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# Monogamy vs. Polygyny in Rwanda:

## Round 1 - The White Fathers

## Round 2 - The 1994 Genocide

*Clea Koff*

### Introduction

The symbiotic relationship between European Christian missionaries and European colonizers in East Africa is well-documented (Opoku 1985:513; Uzuoku 1996:29). However, the colonial history of Rwanda reveals a collaboration between French Roman Catholic missionaries and the coexistent Belgian administration that ensured a profound transformation, not only of indigenous religious practice, but of the marriage pattern — from polygyny to monogamy. The Catholic missionaries in Rwanda, an order called the White Fathers, imported a model of ideal marriage that was an amalgam of Christian theology and their own Western European culture. The model was not immediately embraced by Rwandans and after twenty years, the White Fathers recognized that traditional methods of evangelism and teaching were not resulting in the conversions they had hoped to gain.

The White Fathers, therefore, turned to a decidedly secular forum for aid in enforcing their ideal marriage model: ordinances, taxes, and coercion through the Belgian administration. Rwanda is a small country by African standards at 26,338 square kilometers. It proved a fertile laboratory for the White Fathers' experiment, as their presence and beliefs were not challenged by proselytizers of other religions — such as Protestants, Muslims, and Quakers — as was the

case in the rest of East Africa. The Catholic hegemony in Rwanda was a unique situation that enabled the missionaries to remain uncompromising over the issue they envisioned to be at the "very heart" of their endeavour: marriage — monogamous and indissoluble (Hastings 1967:163).

This paper examines the dichotomy between the Christian and Rwandan models of marriage, the strategies employed by the White Fathers to impose their beliefs, the Rwandan response to that imposition, and the current marriage pattern in Rwanda.

### Missionaries and Colonizers in East Africa

Intense and sustained Christian missionization of East Africa commenced in Tanzania in the mid-nineteenth century (Shorter 1974a:88). Over the next forty years, the Christians expanded into Uganda and south eastern Kenya. The turn of the century brought the Roman Catholic White Fathers (*Pères Blancs*) from Uganda into Rwanda, building their first mission at Save in 1899, just as the country became part of German East Africa (Dorsey 1994:44). Particularly in the coastal regions, Kenya and Tanzania continued to receive missionaries of different Christian religions, such as Protestant, Quaker, Seventh Day Adventist, the Church of God, and the Church of Scotland, as well as missionaries of Islam. The British

colonial administration, which governed Uganda from 1894 until 1962, fostered competition between the missionaries " ... thereby rendering the religious parties even more rigid and intolerant of each other" (Dorsey 1994:89; Shorter 1974a:89).

Such interreligious competition did not exist in Rwanda, where Belgium gained the German protectorate after World War I. The new Belgian administration was grateful for the White Fathers, who knew both the language of the country, Kinyarwanda, and the lay of the land. Perhaps more importantly, the Belgians believed that the "work of the missions ... are contributing in the most efficacious manner to the progressive civilization of the country" (Belgium 1920:19 in Des Forges 1969:191). In keeping with this amicable relationship, the Belgian administration continued and expanded upon the previous German Resident's ordinance that provided protection for the spread of Christianity and its converts (Des Forges 1969:192). This protection and advocacy enabled the White Fathers to continue building their missions at the rate of approximately one per year in all regions of the country.

## **Christian and Rwandan Marriage Models**

### *Overview*

Ron Lesthaeghe (1989) describes Christianity in Africa as having "little or no tolerance of polygyny or divorce ... nor ... bridewealth, postpartum abstinence, or widow-inheritance ... In contrast ... it propagated the notions of premarital chastity, conjugality, and marital fidelity ... with neolocal residence." Although the Old Testament does allow for polygamy when a marriage is infertile, "there is no doubt that monogamy, and not polygamy, is the Christian ideal."

The New Testament adds another dimension with the indissolubility of marriage (Shorter 1974b:174-5).

