Violence, the Cross and Social Transformation: Toward a Critical Appropriation of a Theology of Non-Violence for an African Context

By
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Abstract

The Cross is without doubt the most important symbol within the Christian religious tradition because of its salvific import. For Christians it is ultimately a symbol of divine forgiveness and reconciliation. Therefore it symbolizes hope and new life. Yet, for others the Cross can be a symbol of violence, oppression and abuse. While it is not the focus of this thesis to enter into the debate as to whether the traditional models of atonement implicate God in violence, this thesis emphasizes that the violence of the Cross is not divine violence but human violence and that God in Jesus Christ absorbed this human violence and transformed it for the salvation of the world.

The thesis demonstrates this by exploring some contemporary interpretations of the theology of atonement. Specifically, it explores key thoughts of René Girard (1923-), Raymund Schwager (1935-2004) and Miroslav Volf (1956-) and argues that there are relevant insights that can be drawn from some contemporary interpretations of the atonement and that these insights constitute a legitimate theological and hermeneutical perspective for understanding and responding to the phenomenon of violent conflicts in contemporary Africa. More concretely, the thesis brings the relevant insights drawn from our thinkers to bear not just on conflicts in Africa in general but on two contemporary
ethnic conflicts—the Hutu-Tutsi in Rwanda and the Konkomba-Nanumba in the Northern Region of Ghana.

As an alternative to ethnic rivalry and conflict, this thesis, inspired by the insights of these thinkers, promotes a theology of non-violence as the basis for reconciliation, forgiveness and healing between ethnic groups that suffer from ethnic violence. A theology of nonviolence that takes seriously the theological category of embrace and its practical implications is a significant alternative to the evil of hegemonic centrality and the practice of exclusion.
Dedication

To all people of goodwill who work for peace and for the eradication of violence in our world
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank God for his providence and for his unmerited graces without which it would have been impossible to complete this work. I am greatly indebted to my former bishop, Archbishop Gregory E. Kpiebaya, now Archbishop Emeritus of Tamale, Ghana. He did not only decide to send me for further studies but also worked around the clock to make it a reality. I thank my present bishop, Archbishop Philip Naameh for his support and encouragement.

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Fensham and Prof. Thomas Reynolds for their immense contributions. I am grateful to Dorothy Cummings for proofreading the work.
## Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPP</td>
<td>Convention Peoples Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>FLAM</td>
<td>Force de Liberation Africaine de Mauritanians</td>
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<td>GNP</td>
<td>Gross National Product</td>
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<td>HRW</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
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<td>KOYA</td>
<td>Konkomba Youth Association</td>
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<td>NLM</td>
<td>National Liberation Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>OAU</td>
<td>Organization of African Unity</td>
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<tr>
<td>PARMEHUTU</td>
<td>Parti du Mouvement de l’Emancipation Hutu</td>
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<tr>
<td>RPF</td>
<td>Rwandan Patriotic Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>Togoland Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNAR</td>
<td>Union National Rwandais</td>
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Introduction

One of the disturbing if not distressful phenomena in contemporary Africa is the reality of violent conflicts. Since the time of decolonization most African countries have gone through different forms of violent conflicts including ethnic conflicts. Over the years the hope that Africa would witness a diminution in the number of violent conflicts especially ethnic conflicts has been dashed as we continue to witness the eruption of violent conflicts on the continent. Today, in many African countries and contrary to the prediction of modernization theorists, ethnic sentiments have flourished “becoming more politicized and intensely conflictual.”

Ethnic conflicts like other violent conflicts have consequences. Violent conflicts, “cause not only casualties and refugees but contribute vastly to the spread of disease, malnutrition and starvation, social and economic decline and moral deterioration…”

Waves of conflict including ethnic conflicts across the African continent continue to be a drain on Africa’s scarce resources and a threat to peace, stability and development and the carnage that usually accompanies these conflicts leaves much to be desired.

For example, the horror that accompanied the 1994 Rwandan genocide (6 April-14 June), can never be overstated. In the capital, Kigali alone, thousands of people were killed within such short time that the outbreak of infectious diseases was feared. A group had to be organized to pick up the dead for burial. Already by the middle of May, about

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1 Patrick Chabal, “Violence, Power and Rationality: A Political Analysis of Conflict in Contemporary Africa,” in Is Violence inevitable in Africa? Theories of Conflict and Approaches to Conflict Prevention, eds. Patrick Chabal, Ulf Engel and Maria-Gentili (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 4

60,000 bodies were collected and buried in mass graves. Meanwhile Lake Victoria suffered from high levels of pollution because 40,000 bodies had been thrown into it.\(^3\) Because the majority of the killers used machetes, the killing was often long drawn out and brutal. Victims with financial means, often paid their killers for a quick death, perhaps by gun. The emotional and psychological pain was even greater for families of mixed marriages as some Hutu witnessed the murder of their loved ones before their very eyes. By the time the organizers of the genocide were militarily weakened and pressured by the intentional community to end the genocide, “they had murdered about three-quarters of the Tutsi population…”\(^4\) In the same year that Rwanda suffered from a genocide, an ethnic conflict erupted in the Northern Region of Ghana between the Konkomba and the Nanumba with devastating consequences although fortunately on a smaller scale.

Given the reality of violent conflicts in contemporary Africa with their unspeakable negative consequences, the question arising concerns the relevance of theological discourse in this context. As we will see in due course, distorted theologies such as the Hamitic Hypothesis have been co-opted and have played a negative role in ethnic conflict and violence on the continent. However, can a theology of atonement function positively as a resource to help interpret and respond to such an unstable and violent context? The traditional models of atonement do not seem to provide sufficient resources for dealing with the African context under consideration mainly because they have focused almost exclusively on the forgiveness of individual sin as the core of


atoning theology. Fortunately, some contemporary interpretations of the doctrine of the atonement do provide resources that can constitute a theological and a hermeneutical perspective for responding to the context in question.

For African Christians, an important contribution that Christian theology can make to the healing of ethnic conflicts in Africa hinges on the interpretation of the redemptive aspects of the Cross, particularly the emphases on reconciliation and the amelioration of ethnic rivalries that lead to violence. Recent developments in Christian interpretations by René Girard (1923-) and others along these lines have the potential to make a significant contribution in these areas.

