saliency of ethnic identity can feed into the circumstances which lead to explosions of genocide (Uvin, 1998).

Thus, divisive forms of ethnic identity need to become an explicit target of programs for social change rather than assuming that they will change as by-products of economic development. This is a controversial recommendation – at various moments in their

postcolonial careers, both Rwanda and Burundi have officially discouraged even the mention of ethnicity, resorting in some cases to the law. But to tackle ethnicity (and mega-ethnicity) entails talking about it, an admittedly ambiguous first step. While the value of “civil society” has been somewhat overstated in recent development fashion, and much of it remains ethnicized itself in the Great Lakes, still there are worthwhile partners to be identified in all the countries at stake who can effectively absorb donor funding to mount national (and regional) education initiatives.

As this paper has shown, the compass of the Bantu/Nilotic mythology is now regional, if not, in fact, trans-regional. Thus, initiatives aimed at combating it must be regional in their focus too. Given that the mythology has spread particularly through modern means of mass communication, these are also the mechanisms through which it may be fought. Hate radio has been effectively fought with “peace radio” in some instances – the Internet has been less used thus far but also offers interesting possibilities.

To conclude, policy is often driven by pendulum swings. In the case of interpreting conflict, the Kaplanesque doomsday scenario of eternal, primordial ethnic conflict was met with a determined effort, liberal in its instincts, to explain African conflicts as driven not by blood relation but by narrow and cynical politico-economic interests: greed for short. To reassert the salience of ethnic identity in conflict risks appearing to swing the pendulum back to primordialism. This has precisely not been the intention of this paper. The paradox is rather that a highly contingent and relatively recent identity dichotomy – having its origins as an artefact of the colonial period – nonetheless has quickly acquired the patina of great age and the ability to metastasize at great speed across a wide geographical region. The mythology has claimed far too many lives, and linked together too many disparate conflicts, to be ignored any longer by international policy makers.

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<b>ANNEX - Summary of the Nineteen Tracts Analysed. [French language unless indicated]</b>			
<b>Tract</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Narrative</b>	<b>Representative Text Sample</b>
Alerte a.s.b.l [AL]	Alerte a.s.b.l.	Alert / Plans	“The project of Kivu secession: an avatar of the annexation of the country... The hour is very grave!”
Borders Email [BE]	Dr Simba Lukadi	Complaints [English language]	“...Western countries are studying the project to create a ‘New Israel’ in Central Africa...”
Congo Dépecé [CD]	L’Oeil du Peuple	Alert / Plans	“This plan of KAGAME’s, nicknamed in certain Rwandan milieux ‘Operation Berlin II’ and backed by certain Congolese traitors, will be realised in five steps...”
Gahutu, Gatwa, Gatutsi [GH]	Kanyarwanda	Ventriloquis m/Threat	The moment has come to enjoin all those who do not support the Rwandophone community to go back immediately to their territories or provinces of origin before it is too late for them...
Grève Générale [GG]	Pour l’ACR de FAP, le Lieutenant MBAYO-K	Resistance	“A general strike until the moment that the RWANDO-UGANDO-BURUNDESE aggressors and all their Nilotic and White allies leave our Congolese territory, currently under occupation.”
“Guerre de Conquête” [GC]	“Kagame, Museveni and Karamaheto”	Ventriloquis m	“The decisions of Tutsi to reign for ever in KIVU and install a HIMA empire in short, medium and long term...”
“Haut Commandement” [HC]	“Haut-Commandement des Forces de Resistance Civile.”	Resistance	“The High Command of the Armed Forces for Civil Resistance (FARC) salutes the courage and determination of the Kivutien population, victim of this occupation by Rwandan, Burundian and Ugandan Tutsi.”
“Mawe Mawe Antifada” [MM]	FORCES MAI MAI-FAP Conseil Politico-Militaire, Division Brigade	Resistance	“promising to continue the struggle until the last of the secessionist and annexationist occupants, dead or alive, leave the ANCESTRAL

	Jeunesse		CONGOLESE LAND... Another reason that pushes the Mawe Mawe to attack the enemy is the political repression and social cannibalism from which the autochthon population suffers under this Israeli-Anglo-American occupation via its mercenary Tutsi intermediaries..."
Mentalité de Génocide [MG]	Membres du Barza Intercommunautaire du Nord-Kivu	Resistance	"Let the Congolese political class be conscious of the danger and cease from distracting the new President of the Congolese people."
Opération Atuchangane [OA]	Le patriote	Threat [French & Kiswahili]	'MUTUTSI AENDE INJE [Tutsi Get Out!] – MKONGOMANI AONGOZE INCHI [Congolese Guard Your Country!] – or MAI-MAI for short'
Partition du Congo Effective: Minembwe [PC]	Pierre Vini TO THE GOOD LISTENER, GREETINGS: "I hope not to be preaching in the desert..."	Alert	"Concerned at this constant, bitter outcome, the ruling class of International Tutsi Power (ITP) grasps, no matter the price, to reassure their own, and as soon as possible..."
Peuple Silencieux [PS]	L'Observatoire du Peuple Silencieux	Threat	"Your tomorrow is uncertain because you don't know, you don't master and you don't understand the reason for this silence. We are not dupes..."
Proclamation de la République des Grands Lacs [PR]	Joachim Diana G.	Ventriloquism	"This conferences which some are already calling Berlin II, proposes to fix new frontiers for a Federal State, the Republic of the Great Lakes..."
Race Pure [RP]	Le Représentant de la race Pure à Kigali	Ventriloquism	"The present circular note is only for effective members of the Pure Race"
Service des Renseignements [SR]	Service des Renseignements pour la Population	Alert	"It's now or never that you go back to where you came from!"
Tutsi Colonization	Anonymous	Ventriloquism [English]	"Although we are a minority in the Kivu region, we have been able to

Colonization Plan [TC]		m [English Language]	Kivu region, we have been able to successfully retain the power during the 1960 elections by availing ourselves of the Bantu's naivety.”
Tutsi International Power [TP]	Republic of Rwanda – Ministry of National Defense, Department Of Strategic Planning	Ventriloquism [English Language]	“TUTSI INTERNATIONAL POWER is now extended to Ethiopia and Eritrea and should also include Sudan after its liberation by John Garang.”
Ville Morte [VM]	pour l'ACR de FAP Liutenant MBAYO-K	Resistance	“State functionaries ... the coins you put in the bank serve only to kill your children, your brothers...”
“Vrai Banyamulenge” [VB]	Boniface Zingira – ASBAC, Association des Banyamulenge au Congo	Ventriloquism	“This Tutsi nationalist movement touts the establishment of a Tutsi Empire in Central Africa. To attain this objective, they have decided to infiltrate the Banyamulenge communities established in the Congo”