The pre-colonial Rwandan ideal marriage and family model is a study in contrast from the Christian model: leviratic marriages were commonplace, polygyny was the ideal structure, separation or divorce of spouses was allowed if necessary, bridewealth was universal and was followed by patrilineal inheritance, and residence was predominantly patrilocal (Maquet 1962:69-74). Jacques Maquet (1962) describes Rwanda as a "polygynous society" because it was the ideal structure and was achieved by 30 percent of the population. The largest family structure reported consisted of four wives, with two and three wives appearing more often. Wives were managers of a husband's multiple homesteads if he herded many cattle, or they would assist in cultivating land. In addition, polygynous unions facilitated social cohesion between chiefs and their extended family (Maquet 1962:72-3).

### *Mate choice rules*

Mate choice rules are explicit within Christian teachings and primarily consist of incest prohibitions that include "all lineal ascendants and descendants of the spouse, and collateral relatives to the second degree (brother, sister, first cousin, aunt, uncle)"<sup>1</sup> (Shorter 1974b:161). Although East African societies also maintained incest prohibitions, this last rule excluded leviratic marriages, a common practice in East Africa, in which the widow of a deceased man became the wife of one of his brothers, as opposed to remarrying outside of her husband's lineage or not remarrying. Lesthaeghe (1989:22) contextualizes the practice of the levirate in the African conception of marriage: "A marriage in the African context is not a contract between two

individuals, but a *definitive* transfer of the rights *in uxorem* and *in gentricem* from one lineage or kinship group to another ... [it] implies that a woman who is young enough to continue childbearing and/or work in the fields will remain with the clan of the deceased husband ... [in] the form of widow-inheritance."

Marcel d'Hertefelt (1962)<sup>2</sup> provides details of the marriage transaction in pre-colonial Rwanda: the father of a young man chose a wife for his son and negotiated with the woman's family for an engagement. In contrast, Christian marriage is based upon consent between the couple; Shorter (1974b:182) maintains that "In Church Law marriage begins with an exchange of consent (ratification). This exchange constitutes the beginning of a marriage and the beginning of the mutual administration of the sacrament of matrimony." Mutual consent is bound up with the Christian teaching of social equality between the sexes (Shorter 1974a:73). There was some flexibility in ancient Rwandan marriage, however, in that a couple whose parents disapproved of their marriage could "force" a marriage through cohabitation. Cohabitation created a "de facto marriage" and the parents could agree to regularize the "marriage" through exchange of bridewealth and a ceremony.

### *Bridewealth*

Bridewealth in ancient Rwanda was negotiated ("through long conversations") by the father of the man with the father and lineage relations (*zu*) of the woman. Among the Tutsi, the standard negotiation required the male's father to support his request for an engagement with an earthenware pitcher of "excellent" beer, a hoe encircled with a branch of *momordique*, and *kwaano*, the transfer of one cow.

The cow that is acquired as bridewealth is known as *indongoranyo*, to distinguish it from cows that are inherited or traded (Kimenyi 1989:27). Among the Hutu and the Twa, a pitcher of beer sufficed to introduce the negotiations, but the bridewealth itself varied greatly between regions. Once the bridewealth amount was fixed, it could be delivered at a later date, and often in installment payments.

The Christian church in Africa has attempted in the past to abolish or place a "ceiling limit" on the practice of bridewealth due to the concern that wives could be treated as "chattel" and high bridewealth could limit some individuals' ability to marry (Shorter 1974b:171-2). Yet there were recourses in pre-colonial Rwanda for those fathers who could not afford the standard bridewealth. For example, if a man's father had one cow, he could lend the cow to the woman's father until a calf was born. The calf would then belong to the woman's father. Goats and hoes could also be used to pay bridewealth. If a man was poor, he could work at his future father-in-law's house. Among the Tutsi, some men avoided paying bridewealth altogether, and in this case, the fiancées were known as *umugeni wubuuntu*, "fiancée of friendship" or "fiancée-gift." The fiancée's father and relations also gave gifts to the future husband and his lineage. These counter-gifts consisted of cattle, equipment, provisions, and beer. In some circumstances, the husband received land that he bequeathed to his male descendants. These counter-gifts held almost as much importance as the bridewealth.