One vital problem in contemporary society which Girard has raised and addressed concerns the phenomenon of violence and how this is connected with interpersonal relations. For Girard, what poses the greatest anthropological problems of our time concerns the social relationships among people in human society. Contrary to the idea of the social contract upheld by Jean Jacques Rousseau, which for Girard, is a form of naïve humanism that idealises human reason and will, Girard maintains that it is not self evident that human beings are peaceful and rational by nature. By contrast, Girard does an analysis of the problem of human aggression and violence from different sources including European literary works, ethnology and biblical revelation and comes to the conclusion that the phenomenon of violence has been largely due to mimetic desire.

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5 I want to state from the outset that I would not be making an argument in the thesis in respect of this assertion because it is outside of our primary concern. Suffice it to say that while the traditional models such as the Christus Victor model, the satisfaction model, the moral influence model and the incarnational model, do well in focusing on sin and human salvation, they are less concerned with the question of violence. In fact some contemporary contextual theologies of atonement such as black theology, feminist theology and womanist theology have been critical of the traditional models of atonement. Again, this thesis will not be directly concerned with these criticisms.

Mimetic desire inevitably leads to rivalry, conflict and violence in human society. This important anthropological discovery by Girard was the inspiration for his anthropological interpretation of the Cross. While Girard’s anthropology of desire crystallizes inter-tribal rivalry and conflict in the African context, his anthropological interpretation of the Cross which leads him to propose Jesus as a model of positive mimesis is relevant also in responding to ethnic rivalries and conflicts.

In his *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*, Raymund Schwager (1935-2004), inspired by Girard’s anthropology of desire and the violent scapegoat mechanism that results from this anthropology, reconstructs the life of Jesus including his public life, his passion, death and resurrection from the perspective of the Girardian mimetic theory. In this reconstruction, Schwager interprets the Cross within the broader framework of Jesus’ inauguration of God’s kingdom and argues that the core message of this kingdom is God’s act of turning towards God’s enemies-sinners to whom God offers forgiveness not as a condition for conversion but as a response to the offer of grace. From this perspective, Schwager arrives at an interpretation of the Cross both as a symbol of divine forgiveness and as a nonviolent divine response that transformed not only the evil of violence into good but the very agents of violence in the drama of salvation.

Like Schwager, Miroslav Volf (1956- ) whose interpretation of the Cross is situated within the broader framework of God’s dealings with humanity reveals a nonviolent God. For Volf, “the cross is the giving up of God’s self in order not to give up

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on humanity; it is the consequence of God’s desire to break the power of human enmity without violence and receive human beings into divine communion."⁹ The Cross externalizes as it were that perfect communion that properly belongs to the Triune God who does not abandon sinful humanity but receives it into divine communion through atonement. Therefore, Volf argues that God’s embrace of all people through the Cross should be replicated in human society. Volf therefore proposes the metaphor of embrace as a theological category and as an alternative to the will and the practice of exclusion. Sin is exclusion and redemption is embrace. By placing the problem of identity and otherness at the centre of theological reflection and by relating it to social issues, Volf does not only demonstrate that identity and otherness is the broader context within which ethnic and cultural conflicts can be understood, he also demonstrates that embrace is possible in the midst of differences. There is a constructive use of differences that does not entail the negation of the other.

In the light of the above, this thesis draws upon key aspects of the thought of Girard, Schwager and Volf in order to demonstrate that there are relevant insights from some contemporary interpretations of the atonement that can help interpret and respond to the phenomenon of violent ethnic conflicts in Africa. While it might seem ambitious in its hope, the emphasis will be on a positive Christian contribution and response to this context.

Methodology

The methodology that I will employ will essentially be descriptive, interpretative and analytic. This thesis will explore Girard’s, Schwager’s and Volf’s interpretation of the atonement in view of establishing the relevant theological and hermeneutical framework for this project. An exploration of Girard’s anthropology of desire will be part of this framework.

Since the context of our study is contemporary Africa’s experience of violent ethnic conflicts, the study will involve a critical analysis of the social, economic, political, and cultural factors responsible for conflicts. In doing so, we shall examine to what extent Africa’s colonial past is related to contemporary conflicts in Africa. A summative review of this historical and cultural context will help provide a basis for understanding and responding to ethnic conflicts in Africa.

Scope and Content

This study is primarily concerned with how insights drawn from Girard, Schwager and Volf can shed light on the phenomenon of ethnic conflicts in Africa as well as contribute to the healing of ethnic rivalry and conflict. The thesis also demonstrates that the insights drawn from our three thinkers support a theology of nonviolence and that a theology of nonviolence is not only relevant for the African context but also serves as an alternative to the misappropriation of theology as exemplified in the Hamitic hypothesis, a hypothesis as we will see that contributed to the Rwandan genocide.

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This thesis integrates reflections from the Second African Synod (4th to 25th of October 2009) with insights from our thinkers. By reflecting on how the Church in Africa as salt of the earth and light of the World (Mt 5: 13, 14) can be of service to reconciliation, justice and peace, the Fathers of the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Africa, have demonstrated the importance that the Church in Africa attaches to the issues of reconciliation, justice and peace given the numerous violent conflicts that Africa still suffers from today.

Chapter 1 establishes the general context of our study by exploring the phenomena of violence and conflict in Africa. Because ethnicity is an important identity category in the African context, the chapter highlights three basic views of ethnic identity: the primordialist, the instrumentalist and the constructivist with a view to understanding how ethnic identity and ethnic identification can be a source of ethnic conflict especially when placed within a political framework. The chapter also delineates three important theories that are significantly related to ethnic conflicts in contemporary Africa. These include: ethnic identity theory, competition theory and colonial legacy theory.

