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About

- Master in History (Ghent University)
- Defended PhD in 2010 (Ghent University)

Research

"Ethnicity and Power in Rwanda, 1890-1960. On the (dis)functional representation of ethnic identities in the colonial encounter." [working title] (Supervisor Prof. Dr. Eric Vanhaute)

It has become common knowledge that ethnic identities in Rwanda were strongly influenced by the European colonial rule, starting with the arrival of the Germans at the end of the nineteenth century and continued by the Belgians from the 1920s onward. More in particular, it is agreed that whereas ethnic categories were defined in the period just before the coming of Europeans in a more dynamic way, they were stated ever more rigidly in the colonial period. An official ideology was forged to justify practices of segregation in the fields of education, administration and jurisdiction. However, this research argues that it is significant to make a clearer distinction between definitions of

ethnic categories and the practices based on these definitions. A careful rereading of the colonial sources suggests that definitions or discursive representations of ethnicity in themselves did not become more rigid, but the practices and political strategies justified by some of these discourses did. Whereas rigid as well as more nuanced representations can be found during the entire colonial period, the functionality of rigid representations changed dramatically. This research wishes to reconstruct the heterogeneity of ethnic discourses and their (dis)functionality without underestimating the Rwandan contribution to the making and making use of representations in the colonial encounter. Because the praxis of representation never was a matter of one-way traffic, the way in which European and African discourses collapsed deserves our full attention.

Conference papers

- "Identity and Power in Rwanda: The Grand Narrative of Ethnicity Unravelling." Paper presented at the fourth congress of the Association of African Historians (Society, State & Identity in African History), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, May 22-25, 2007.
- "Ethnic Boundaries, Borderlands and Symbolic Resources in Colonial Rwanda." Paper presented at the bi-annual BVA colloquium (Borderlands and Frontiers in Africa), Tervuren, Belgium, November 23th, 2007.
- "Revisiting the Colonial Encounter: Physical Stereotypes and the Representation of Ethnicity in Rwanda." Paper presented at the N.W. Posthumus Instituut Conference, Groningen, the Netherlands, May 22-23, 2008.