### *The Marriage Ceremony*

Between the engagement and the marriage, Tutsi were not obliged to give presents to the woman's relatives. However, the Twa and Hutu sent a

number of pitchers of beer to the parents of the fiancée, as well as her brothers and maternal and paternal uncles. In general, the marriage ceremony took place at night at the fiancé's father's house. The woman went to her future husband's home accompanied by her friends and a number of male and female relatives, including the paternal aunt who played a special role. The fiancée did not walk in the middle of the paths for fear of "being bewitched by contact with an object hidden by sorcerers." The woman went to a hut constructed for the new couple in her fiancé's father's compound. The peak of the nuptial ceremony consisted of the husband, crowned with a wreath of *momordique*, spitting a mixture of herbs and milk onto his wife's face or chest. This ritual took place at midnight, after her male relatives and her future father-in-law discussed spiritual matters, while drinking "considerable quantities of beer."

The Christian church in Africa advocates a long engagement during which the partners are prepared for marriage by a priest, who ascertains that neither individual is already married. The marriage must take place in a church in a manner that "emphasizes marriage and married life and plays down the wedding aspect" (Shorter 1974b:183). Indeed, the Roman Catholic priests in Rwanda "were against night celebrations and even the practice of newly-weds wearing veils in church. Or from the viewpoint of a canon lawyer: 'La prépondérance des interventions des parents et de la famille a fait place à une simple mais sereine déclaration des deux fiancés au curé de la paroisse'" (The preponderance of interventions by parents and family has given way to a simple but serene

declaration by two fiancés to the parish priest) (Linden 1997:149).

#### *Postmarital residence and family types*

Christian marriage is characterized by neolocal residence and the "autonomy of the nuclear family" (Shorter 1974a:73). Neolocal residence also characterized some pre-colonial Rwandan marriages, but the nuclear family was not the only pattern. d'Hertefeldt (1962) distinguishes between three types of family in ancient Rwanda: nuclear, polygynous, and leviratic. The nuclear family was marked by patrilocality among the Hutu and neolocality among the Tutsi. The polygynous family consisted of a husband and several wives, each with her own hut and attic either in a group enclosure or in separate *go's*. The husband did not live on his own, but visited each wife in turn. The co-wives' possessed equal status, although among the Reera, the first-married wife was the most important in the ritual domain. Sororal polygny was not common in ancient Rwanda. All children born in the marriage belonged to their father's lineage, unless bridewealth had not been paid. In which case, the children were *kuri* or *kurin kooba*, meaning they belonged to their mother's lineage.

#### *Divorce*

Divorce in pre-colonial Rwanda was initiated by either the husband or the wife. There were several "socially recognized" reasons for divorce. For the husband, they included a wife's negligence in domestic work and repeated infidelities. For the wife, they included maltreatment, incapacity of the husband to support her, and refusal to cohabit. Divorces were customarily preceded by temporary separations, *kwaahukana*, during which the spouses' relations attempted to mediate between

the two people. Bridewealth was not returned to the husband's family unless children had not been born or the counter-gifts had not been exchanged. Children born to a divorced woman belonged to her lineage, although the genitor could acquire the children in return for payment of a "birth price" or "childwealth".

It is notable that infertility was not a "socially recognized" reason for divorce in pre-colonial Rwanda. The response to infertility was polygyny, regardless of which partner contributed to the infertility. Mbiti in 1969 characterized African marriage as "a duty, religious and ontological ... and if a man has no children or only daughters, he finds another wife so that through her, children (or sons) may be born who would survive him and keep him (with other living dead of the family) in personal immortality" (in Kuria 1987:288). In contrast, Christian marriage must remain monogamous, regardless of the ability of the partners to produce children, and divorce is not an option. Ancient Church Law maintained that a marriage became "indissoluble after the first act of marital intercourse. Consequently, impotence (inability to perform the marital act) was an impediment, and sterility (inability to have children) was not considered an impediment." Although the Vatican Council recognizes the "... very intense desire of the [infertile] couple" to have children, the rule of indissolubility "[implies] that ... the Christian marriage ideal includes a readiness to accept barrenness as well as fruitfulness from [God's] hands" (Shorter 194b:182).