Chapter 2 is a more specific context of our study as it focuses on two contemporary ethnic conflicts-the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict in Rwanda and the Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict in the Northern Region of Ghana. These two ethnic conflicts are not only concrete examples of violence in Africa, they are also a concrete demonstration of how the theories delineated in chapter 1 played out in a specific and more focused context. The chapter also examines the Hamitic hypothesis and how, as a mistaken theology, it contributed to the Rwandan genocide.
Chapter 3 summarizes Girard’s hermeneutic of desire with a focus on how it leads to rivalry, conflict and violence and demonstrates how a culture built on violence is self-destructive. It demonstrates a gradual and progressive desacralization of violence in the Judeo-Christian tradition which reaches its climax in the Paschal Mystery where the Cross unmasks human violence and the scapegoat mechanism. Schwager’s engagement with Girard provides a further theological foundation within which both thinkers propose a nonviolent and nonvindictive God with implications for the context of this study. Chapter three therefore constitutes a hermeneutical and a theological framework that would be appropriated in the final chapter.

Chapter 4 takes this hermeneutical and theological framework further by highlighting Volf’s theological engagement with the problem of identity and otherness as the proper context for understanding ethnic and cultural conflicts. The chapter also highlights insights from Volf’s theology of the Cross and Trinitarian theology, insights that can help respond to the African context in question.

Chapter 5 is basically concerned with appropriation and application building upon the previous chapters. It brings the relevant insights from the previous chapters especially those established in chapters 3 and 4 respectively, to bear on this work of appropriation. It focuses on the implications of the theology of Girard, Schwager and Volf in the African context. Specifically, how do the insights drawn from these thinkers, shed light on the phenomenon of ethnic conflicts in Africa but especially on the two concrete examples discussed in chapter 2? More importantly, how can their insights contribute to the healing and amelioration of ethnic rivalry and conflict? In light of this, the chapter discusses reconciliation and healing through forgiveness as an important means to
resolving ethnic conflicts in Africa with a theology of nonviolence as its basis. In doing so, it integrates reflections from the Second African Synod and the post-apartheid South African experience with the thoughts of our thinkers. It also discusses social transformation as an integral part of the search for a nonviolent and peaceful society.

The general conclusion will once again highlight the thesis statement or the main question that was raised at the beginning of the thesis and demonstrate how this has come through in this thesis. That is, the conclusion will highlight briefly how the thesis statement has been applied to the context in question from the point of view of interpretation and response. It would indicate possible areas that could be explored in the future.

**Parameters of the Study**

It is important to state clearly from the outset what this thesis will not be doing. First, because the focus is on some contemporary interpretations of the atonement and their relevance for a specific problem in contemporary Africa, this thesis will not be discussing the different models of atonement theology with the view to engaging the debate as to whether they implicate God in violence or not. It will however show its awareness of the problem by briefly exploring positions of some feminist theologians who argue that the traditional models of the atonement implicate God in violence and promote patriarchy and violence. While it is not the purpose of this thesis to critically engage the claims of feminist theologians with regard to their critique of the traditional models of the atonement, it agrees that patriarchy and violence are obstacles to be overcome.
Second, because the different models of the atonement are not the focus of this thesis, a synthesis of these different models is not foreseen. This is not to suggest that none of these models will be discussed. On the contrary one or the other model might receive a detailed treatment somewhat but only in so far as it relates to the overall purpose of the thesis.

Third, even where this thesis engages the soteriology of our three thinkers it cannot address everything they have written on the subject but only those aspects of the interpretation of the Cross that contribute to resolving ethnic rivalry and conflict and ultimately to reconciliation and healing.

Fourth, violence here refers to both physical and systemic violence after all it is systemic violence expressed in horizontal inequalities, exploitation, domination and suppression which often lead to violent conflicts between different groups.

Finally, while presumption prevents us from being overly confident about the fruitfulness of our inquiry, we are hopeful that it will shed light on the phenomena of violence and conflict in contemporary Africa and at the same time provide the relevant Christian resources for addressing the problem. That is, by engaging the insights of our thinkers with respect to the context in question, I hope from a theological perspective, to lay out a theoretical foundation that can help address the problem of ethnic rivalry and violence.
Chapter 1

The Phenomena of Conflict and Violence

Introduction

Violent conflicts seem to be the hallmark of many societies in contemporary Africa. The African continent today suffers “a greater degree of violence than at any time since independence.”\textsuperscript{11} Many Africans have endured and are still enduring inordinate suffering resulting from large scale conflicts ranging from ethnic to wider regional conflicts, and including civil wars. Of the various types of conflict, ethnic conflicts seem to be the most common on the continent.

Generally speaking, ethnic conflicts are intimately connected to the reality of ethnic pluralism. “Ethnic pluralism occurs when two or more ethnic communities are present in the same political space.”\textsuperscript{12} Despite the progress made towards nation-building in post-colonial Africa, it must be admitted that much of the political apparatus in contemporary Africa is still largely characterized by ethnic interest and boundaries. This means that disputes between ethnic groups which often lead to violent conflicts are issues of real differences, “… over political power, economic resources or cultural values”.\textsuperscript{13}

Modernization theorists concerned primarily with the economic and political development of African states in post-independence Africa predicted that ethnic divisions

\textsuperscript{11} Patrick Chabal, “Violence, Power and Rationality: A Political Analysis of Conflict in Contemporary Africa,” 1. Most African countries, particularly those south of the Sahara, gained their independence in the 1960s, with the exception of a few such as Ghana, which gained its independence in 1957 as the first independent post-colonial state in sub-Saharan Africa.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 26.
would be healed in the wake of liberal democracy, an advance which would then positively influence nation-building. This expectation or assumption has not been realized. In many African countries, including Nigeria, Sudan, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Burundi, ethnic sentiments have flourished, “becoming more politicized and intensely conflictual”. ¹⁴ Neither liberal democracy, on the one hand, nor human mobility and information technology, on the other, has been able to make the significant shift in the shaping of, and transition from, collective identity to the individual identity modernization theorists had envisaged. This, however, is not an indictment of democracy per se, but an assertion that heightened awareness of ethnic consciousness often remains latent until it is placed within a political framework. It is also an assertion that negative ethnicity, which by its nature is exclusionary, discriminatory and exploitative, has led to violent ethnic conflicts in most parts of post-colonial Africa.

