

Opinions

Rwanda: Despicable Democratic Republicanism

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Victoire Ingabire and Theodore Sindikubwabo.

Rwandan Genocide ideologues have a long history of manipulating terms like “republican” and “democracy” to mask their genocidal agendas. By co-opting these terms, they attempt to present themselves as advocates of legitimate political ideals while promoting ethnic hatred and violence.

This tactic of using democratic and republican language to disguise extremist goals can be traced back—few years before independence and has continued to evolve to the present day. Unsuspecting foreigners have joined them by branding Rwanda’s leadership

a dictatorship without knowing its real meaning and the origin.

On June 17, 1994 Rwanda’s genocidaires’ president, Theodore Sindikubwabo—was in Kinshasa as the guest of the press club of the Zairean section of the International Union of French-speaking Journalists (UIJPLF).

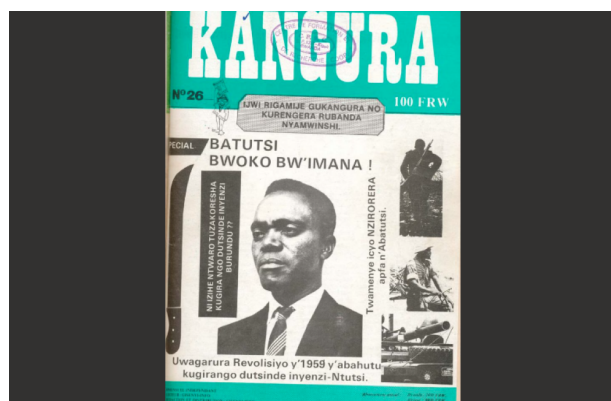
Noticeably, he used the opportunity to deny the genocide against the Tutsi committed by his government. He christened the hecatomb as “activism” of the Rwandan militia as a “resistance movement by the youth and the whole population against foreign aggression”.

Clarifying the reason that led “the Rwandan youth to defend themselves”, the Sindikubwabo alluded to a “secret document” by rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) calling for “the demolition of broad-based institutions to install the RPF, and the elimination of all republicans.” Sindikubwabo knew what he was talking about. Several weeks into the genocide — May 25, 1994 his government issued a Prime Minister’s Civil Defence Directive. “Close cooperation between territorial administration

authorities and political parties that uphold republican and democratic ideals is a prerequisite for the recruitment of members of resistance groups and the organisation and training of such groups.” (para.5)

MDR-PARMEHUTU and the Ideological Foundations

The deliberate use of terms like “democratic” and “republican” by Hutu extremists began in 1959 with the establishment of MDR-PARMEHUTU (Mouvement Démocratique Républicain – Parti du Mouvement de l’Emancipation Hutu) under the leadership of Gregory Kayibanda. The inclusion of “Democratic” and “Republican” in its name was a strategic effort to appeal to popular sentiments of liberation and anti-monarchism.



The choice of those two words suggested a political movement rooted in democratic

principles and republican governance. However, in practice, MDR-PARMEHUTU was committed to ethnic exclusivism and the elimination of Tutsi influence in Rwanda.

The “republic” envisioned by the MDR-PARMEHUTU was not a pluralistic state but a Hutu ethno-nationalist regime. The underlying agenda was to frame the Hutu-Tutsi conflict as a battle for “republicanism” and “democracy,” wherein the true “republic” could only be realized by removing Tutsis from positions of influence and power.

In the early 1990s, as Rwanda entered a period of political liberalization, Hutu extremists once again manipulated these terms. On April 28, 1991, the ruling party MRND (Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement) underwent a rebranding to change the connotations of “R” from “Revolutionary” to “Republican” and “another “D” for “Democracy.” was added before “Development”, the acronym remained MRND.

This shift was a strategic move to appear more aligned with democratic ideals during a time of international pressure for democratization. Yet, this was merely a thin covering; the true purpose was to continue promoting Hutu hegemony under the guise of republicanism and democracy.

In November 1990, pro-government demonstrators in Butare were heard chanting: “Let slavery, servitude and discord be finished forever!” “We condemn the exploitation and servitude of the people!” “Long live the republic! Down with the monarchy!” “No more feudalism! No more Kalinga!” [the drum that symbolized the power of the ruler]. Almost the same message in the 2020s

from Rwandans in Belgium and the USA.

In 1992, the formation of the CDR (Coalition for the Defence of the Republic) marked a turning point in the radicalization of Hutu Power ideology. The CDR emerged as an ultranationalist party that declared the need to "defend the republic" against an existential threat posed by the Tutsi. The party saw the MRND's rebranding as insufficiently radical and pushed for more extreme measures to address the so-called "Tutsi problem."

The CDR Statute dated February 18, 1992—describes their flag colours red, black and yellow: the colour red signifying the 'blood spilled' for the 1959 revolution and for the defence of democracy and the Republic, the colour black signifying the Republic, confirmed by referendum in 1961 as an irrevocable expression of the will of the people, and the yellow colour representing the sun, meaning the victory that had risen over feudalism and monarchism, with the circle representing the unity of the popular masses.