### **Conversion Strategies of the White Fathers**

#### *Recognition of the obstacle*

Given the dichotomy between Christian and East African models of ideal marriage and family life, East

Africans resisted conversion to Christianity<sup>3</sup>. In Rwanda, the White Fathers initially utilized evangelism and teaching as the primary method of gaining converts. They had established at least sixteen missions throughout the country by 1919 where they provided education and the then unknown wage labor, following the instruction of their founder, Cardinal Lavigerie: "To succeed with the Negroes, gross and materialist as they are, spiritual teaching and moral truths will not suffice: tangible and material benefits must be added to them as much as possible ... " (Un Père Blanc 1925:382-3 in Des Forges 1969:179). Despite the possibilities of "material benefits," the final year of transition from German to Belgian rule, 1918, ended with converts numbering only 13,000. The converts consisted of mostly disempowered Hutus attempting to free themselves from oppressive client relationships with Tutsi nobles (Des Forges 1969:194). Even among their converts, the White Fathers found themselves intervening in family affairs to prevent the levirate from taking place after a husband's death (Linden 1977:137).

The White Fathers must have recognized that intervention in individual marriages would not change the pattern of marriage for the whole country, nor did they trust that the conversion of a portion of the proletariat would yield the rest of the country. As Cardinal Lavigerie envisioned, "Christianity will not become universal in a country until it is officially adopted by the chiefs" (Un Père Blanc 1925:386 in Des Forges 1969:179). The obstacle to the conversion of the chiefs was the Mwami (king) Yuhi Musinga. Musinga tolerated Christian presence in Rwanda, particularly as the Belgian administration demanded his cooperation with the White Fathers. However, he refused to convert to Christianity himself and was perceived

by the Belgians as being publicly adulterous. His lower chiefs followed his example and by extension, the Tutsi nobles did. Even more importantly, the Mwami was conceptualized by Rwandans as an agent of Imana, the Supreme Being of the Rwandan religious system. Thus, "conversion to this new religion could be seen as a betrayal of the king" (Des Forges 1969:180). Lavigerie's top-down model could succeed only with the conversion or removal of Mwami Musinga.

### *Collusion with the secular world*

Success for the White Fathers came fifty years after their arrival in Rwanda, amidst an era of Belgian colonial reforms known as *les réformes Voisin*, after the Governor of the Territory of Ruanda-Urundi who initiated the changes. The reforms were primarily administrative, restructuring chiefdoms for greater Belgian control and commencing agricultural development programs (Dorsey 1994:403). However, embedded within the reorganization was a "prerequisite" for access - becoming Christian (Prunier 1995:31). It was through these reforms that the White Fathers succeeded in transforming the marriage pattern of the country. Lavigerie's top-down policy finally had an opportunity to be tested.

In 1931, the Belgian administration instituted a supplementary tax that became known as the Polygamy Tax (Dorsey 1994:51). It entailed an additional payment of 6 to 15 francs per wife for all Africans married polygynously (Des Forges 1969:189). This tax particularly affected Musinga-loyal Tutsi, who had remained polygynous. The Belgian administration facilitated payment of the tax by reducing the tributes traditionally paid to the Mwami (Des Forges 1969:189). The Belgian administration

also subsidized education in Catholic mission schools where the White Fathers not only addressed literacy, but also disseminated their teachings on ideal marriage and family life<sup>4</sup> (Des Forges 1969:180; Dorsey 1994:19). Chiefs in particular were encouraged to become literate and to send their sons to the mission school at Nyanza reserved only for them. However, as Alison Des Forges (1969:195) describes, "From 1926 on, the administrators were less likely to be content with mere cooperativeness or even with literacy; they increasingly expected the Chiefs to be Christian as well."

