

academic experience Worldwide e.V. in cooperation with Imbuto e.V.
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ABSTRACT

Hildegard Schürings (Imbuto e.V.): The restructuring of the Rwandan society during colonialism - The dominant historiography is the history of those who rule.

In 1994, one of the most cruel genocide and massive violence in the last century was organised during 100 days in Rwanda. Victims were mainly people of the so-called ethnic group Batutsi and much less of the Bahutu and Batwa groups. The lecture is questioning how the colonial period, first by Germans, then by Belgium until 1962, has contributed to a fundamental restructuring of the political, social, economic and cultural systems and the reinforcing of social identities.

Little is known on the history of the region until the 15th century. The region's history (political, economic, social, cultural and spiritual) was transmitted by oral traditions and widely influenced by the intent of the tellers. As in every region history is not fixed but dynamic.

The Berlin Conference of 1884 assigned the territory to Germany as part of German East Africa (Burundi, Rwanda, Tanganyika), marking the beginning of the colonial era.

With the arrival of European Colonisers in the last decade of the 19th century, and French Catholic Missionaries in 1900, the "invention of tradition" took place. From the perception, based on race theories of the missionaries the country's history was written that accompanied the implementation of colonial administration. The Christianisation of society accompanied by a decline of genuine culture, change of former rules and power sharing, beliefs, social cohesion, values and cultural practice, lead to an "ethnicisation" of the population based on racist stereotypes and unscientific theories (based on the bible - Hamitic thesis). The members of the Batutsi groups were considered as superior to the other groups (hamites, master-race - Herrenmenschen), those of the Bahutu groups were stigmatised as subjects (Untertanen, bantu-population, negroes) and the Batwa as a subhuman race. Individual identity cards introduced in 1930 included "ethnic" (Ubwoko) categorization for the Rwandan population. This lead to an "ethnogenesis" stigmatising the population through a division in superior and inferior groups and a strong centralisation of power, now held by a small group of Batutsi. This process was accompanied by creating and reproducing myths on origin, migration, and characters influencing self-esteem, self-image, and the perception of others.

In the fifties the support of the rigid political and social system by the Belgian administrators and the Catholic Church shifted from the support of the Batutsi-population, now considered as oppressors, to the support of the majority of the population, the Bahutu.

Corresponding to this social reorganisation and ethnicisation the "social revolution" of 1959, lead to the independence from Belgium and the overthrow of the ruling regime. The conflicts over power that were bound to ethnic identities became more and more hardened and rigid. During this time a lot of Batutsi fled in neighbouring countries (Uganda, Zaire, Burundi and Tanzania). In 1962 the first republic was founded, widely dominated by Bahutu-groups from Central-Rwanda. This regime was overthrown in 1973, after violent conflicts affecting the Batutsi-population, by Bahutu-groups of the North.

October 1, 1990 a group of descendants of the population, who fled Rwanda in the fifties and sixties, living in Uganda, attacked Rwanda. This was the beginning of the war lasting till the beginning of the genocide and numerous crimes against humanity in April 1994.

Hildegard Schürings holds a PhD and master in sciences of education (Dipl. Päd.) with the specialisation in adult education. She has worked in the Great Lakes Region in Africa since 1978 and has published widely on Rwanda, its history and colonial period, the genocide, crimes against humanity, peace-promotion and youth. Since 1972, she has worked as project-director, advisor and researcher in Germany and then in development cooperation in Rwanda (1978-1983), Tunisia (1993-1997) and as international consultant in the areas of Education, Vocational and Educational Training, distance studies, promotion of civil society, gender mainstreaming, crisis prevention and peace-promoting projects in Europe, Maghreb, West Africa and Central Africa. She works as a researcher, evaluator and trainer for international governmental organisations, European and African non-governmental organisations and has lectured at the Universities of Bilbao, Darmstadt, Frankfurt (1984-1993), Freiburg, Kassel, Louvain-la-Neuve, Strasbourg, Tübingen, and in Rwanda. Since 2001, she is managing director of Imbuto e.V. (www.imbuto.net).

Hildegard Schürings hat in Erziehungswissenschaft an der Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe Universität, Frankfurt, zum Thema: „Restrukturierung der Gesellschaft in Rwanda während der Kolonialzeit“ promoviert. Seit 1978 ist sie u.a. in der Region der Großen Seen in Zentralafrika tätig und hat zu vielen Themen veröffentlicht. Seit 1997 ist sie freiberuflich als Beraterin in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit in den Sektoren „Bildung, Berufliche Bildung, ländliche Entwicklung, Förderung von Zivilgesellschaft und Friedensförderung sowie Gender“ tätig, besonders im Maghreb, West- und Zentralafrika. Seit 2001 ist sie Geschäftsführerin des Vereins Imbuto e.V. (www.ruanda-entgrenzungen.net).

Imbuto, an international NGO, founded in 2001, means in Kinyarwanda and Kirundi, the national languages of Rwanda and Burundi: Seeds. The association's goal is to sow the seeds and to reap fine fruit one day. The majority of Imbuto's members are youth from the Great Lakes Region and other countries and people who had worked in Rwanda. Since the beginning, Imbuto is organising workshops, seminars, and conferences on peace issues, reconciliation, strengthening the personality and capacities especially of young people with different cultural backgrounds (e.g. Europe, Burundi, Rwanda, Eritrea, Somalia ...) with the aim to shape the future, focusing on looking forward rather than backward.