In his *Negative Ethnicity: From Bias to Genocide*, Koigi Wa Wamwere argues that ethnic hate or negative ethnicity has been responsible for most of the tensions and conflicts in the world. After a careful survey of conflicts around the world which he believes have been caused by negative ethnicity, Wamwere contends that ethnic hate is as deadly as racism, dictatorship and divisive regimes such as Apartheid. Wamwere further argues that the attention that has been given to racism, dictatorship and Apartheid by the international community and by institutions like the United Nations has not been given to negative ethnicity, a reality that has caused so much harm to inter-personal relations, especially those between people of different ethnic groups. In Africa, as in other places

around the world, negative ethnicity has been to a large extent responsible for war and the loss of many lives.\footnote{Koigi Wa Wamwere, \textit{Negative Ethnicity: From Bias to Genocide} (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 10-11.}

Against this background, this chapter explores the question of theory or theories regarding conflict, especially ethnic conflict, and the phenomenon of collective violence as a social category. There are two reasons why this approach is important. First, it offers us the opportunity to lay out the theoretical framework against which two concrete ethnic conflicts, the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict and the Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict, will be explored in our second chapter. Second, such an approach in itself is an affirmation of the fact that conflicts are multifaceted in nature. The fact that there are different theories of conflict suggests that there is no one single cause for conflicts.

We will first examine the question of theory with respect to understanding violence. This will be followed by an examination of collective violence per se. The theory of collective violence as a social category has some characteristics in common with the theories of conflict proper. Our exploration of these theories and categories will be supported by concrete examples.

\subsection*{1.1 The Question about Theory}

Social scientists, historians, political analysts and indeed all those concerned with conflict analysis do not seem to have difficulty about the need for a theory or theories. However, there has been some debate regarding the possibility and relevance of universal theories for explaining all conflicts and for prescribing adequate solutions. A usual objection goes something like this: Should universal theories developed by Western scholars be used to
explain conflicts in Africa, or should they be held in suspect on the basis that they are unable to take into account what is distinctively African?

In speaking about theories of political violence and revolution in the developing world, Ted Robert Gurr makes two significant observations. First, he agrees with those Africans who insist that the management and resolution of civil wars both internally and regionally are primarily the responsibility of Africans, although foreign observers and researchers may certainly offer their contributions. Gurr has some difficulties regarding universal theories and whether they can adequately address the African context. According to Gurr, “Western scholars’ theoretical explanations of violent conflict in the Third World and their models for management of regional conflict make little use of African evidence.”

Second, Gurr further argues that Western scholarship has its own assumptions regarding the understanding of human nature, of society and of the polity, assumptions that are often applied to the African context without due consideration for what might be distinctively African. In other words, Gurr is critical of theories where a conceptual and prescriptive framework is developed from a Western point of view and applied unequivocally to all contexts including Africa.

Milton J. Esman is also wary of using general theories to explain all ethnic conflicts and to propose solutions for peaceful settlements. Esman bases his skepticism on the fact that there are usually a variety of circumstances that underpin relationships between ethnic communities and between factions of the same ethnic community. Circumstances can and does affect inter-ethnic relations positively or negatively.

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Esman cites the example of the Nigerian experience with reference to its trade union movement. In the colonial era, the Nigerian trade union movement was composed of people from all ethnic groups. However, this changed after independence. Subsequently, politics began to be organized along ethnic lines. This caused a shift from collective identity based on class or occupation to one based on ethnicity.¹⁷ Even though this example is about how collective identities and, for that matter, collective solidarities are dynamic, it is also a good example of how circumstances can turn an inter-ethnic relationship that is cordial and cooperative into one that is characterized by competition and antagonism.

Esman is critical of social scientists who examined particular cases of violent inter-ethnic relations in particular societies and from these findings formulated general theories that they believe are applicable to all violent inter-ethnic relations. For example, Esman is doubtful whether a general theory evolved by an influential American school of social scientists, the Chicago School, has general applicability. Milton Gordon and Robin M. Williams,¹⁸ members of the Chicago School, having examined both the situation of new immigrants and the oppression suffered by African Americans, concluded that inter-ethnic tensions are explicable on the grounds of attitudes, characterized by prejudice,

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¹⁸ See for example, Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 1-8. Gordon’s work is ultimately concerned with the problem of prejudice and discrimination like other works on the subject. However, its focus is not so much on overt acts of discriminations against minority groups such as African Americans, Jews, Americans of Japanese origin or native Indians within the larger American society as it is more about exploring the nature of the communal life of groups and the kind of structure that underpins inter-group relationships. Prejudice and acts of discrimination based on race, religion or cultural background are to a large extent influenced by a group’s knowledge and perception of the communal life of other groups. What for example is the nature of the social communal life of a minority group and how is this communal life perceived by the dominant White American society? Gordon believes that the result of his research has a wider applicability even though the research focuses on the American social context.
which then lead to discrimination. They posited that this situation could be overcome through education, legislation and the creation of more enlightened attitudes. However, Esman argues that this theory cannot explain the tension between Israelis and Palestinians, two organized ethnic communities, both of whom lay incompatible claims on lands that lie between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean.  

Esman is equally doubtful about the hypothesis that the presence of inclusive civic institutions can forestall inter-ethnic conflicts in all situations and in all places. According to this hypothesis, if people of different collective identities participate together in civic institutions or in associations established by non-governmental organizations, ethnic violence will be prevented. After collecting data in Indian cities where different ethnic groups participated in activities organized by civic institutions or non-governmental organizations, Varshney concluded that in these places violence between Muslims and Hindus had been averted. This, he stated, was not the case in cities where such institutions were nonexistent.

Esman criticises Varshney as short-sighted, having built his hypothesis on a limited set of experiences without admitting that there could arise other situations which prove his hypothesis to be false. Esman cites the city of Sarajevo and the war in Bosnia in the former Yugoslavia as examples to which Varshney’s hypothesis does not apply. Esman observes that people of different ethnic groups in Sarajevo co-existed peacefully before the Bosnian war. Croats, Serbs, Muslims and people of other communities had shared a common civic life and participated in activities organized by various local institutions, but all this changed when the war broke out. As he states: “…when Bosnia

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split into warring ethnic enclaves, the people of Sarajevo were unable to resist this pressure. They too broke apart into separate, hostile camps as Sarajevo turned into an ethnic battleground.”