The culmination of the joint Christian-colonial effort came on November 14, 1931. After years of exiling members of Mwami Musinga's court who refused to convert to Christianity, the Belgian administration deposed the king with the support and assistance of the White Fathers who "participated fully in the planning of the deposition, the Bishop himself being the one to win Mutara's [Musinga's pro-Christian son] consent to succeed to the vacated throne"<sup>5</sup> (Des Forges 1969:193-4). One of the reasons given for Musinga's dethronement was "moral turpitude" (Dorsey 1994: 305). The new king had no such fault and the White Fathers furthered their ideals of marriage and moral life through him: "when the Fathers requested it he [Mutara Rudahigwa] would summon a Tutsi who had taken another wife and publicly admonish him" (Linden 1977:199).

In just four years after the removal of Musinga, 60 percent of the 969 chiefs and subchiefs in Rwanda were literate (none of whom had been able read or write prior to the reforms) (Des Forges 1969:190). All of these men were educated at Nyanza. Correspondingly, over 80 percent of them were Christian (Newbury

1988:155). Lavignerie's prediction of the mechanics of country-wide conversion was realized. The period in Rwanda from 1927 to 1935 saw an enormous conversion to Roman Catholicism by both Tutsi and Hutu, from 36,978 to 202,732 (Des Forges 1969:198). This period is known as *la Tomade* ("the Tomado"); indeed, the Bishop of the White Fathers, Leon-Paul Classe, wrote in 1932: "... A veritable epidemic one would say: no one wants to stay pagan ... everyone wants to be catholic" (Figure 1; Salzman 1997:18).

## Rwandan Response

### *Conversion*

Outside of Mwami Musinga's anti-conversion stance, the initial response to the White Fathers at the turn of the century varied from indifference to chiefs offering their concubines in marriage to the Father Superior. The only conversions arose out of the Hutu underclass<sup>6</sup> (Salzman 1997:18). However, the cumulative weight of *les réformes Voisin* and the crowning of a pro-Christian and monogamous king led to a massive conversion by Rwandans to Christianity. For some, conversion increased their status and led to jobs in the colonial administration<sup>7</sup> (Salzman 1997:19; Taylor 1992:55). For others, it was a strategy that reduced the ever-growing taxes or earned the monetary income necessary to pay the taxes (Des Forges 1969:194; Taylor 1992:59). Some Rwandans converted because they believed that baptism could protect them from disease (Linden 1977:117). The sharp rise in conversions even led the Fathers to ponder the motivation of their new converts: "Their motives are perhaps not the most disinterested, but with the help of God's Grace, they will be turned into good Christians" (Prunier 1995:32). Gerard Prunier (1995:34) describes Catholicism in Rwanda after

Rudahigwa's ascendance to the throne as "... a legitimising factor, a banner, a source of profit, a way of becoming educated, a club, a matrimonial agency, and even at times a religion."

### *Resistance*

Conversion for material reasons was not the only Rwandan response, however. Resistance was manifested in several ways. Early resistance took an interesting form, in that chiefs offered presents to the Church as payment for *not* evangelizing and those who could afford it paid catechists not to teach their children. The concern was the inherent conflict between allegiance to Christianity and to the patrilineal corporate group; "... no children would honour a head of *umuryango* when he died, if they were all Christian" (Linden 1977:116).

Organized resistance came most strikingly in the form of the Nyabingi cult of northern Rwanda. The Nyabingi cult was multi-ethnic and multi-regional; its adherents lived in Uganda and northwestern Tanzania, and it surfaced in southern and central Rwanda under the name *Ryangombe* or *Kubandwa* (Taylor 1992:56). The cult is named for the goddess of fertility, health, and prosperity, and its followers believed that Nyabingi's power, among other capabilities, could melt European bullets (Opoku 1985:516). Both the German and Belgian administrations had difficulty in suppressing the cult. Before it was sent completely underground in 1934, the cult protested against missionaries and colonialists several times.

By 1941, a decade after *la Tomade*, there was a backlash by converts who did not feel rewarded by either the colonial administration or the White Fathers. Some baptized Christian Tutsi took second wives. Catholics in search of work were drawn



away from mission stations and it became possible for them to maintain "temporary liaisons with women" (Linden 1977:208).