The CDR framed its genocidal rhetoric as a necessary defense of democracy and republicanism, positioning itself as the true protector of a "Hutu Republic." Here, "democracy" was redefined to mean majority rule—where the Hutu majority would have the exclusive right to govern and the right to exclude or exterminate the Tutsi minority to preserve the "republic."

For the CDR and its supporters, "defending the republic" meant creating a Hutu-only state. In this distorted view, genocide against the Tutsi was framed as a democratic undertaking, where the majority Hutu population would be "liberated" and guaranteed their

rightful political dominance. This manipulation of the concept of democracy as majority rule became a rationale for committing genocide, casting mass murder as an expression of popular sovereignty.

RDR and the rebranding of genocidal ideology

After the 1994 genocide, extremist ideology persisted among Hutu extremists who fled to neighboring countries like Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). In April 1995, in the refugee camps of Zaire, the RDR (Rassemblement pour le Retour des Réfugiés et la Démocratie au Rwanda) was born.

Here, "Democracy" became a code word for the return of *genocidaires*—those who perpetrated the genocide—to power in Rwanda, under the guise of majority rule. The RDR's interpretation of "democracy" was not about inclusivity or justice but about restoring Hutu extremists to political power, using the displaced refugee population as a political tool to achieve this end.

In 2000, when Ingabire Victoire took leadership of the RDR, she emphasized the terms "Republican" and "Democracy" in the party's acronym, restoring the ideological lineage with the original Hutu Power movements like MDR-PARMEHUTU and CDR.

This rebranding aimed to evoke a sense of continuity and acceptability, implying that the RDR's goals were in line with so-called democratic and republican values. In reality, the movement sought to maintain the ex-

clusivist and genocidal DNA of its predecessors, where "republican" meant a Hutu-only state, and "democracy" meant the return of those who committed genocide to positions of power.

This ideological manipulation continues to the present day. In 2024, Christine Coleman, a virulent extremist based in the United States, established 'Movement for the Republic and Democracy (MRD)'. In this new political entity, "Republicanism" and "Democracy" are central themes of its political philosophy, but clearly a 1959 MDR with letters "D" and "R" changing positions.

Coleman's party declares: "When the Kagame's RPF regime took power on July 4, 1994, the democratic values that led our people (RUBANDA) through the Revolution of 1959 and Independence of 1962 were abolished. Slowly, Kagame reinstated the return of the feudal-monarchical regime." Their article of faith in capital letters is— "THIS IS OUR 1959 MOMENT."

To better understand what the reference to 1959 means, is what was published on the front cover of Kangura No. 26 of November 1991. In a black box on the left of the cover, the word "SPECIAL" is followed by the headline text: "THE BATUTSI, GOD'S RACE!" Under this title is an image of the former President of Rwanda, Grégoire Kayibanda, in the centre and occupying most of the cover.

Under the picture of President Kayibanda is the text: "How about re-launching the 1959 Bahutu revolution so that we can conquer the Inyenzi-Ntutsi." Just left of the picture of Kayibanda, is a black box with verti-

cal text reading "WHAT WEAPONS SHALL WE USE TO CONQUER THE INYENZI ONCE AND FOR ALL??"

On the left of this black shaded box is a drawing of a machete. Don't mind what is on the right of the picture of Kayibanda. The machete symbolized what was used in 1959 and later 1991-4 to crush the Tutsi.

For her and other Hutu Power ideologues like Belgium-based Emmanuel Neretse, Rwanda can never be a republic as long as a Tutsi, such as Kagame, is President. In their distorted view, a true republic and democracy can only exist in Rwanda when Tutsis are stripped of full rights as human beings, and Hutu power is restored as the supreme authority.

In his 2021 book 'Ils ont tué la République rwandaise: histoire d'un retour à la féodalité Tutsi' meaning 'They killed the Rwandan Republic-History of a Return to Tutsi Feudalism'. Coleman's MRD flag colors and those on the cover of Neretse's book are the same. It is yellow, red and green like the one of post-independence flag colours. A political identity to watch-out.

The threat of misconstruing extremist language

These examples show how Hutu extremists have repeatedly used terms like "republican" and "democracy" to mask their genocidal agenda. For unsuspecting observers, these terms might appear to reflect legitimate political ideologies; however, they are deeply

rooted in a history of ethnic hatred and exclusion. Recognizing this coded language is crucial for understanding the true nature of these movements.

Underneath the seemingly democratic rhetoric lies a commitment to Hutu supremacy, a rejection of Tutsi rights, and an agenda that seeks to reverse Rwanda's progress towards unity and reconciliation. Each iteration—whether in the creation of MDR-PARMEHUTU in 1959, the rebranding of MRND in the 1990s, the rise of the CDR, or the later formation of RDR in exile—has repurposed these words to normalize exclusionary and genocidal ideologies. Today, figures like Ingabire Victoire and

Christine Coleman continue to use these terms to mask extremist views, making it crucial to understand their historical and ideological underpinnings.

The international community and Rwandans alike must be vigilant against these deceptive narratives that co-opt democratic ideals to justify hate and exclusion. True democracy and republicanism in Rwanda—and anywhere—are built on inclusivity, equality, and justice, not on the denial of humanity to others. We must strip away these deceptive labels and expose them for what they are—safety measures for the preservation of a dangerous ideology that seeks to rewrite history and incite further hatred and violence.