According to Esman, some observers surprised by the turn of events blamed the sudden fragmentation on unscrupulous political extremists who, through their own machinations and intimidations, managed to mobilize groups of reluctant people behind them, thereby causing ethnic division. Esman rejects this assertion and argues that the adherence to collective ethnic identity must have been “continuous, widespread and deeply rooted,” otherwise the appeal of the so-called political extremists would have failed to elicit the kind of response that it did. Esman posits that the links that bound the people of Sarajevo together, allowing for respectful and peaceful coexistence, were weak to begin with and so gave way when each group felt that its vital interests and, for that matter, its collective survival were threatened. In any event, Esman’s main point is that it is wrong to formulate a hypothesis or a theory from a particular experience and to assume that it is applicable to all conflict situations. He also draws our attention to the fact that even in those situations where different ethnic communities coexist peacefully, each group is still conscious of its distinctiveness and how this distinctiveness relates to its survival.

After considering the views of both Gurr and Esman, one must raise a number of fundamental questions for reflection with reference to the possibility and applicability of general theories. Could any universal theory evolve to speak meaningfully to social phenomena anywhere in the world? Is there such a thing as a set of general theories?

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21 Esman, An Introduction to Ethnic Conflict, 18.
22 Ibid., 63.
which could be used to interpret violent incidents no matter their type and context?

Should theories and techniques drawn from Western social science be directly applied to every conflict situation?

Two responses have been offered which seem to represent two extreme positions. The first position admits of the validity, the usefulness and the applicability of general theories in the interpretation of all cases of violence. Gurr cites examples of Western scholars who believe in this first position and have actually used general theories in their interpretation of conflicts in Africa. For example, René Lemarchand, applied concepts related to Western theories of revolution to his comparative analysis of revolution in Rwanda and Zanzibar. Also, Pamela Ann Arthur, in her interpretation of the process and political outcomes of the Ethiopian revolution made use of concepts and theories from other African and non-African contexts.

Those who hold an opposite view argue that African societies have distinctive features that are not usually taken into account when universal theories are applied. Proponents of this position insist that, no matter the type of violence, violence can be understood and interpreted only within its immediate context. In effect this means that only distinctively African theories should be used to interpret conflicts in Africa. But what would make a theory of conflict specifically African if the claim that violence is a human problem is true? If it is right to assert that a theory must by its very nature and definition begin by being universal, that is, by being true for all cases, then two things are required for an African conflict theory. First, an African conflict theory must at least contain variations of the variables that are found in general conflict theories. Second, these variations should have occurred in a systematic pattern or manner in Africa.

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course, an objection could be raised that the fact that these variations have occurred in a
systematic manner in Africa does not make such a theory distinctively African since a
similar pattern of variations may be found elsewhere. In any event, Gurr does not deal in
an elaborate and conclusive manner with the nature of a distinctively African conflict
theory but takes a position that is important to this discussion.

Gurr takes a middle position and argues that universal theories can be applied to
conflict analysis in Africa but with a modification. A universal conceptual and
prescriptive framework is applicable to the African context, provided it incorporates into
itself variables and concepts that speak to those conditions that can be described as
distinctly African. One such variable which speaks to the African condition is the
relative significance of ethnicity and class in relation to conflicts. According to Gurr, the
relationship between these two factors must remain an open or an empirical question. In
other words, it would be wrong to assume that conflicts in Africa are mainly due to inter-
ethnic tensions just because the ethnic groups involved have invoked communal or ethnic
symbols. It also would be wrong to assume that a conflict is a class conflict just because
there seem to be economic interests involved. A conflict may occur due to economic
reasons, political reasons, and inter-ethnic tensions or due to a combination of some or all
of these factors. In Gurr’s opinion, for a general theory to become relevant to the African
context, it must first examine the body of sources that are critical to group formation and
inter-group tensions. Second, it is the task of a general theory to clarify and specify the

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24 Ibid., 157. See also Esman, An Introduction to Ethnic Conflict, 19. Just as Gurr takes a middle position,
Esman adopts a middle-level theory. By a middle-level theory, we mean that Esman is proposing the
possibility of evolving and testing statements that could be applied to similar cases while observing a
margin of probability. Even when such statements are applied to similar cases, Esman insists that the
particular context of each conflict, the circumstances surrounding each case, must always be taken into
account. In fact, the complexity of the phenomenon of ethnic conflicts places a limit on the extent to which
general theories may be applied.
circumstances under which these sources are “most important, and how they affect the processes and outcomes of conflict.”

Gurr observes that scholars who believe in the Marxist ideology of class struggle in which the working class rises up against the wealthy and powerful capitalist class tend to employ Marxist concepts in their interpretation of conflicts in Africa. These Marxist theorists often tend to reduce the cause of conflicts to only economic needs or to the means of production, thereby dismissing completely the question of ethnicity. This group of theorists insists that it is a class struggle disguised as ethnic tension. Marxist theorists contend that every conflict is but an expression of what has happened in the evolution of human societies. For them, evolution is the proletariat, oppressed by the capitalist class, rising up against the latter to overthrow them by means of a revolution with the intention of altering the political order and the way labour is organized in society.

A second important variable is the question of how culture in Africa determines actions and meanings. For example, what is the cultural orientation towards conflict and violence in Africa?

A third important variable in the African context is the question of natural resources, their extraction and distribution, and the role of the state in all these affairs. According to universal theories, it is sufficient to have strong states that can extract and distribute equitably their natural resources, so that conflicts do not arise because of these natural resources. As much merit as there may be to this argument, it takes for granted—as Gurr points out—that natural resources are plentiful and need only to be extracted and

25 Gurr, “Theories of Political Violence and Revolution in the Third World,” 157
distributed equitably. It fails to realize that in some parts of Africa the problem is about scarcity of resources for which different groups compete.

A fourth variable that must be considered in the African context concerns the belief that political power is a sure means to economic power and how the implications of such a belief relate to partisan politics and conflicts. How does competition between the African political elite for both political and economic power relate to violence in Africa? To what extent does personalistic and autocratic politics influence violence in Africa? In other words, is the use of state institutions by the African political elite for the attainment of personal gain linked in any way to violent conflicts in Africa? What shape did politics in post-colonial Africa assume, and how does this shape relate to violent conflicts in the continent today? These are some of the questions that are relevant to the African context when dealing with conflict theories, to which Gurr and others draw our attention either directly or indirectly.