## **Rwanda Today**

### *Pre- versus post-genocide*

Recent, but pre-genocide, statistics tally Catholics in Rwanda as 85 percent of the population, although respect for Imana is still strong<sup>8</sup> (Waller 1993:62). A 1950 United Nations report states that the Polygamy Tax was collected from 10 percent of the population (Dorsey 1994:337). The most recent estimates of polygynous unions in East Africa in general range from 15 to 35 percent and indicate that prior to the 1994 genocide, Rwanda exhibited the lowest level of polygyny in that region, with a polygyny ratio of 1.1 out of a possible 1.3+<sup>9</sup> (Figure 2, Lesthaeghe et al. 1989:270).

A post-genocide survey of married people, however, has shown a resurgence in polygyny almost to the level achieved prior to colonialism: 23 percent of married women and 17 percent of married men reported living in polygynous households (McKinley 1998). The resurgence in polygyny is attributed to two consequences of the genocide: a sex ratio imbalance and the deaths of many children. The genocide resulted in a population in which more than a third of all households are headed by women, many of whom are widows whose husbands were killed during the genocide. As Jeff Drumtra (1998) states, "The feminization of the population is one of the direct consequences of the genocide and massacres ... only 84 males exist per 100 females [in all age groups] .... " Both widows and single people that survived the genocide are attempting to "replace" either children or family members lost to the genocide. The sex ratio imbalance is significant,

particularly among people between the ages of 24 and 29 years where the ratio is 67 males for every 100 females (Drumtra 1998). This imbalance has led to polygyny in some communes and to unmarried women sharing a single male in others (McKinley 1998).

In addition, it is not clear if the Catholic church has "lost" followers since the genocide. It is possible that syncretic churches, perhaps from neighboring countries such as Tanzania, have taken the opportunity to create a more significant presence in Rwanda since the genocide and have welcomed those individuals who are living in a polygynous household. Roman Catholic participation in the genocide is also well-documented (AP 1998; Brittain 1998); priests allowed their churches to be used during the genocide as collection sites for those who would be killed, and some priests even joined in the killing of their own parishioners. The effect that this has had on the religious beliefs of surviving Rwandans, Catholic or otherwise, is unknown.

## **Discussion**

I would argue that the dichotomy in pre-genocide levels of polygyny between Rwanda and the rest of East Africa is the legacy of the colonial-era dominance of the White Fathers. Their unique reign enabled them to stunt the growth of the myriad of independent and syncretic churches that have developed in East Africa (Taylor 1992:62). These institutions marry traditional African religious beliefs with Christian dogma. A number of syncretic churches, such as the African National Church of Tanzania, were formed expressly to incorporate Africans who refused the monogamy rule or Christians who transgressed, took multiple wives, and were subsequently banished from the Catholic church

(Atiando-Odhiambo 1985:655). Syncretic churches must account in part for the greater levels of polygyny reported for East Africa than in Rwanda itself prior to 1994.

In addition, the Catholic Church in Rwanda weathered the storm of independence and the Church remained the genitor of primary and secondary education (Taylor 1992:62). In other parts of East Africa, post-independence reforms brought education within the control of the new governments (Shorter 1974a:73). Just as the White Fathers could not resist "secretly" teaching religion at their schools even when Mwami Musinga forbade it in the early days. One may predict that such lessons continued after independence (Des Forges 1969:180).

Lastly, I would argue that the White Fathers' introduction of a monetary economy, and the colonial regularization of that economy, led to the inability of many Rwandans to afford polygyny. Christopher Taylor (1992:51) describes this development as a "passage from a gift economy to a commodity economy." Traditional objects of bridewealth, such as hoes and cattle, became valuable as cash amongst mission stations where traders gathered; even the White Fathers noted a "... doubling and even trebling of bride price in the marriages at which they officiated ... more hoes were needed to effect transfer of genitricial rights from one lineage to another ... " (Linden 1977:103). The mission stations were the only source of wage labour prior to the colonial imposition, and to work there one had to convert to Catholicism. It is likely that Rwandans recognized that in order to afford bridewealth or counter-gifts, working at a mission station was one of the few options available to accomplish a good marriage. Even as recently as 1992, the priests of the Nyabingi cult

recognized the prohibitive cost of bridewealth, and provided wives for their followers at little or no bridewealth<sup>10</sup> (Taylor 1992:80). Between the Polygamy Tax and the rising cost of bridewealth, however, monogamy was the default marriage pattern for the majority of the population.