Apart from proposing that Western universal conflict theories regarding the causes, processes and resolution of conflicts in Africa must always be tested and revised in the light of the African experience and “not imposed on the evidence,” Gurr makes another significant observation. He observes that conflicts in Africa often defy a simple categorization. For example, the distinctions some Western theories make between communal and mass instability are problematic in the African context. Gurr asks, “how should we categorize a violent strike by a political association of Zulu labourers in a multiethnic South African township? Are they acting on the basis of communal identities, class position, or membership in a political movement?” What is implied in Gurr’s

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28 Ibid., 168.
remarks is that it is not immediately clear whether the action of the group in question has been motivated by ethnic sentiments, loyalty to a particular political party or a demand for just wages. More than one of these factors is behind the violent act even if one of the two is the primary or major cause. Ultimately, Gurr is proposing an interactive approach in which the causes of conflicts in Africa must always be examined together. Such an interactive approach would not only confirm the multi-faceted nature of conflicts, it would also justify why there must be a variety of theories regarding conflicts.

There are many theories of conflict. They include the following: group identity theory; human need theory; ‘greed’ versus ‘grievance’ theory; the ownership, management and the control of natural resources theory; politicized ethnicity theory and colonial legacy theory. I will limit myself to the following sub-titles: ethnic identity theory, competition theory and colonial legacy theory. More attention will be given here to the first two than to the third. The question of colonial legacy will be addressed in detail when the two examples of ethnic conflict are discussed in the next chapter. Before discussing these theories, however, it is important to examine the concept and the reality of collective violence. A discussion about collective violence allows us to have a glimpse of some of the ideas related to ethnic conflicts.

1.2 Collective Violence as a Social Category

In their study *Collective Violence*, Steven E. Barkan and Lynne L. Snowden, drawing on a variety of disciplines including history, political science, psychology and sociology, examine the phenomenon of collective or group violence. They raise a number of fundamental questions regarding the causes, dynamics and consequences of collective
violence. According to Barkan and Snowden, even though collective violence is a complex reality and has attracted varied opinions both negative and positive, depending on the political and intellectual climate within which a particular theorist or social scientist is writing, collective violence is essentially both a rational and a political reality. It is rational because it is goal oriented and sometimes produces seemingly positive results. It is political because it influences political arrangements and social policy.

Before engaging all the relevant issues involved with collective violence, Barkan and Snowden define collective violence from the perspective of the social sciences. “Collective violence … has the express goal of aiding or impeding change in the social, political, and economic arenas of society.”

Collective violence is characterized by two elements. First, it must be a group action. Second, the goal must be “to express social discontent and/or to advance or impede social change.” Individual and interpersonal violence is a different kind of violence and stands in contrast to collective violence. For example, if a criminal group were to gang up against another criminal group, this cannot be described as collective violence since it lacks the express intention to bring about a change in social policy but is rather intended to cause harm to a targeted group, satisfy some emotional need or make some personal gains. Similarly, the violent act of an

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29 Steven E. Barkan & Lynne L. Snowden, *Collective Violence*, 2nd ed. (Cornwall-on-Hudson, New York: Sloan Publishing, 2008), 6. René Girard, one of the thinkers whose ideas this thesis draws upon has his own take on collective violence. It is important to introduce here briefly Girard’s notion of collective violence to which we shall return later especially in chapter three. The foundation for understanding Girard’s notion of collective violence is his treatment of desire as such. Girard argues that the root cause of violence is mimetic desire and the rivalries that it generates. Because desire by its nature is mimetic or awakened, it has the capacity to draw an entire community into violence, a reality that has the potential to destroy the whole community in what is referred to as the war of all against all. However, what forestalls the war of all against all from taking place is when all the members of the community gang up against a single victim who is either expelled or lynched. This ganging up against a single victim is collective violence or mimetic contagion. Girard’s notion of collective violence in a sense strikes a chord with that of Barkan and Snowden because appropriative mimesis in the political arena for example, can lead an ethnic group to engage in violent acts with the intention of changing the political situation. See René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 7-18.

30 Barkan and Snowden, *Collective Violence*, 12.
assassin, unless he is member of a larger movement and is acting on their behalf, cannot be described as collective violence. This is so even if he intends to advance or to impede social change. This would be an example of political violence and not collective violence as it is defined here. In brief, even though frustration could lead to collective violence, collective violence is not merely expressive violence but instrumental violence since the goal is to improve a group’s own status or “achieve some other material, social, or political gain.” For this reason, collective violence as Barkan and Snowden understand it is not an act of vandalism.

We can say that collective violence as Barkan and Snowden understand it was at work in the 1959 Hutu Social Revolution, an important moment in the process leading up to the genocide. This is because in the opinion of the Hutu elite, it was meant to bring about a change in the social, economic and political lives of the Hutu ethnic group.

Barkan and Snowden’s exposition on collective violence, contain other essential elements that I find relevant to this thesis, especially in terms of how they shed light on the theories of conflict and on the two concrete examples that I will be discussing in chapter two. For them, the macro and micro dimensions of collective violence must always be examined together. Barkan and Snowden adopt a both/and approach rather than an either/approach. The macro dimension of collective violence examines the ‘why’ question, i.e. why is there collective violence at all? Here one examines the root causes or the so-called structural causes. The causes could be economic, social, political, ethnic or religious. At the micro level, the focus is on the individual, his or her psychological frame of mind, his or her personality and his or her attitudes. It is believed that people who have been cut off from their traditional family ties, due to industrialization and urbanization,

31 Ibid., 6.
are more likely to participate in collective violence than those surrounded by a network of friendships and social organizations. This is even more true of people who are single and unemployed. The assumption is that such people stand to gain twice. Apart from the economic benefits that might accrue from collective violence, their participation in collective violence offers them an opportunity to belong to an identifiable group.

According to Barkan and Snowden, there is a contrary position which asserts that people who are surrounded by a network of friendships and social organizations are more likely to participate in collective violence. The network of friendships and social organizations actually makes it easier for people to be mobilized under a leader. Having being mobilized, the group can easily discuss its common beliefs, beliefs that explain and justify its intended collective action. Though this argument sounds reasonable, a question is being raised whether the connection that has been made between networks of friendships and of social organizations on the one hand and collective action on the other has been exaggerated.\(^{32}\)

Regarding the dynamics of collective violence, the deprivation-frustration-aggression theory must be noted. Basically, proponents of this theory argue that when economic and other conditions deteriorate, leading to lack of the basic necessities of human life, anger sets in, leading to frustration, aggression and ultimately to collective violence. Accordingly, people who suffer from this kind of deprivation often see violence as the only way to press their demands. Their common experience of deprivation is what brings them together. Deprived people believe that they have nothing to lose when they resort to violence in order to press home their demands. Within the theory of deprivation is relative deprivation.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 21.
Relative deprivation is the imbalance between what is being experienced by a group and its expectations. For example, when a group of people begins to experience an improvement in their economic conditions, it naturally begins to expect greater improvements, and when these do not occur, the group gets frustrated, angry, aggressive and violent. Accordingly, relative deprivation was responsible for the Peasant Revolution in France in the 1700s, an event which did not happen in Germany even though the conditions of the French peasants were comparatively better than those of their German counterparts. Because the conditions of the French peasants had been improving and they had begun to experience what that meant to their lives, their expectations had began to rise. When their conditions did not continue to improve, their rising expectations led to anger, frustration, aggression and collective violence. Increased relative deprivation can lead to more frustration and more frustration can lead to more anger, and more anger can lead to more violence. For example, how would the theory of relative deprivation reflect in the case of a so-called minority ethnic group in Africa, that was suppressed by a dominant ethnic group but which, in the course of time, experienced, even if in a limited way, some form of political autonomy?

Against the background of objective relative deprivation is the element of perception. Objectively speaking, two different groups of people might experience the same relative deprivation. One group might be quite happy with its situation, especially if it has become resigned to its conditions. The other group might really feel the deprivation and become resentful and aggressive. Even though relative deprivation theory has its own appeal, it has its weaknesses. First, not every experience of deprivation must lead to aggression. For example, when a group is honestly able to take responsibility for the

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33 Ibid., 19.
deprivation that it is experiencing, it is less likely to become aggressive and violent towards others. Second, frustration-aggression theory applies to individuals while relative deprivation theory applies to groups of individuals. Therefore, it is not correct to assume that what happens in the case of the former necessarily happens in the case of the latter, since the individuals who make up a group in the case of relative deprivation do not necessarily have the same psychological makeup.\(^{34}\) A third criticism against relative deprivation theory results from empirical studies carried out in the United States among very poor and deprived peoples. Contrary to the predictions or expectations of relative deprivation theory, research among people living in the poorest and most deprived areas indicated that they were less likely to get involved in collective violence.\(^{35}\) In this case, one may presume that this happened because they did not experience their conditions as improving and therefore no change in their expectations.

From the above, it is clear that collective violence involves the issue of group mobilization where a leader or a group of leaders mobilizes people, their time and material resources towards the achievement of a structural change. It also involves the discontent and the grievances of the people who are being mobilized. When this is applied to political violence, ethnic violence or any other type of collective violence, it must be stated that there are usually issues that the group considers relevant to their well-being and survival. The meaning or the interpretation that the group in question gives to these issues is important. This means that identity and culture are very much related to group action or collective violence, no matter what form it takes. This is particularly true

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 20.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., 20.
of ethnic conflicts. It is to the theories of conflict, especially ethnic conflict that we now turn.

1.3 Conflict Theories

1.3.1 Ethnic Identity Theory

Ethnic identity is but one aspect of a collective identity. Most individuals share a number of collective identities. For example, an individual may at the same time be a man, a Ghanaian, a Catholic, a lawyer, an environmentalist, an alumnus of the University of Ghana and a Dagara. As far as important decisions in one’s life are concerned, one is often confronted with the question as to which particular collective identity must be the primary determining factor. For example, when it comes to marriage, which of these two collective identities should be the deciding principal factor: one’s faith as a Catholic or one’s ethnic identity as a Dagara?

According to Esman, there are three schools of thought or persuasions regarding the origin and the composition of ethnic identity. The three schools are: the primordialist, the instrumentalist and the constructivist. According to the primordialists, ethnic identity as a phenomenon is something that is deeply rooted in a people’s history and culture. A people’s ethnic identity is reinforced by collective myths and memories and is passed on from generation to generation through socialization. Proponents of the primordialist persuasion believe that ethnic identities are a result of historical circumstances. Forced to respond to a particular challenge, or called upon to seize a particular opportunity, families, individuals and their kin were drawn together. Thereafter, they developed a network of “common beliefs, practices, and institutions to which their members became
attached…”\textsuperscript{36} As time went on, later generations faced new challenges and new
environments and had to adapt to these new challenges, thereby maintaining their
survival and distinctiveness. This distinctiveness is usually marked by language, culture,
religious beliefs and practices, food and a dress code.

There is a biological version of the primordialist school of thought that makes a
strong case in support of its position. Just as by nature the human species perpetuates its
continuous survival through birth, so it is with the primordial understanding of ethnic
identity. By way of an analogy, proponents of this version maintain that because the
community, its culture, values and traditions mean everything to the individual, he or she
not only appropriates all of these as his or her own, but he or she also feels obliged to
pass them on to future generations. In this regard it can be said that “…the primal desire
for survival of the species becomes fused with the need to ensure the survival of a culture
that has endowed life with meaning and that [this] should be available to serve the needs
of generations of offspring.”\textsuperscript{37} As a result of this biological version, primordialists believe
that ethnic identity is very much rooted in the subconscious of every individual by birth.

Critics of the primordialist school accuse its proponents of giving ethnicity and by
extension ethnic identity an essence that is not warranted. Secondly, as it stands, the
primordial view cannot explain why ethnic groups do change with the passage of time
and why at certain times ethnic identity assumes greater significance than at other
times.\textsuperscript{38} Thirdly, it does not explain why the boundaries and characteristics of groups do
change. In the fourth place, if one accepts the argument that a considerable number of

\textsuperscript{36} Esman, \textit{An Introduction to Ethnic Conflict}, 31.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{38} Frances Stewart, “Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: An Introduction and Some Hypotheses,” in
\textit{Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies}, ed. Frances
tribal demarcations in Africa were created by colonial authorities for reasons of administrative convenience, then one must admit that it is difficult to support the essentialist ascription that the primordialists place on ethnic identity as a social category.