## Conclusion

The transformation in Rwandan marriage patterns between the arrival of the White Fathers in 1899 to 1994 is a clear shift from polygyny to monogamy. As Ian Linden (1977) states, the White Fathers were not "uniformly hostile to Rwandan social institutions; it was only in the area of marriage that they had shown themselves determined to impose quite new patterns of behaviour." This determination led the Catholics to collude with the colonial administration in order to ensure that the transformation of the society be a lasting event and not be overturned by resistance cults or Rwandan independence.

It is unlikely, however, that the missionaries could have predicted the genocide of April to June 1994. In the space of those two months, it is estimated that 800,000 to a million people were killed, out of a population of seven million. Since that time, hundreds of thousands more have been either jailed or killed. The consequences of the genocide have been many fold; in the realm of family structure and social mores, deaths of entire families and social upheaval in the form of refugee existence have resulted in the rapid "[break] down [of] social taboos ... as people whose families have been scattered or killed try to ... find new companionship and start new families" (McKinley 1998). It is clear that in order to have the children so highly valued in Rwanda, an

increasing number of men and women are willing to marry polygynously and indeed, are constrained by circumstance. It is not clear how the Catholic church may bring about monogamy among Rwandans faced with a significant sex ratio imbalance, particularly as the new government may not be as open to collusion as the previous one, and certainly not as willing as the colonial administrations.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Shorter (1974b:161) adds that "the Church is conscious of being able to dispense from the prohibition in all cases save that of lineal consanguine ascendants and descendants in contiguous generations, and brothers and sisters. She regards this as a divine law which cannot be dispensed from...All other prohibitions are regarded as ecclesiastical laws which can be dispensed from." It is not documented, however, that the Church in Rwanda chose to "dispense from" any ecclesiastical laws during the colonial era.

<sup>2</sup>The following section on ancient Rwandan marriage customs is based upon d'Hertefeldt (1962) unless otherwise noted. All d'Hertefeldt (1962) is my translation.

<sup>3</sup>In Nigeria, élite men recognized some virtues of Christianity but refused the monogamy/indissolubility clause on the grounds of its conflict with post-partum abstinence, the problem it creates for widows who cannot remarry, and the fact that it leaves some women unmarried, thereby stripping them of their "natural calling" (Mann 1994:173).

<sup>4</sup>The White Fathers paid parents who sent their children to the mission school even prior to the Belgian reforms (Des Forges 1969:181).

<sup>5</sup>Mutara III Rudahigwa's succession to the throne did not follow Rwandan traditions of succession and "the *abiru* royal ritualists were not even present when Mutara was formally proclaimed King. So for the people he was always to remain, in a way, *Mwami w'abazungu*, 'the King of the Whites'" (Prunier 1995:31).

<sup>6</sup>It was a familiar tactic to form marriage alliances with powerful and troublesome local leaders ... " (Linden 1977:70).

<sup>7</sup>In Nigeria, women were drawn to Christian monogamous marriage as a mark of élite status and it enabled them and their children to have access to a conjugal estate (Mann 1994:172).

<sup>8</sup>Other sources describe Rwanda as 57 percent Catholic (Dorsey 1994:349). It is not clear which is the correct count.

<sup>9</sup>Polygyny ratio is defined by Lesthaeghe et al (1989) as the proportion of currently married females to currently married males.

<sup>10</sup>The priests can provide wives through the requirement that a follower give his daughter as a "gift" to the priest if the follower or the daughter is suffering from a misfortune (Taylor 1992:80).

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APPENDIX

TOTAL NUMBER OF ROMAN CATHOLICS  
IN RUANDA

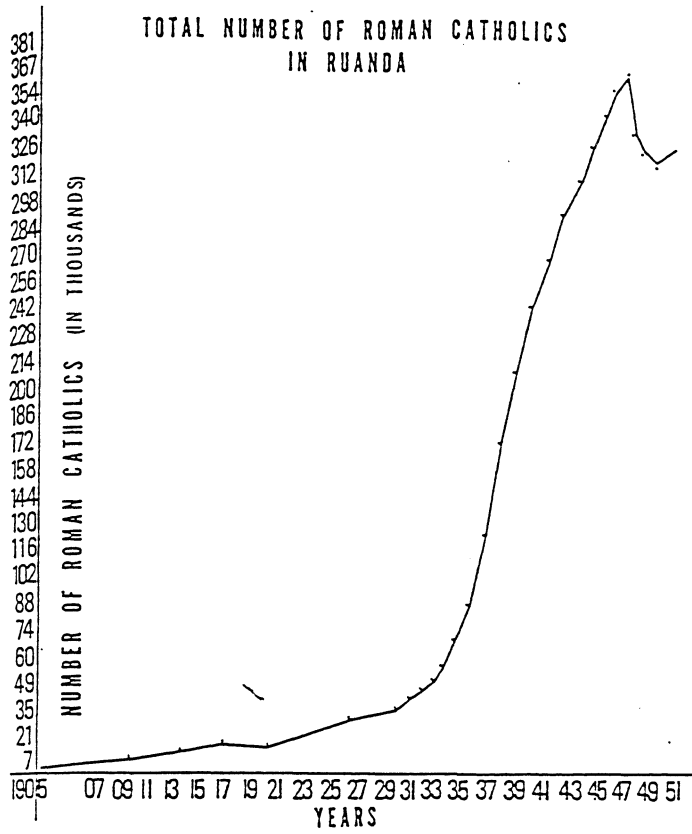
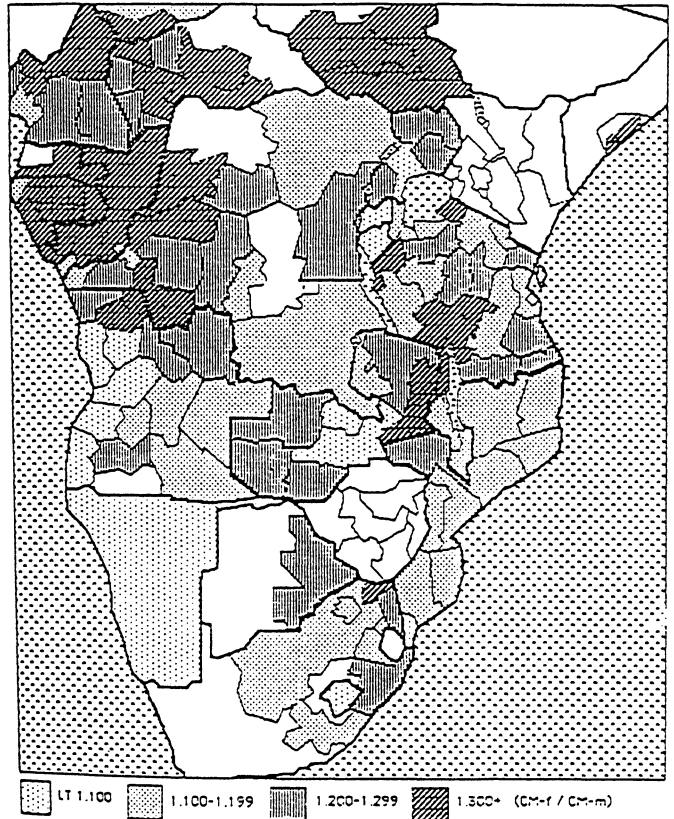


Figure 1: from Des Forges 1969:200.



Map 6.6b. Polygyny Ratio; Latest Available Data

Figure 2: from Lesthaeghe et al. 1989:279.