The instrumentalist school of thought rejects ethnicity and ethnic identity as fundamental in influencing the inter-ethnic dynamics. For instrumentalists, ethnicity is a cover-up to more fundamental categories that determine the outcome of inter-group relations. Class or colonial domination are examples of such basic categories that are often hidden under the guise of ethnicity. In fact, instrumentalists believe that ethnicity is a myth that is propagated and exploited by people with economic or political ambitions. They would point to politicians who propagate and exploit ethnic identity so as to gather a following. Political and intellectual elites have on occasion appealed to ethnic symbols and mechanisms, especially through a reworking of historical memories, in order to mobilize their own people in support of conflict. An instrumentalist use of ethnic identity during civil war for example, would be in order to heighten ethnic or religious consciousness. “An example here would be the radio broadcasts by the extremist Hutus before the 1994 massacre in Rwanda, in which the Tutsis were repeatedly depicted as subhuman, like rats to be eliminated, echoing Nazi anti-Jewish propaganda of the 1930s.”

A major criticism against instrumentalists is that they fail to grasp the reality and the power of ethnicity and ethnic identity as basic and important categories for understanding inter-ethnic relationships. While the instrumentalists are right in saying that people with economic or political ambitions do exploit ethnicity for their personal interests, it must be pointed out that this happens not merely because such people are

39 Ibid., 9.
crafty but also because ethnic identity as a category is something real which evokes emotional attachments and group identification.

The third school of thought is social constructionism. Like the instrumentalists, social constructivists believe that people frequently use ethnicities for political purposes. For this to work, political leaders would emphasize differences between people and might even invent or construct differences where they do not exist. It is for this reason that social constructivists hold the view that ethnic identity is nothing but a mental construct. It is the powerful intellectual elite who have constructed and propagated the idea of ethnic identity. Even though ethnic identity has no basic essence, it is nonetheless real in its effects. It is real because people believe it and conduct their lives according to it. Yet because ethnic identity lacks inherent nature, it also lacks essence and stability and is in fact fluid. Therefore, it is possible to negotiate one’s ethnic identity depending on the circumstances and the benefits that present themselves at a given time. One can change from one ethnic group to another, or one can be affiliated to various ethnic groups at the same time. Moreover, this school of thought rejects the claim that ethnic identities are deeply rooted in a people’s history and culture. Proponents of this persuasion believe that with time ethnic identities will cease to exist and new ones will be constructed according to changing situations and practical needs.

Like the instrumentalists, social constructivists, while according an apparent essence to ethnic identity, deny it any authenticity as a social category. Therefore, social constructivists should be criticized for this denial. Second, social constructivists must explain why people will believe and act according to an empty construct, sometimes even to the point of death as when violence erupts between ethnic groups. These criticisms
notwithstanding, it must be mentioned that social constructivists like the instrumentalists, as a general rule, believe that for instrumentalism to work, there must exist relationships between people “some felt differences in behaviour, customs, ideology or religion …”\textsuperscript{40} Despite its shortcomings, the primordialists’ view of ethnic identity seems to be more conducive and particularly suited for understanding the African context.

The different persuasions notwithstanding, one must admit that among all other collective identities, ethnic identity is fundamental because of its role in defining a person’s basic identity. Ethnic identities “usually draw on deeper layers of emotional sensitivity than those based on more pragmatic interests such as professional associations, recreational activities, or political parties.”\textsuperscript{41} The claim that ethnic identities are more fundamental and so draw on deeper layers of emotional sensitivity seems to be the case in the African tribal context. This can be verified in a multitude of political situations in post-independence Africa.

**1.3.2 Ethnic Identity and Politics in Post-Independence Africa**

Does ethnicity per se cause conflict? What part did ethnicity play in politics in post-independence Africa? Even though ethnic identity is particularly important in the African tribal context\textsuperscript{42}, the general consensus is that ethnicity and ethnic identity per se are not conflictual. “Ethnicity is like a two-edge sword—it tends to be the basis for communal identity and security; but it is also a basis for exclusionary practices, which

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{41} Esman, \textit{An Introduction to Ethnic Conflict}, 28.
\textsuperscript{42} See for example, Okwudiba Nnoli, “Ethnic Conflicts in Africa: A Comparatively Analysis” in \textit{Ethnic Conflicts in Africa}, ed. Okwudiba Nnoli (Senegal: Codesria, 1998), 5. Nnoli underscores the centrality of ethnic symbolism in the African context and explains why ethnic conflicts can be so fierce especially when a group perceives that its dignity has not been respected and its due has been denied.
sometimes result in conflict”.

The presence of two or more ethnic groups in the same political space is not in itself a cause for conflict. In fact, different ethnic groups may evolve a system of division of labour that is mutually beneficial and which promotes cooperation between them. There could even be friendly exchanges between them leading to intermarriage and the possible absorption of one group by the other. However, “competition for economic resources such as land, hunting or grazing rights, or trading opportunities, and for political power may generate mutual suspicion and antipathy that provide … the raw material for ethnic conflict.” This spirit of competition tends to exclude others from having access to these resources. Obviously rivalry and competition ultimately lead to violence and conflict when they go unchecked.

Inter-ethnic competition for political power is critical in this regard. This is because it is those who hold political office who have the power to formulate laws regarding the distribution of the other resources. When ethnicity is politicized or when a government is dominated by a particular ethnic group which deliberately and systematically works to exclude other ethnic groups from political power, this is often resented and resisted, leading to violence. Specifically, because ethnicity was intrinsically linked to the distribution of power and wealth in post-independence Africa and Africa’s emerging elites were willing to use it as a tool to strengthen their hold on political power, ethnic rivalry and violence were inevitable.

In his analysis of conflicts in Africa, Patrick Chabal draws out the connection between the nature of politics in post-independence Africa and the phenomenon of violence and conflict. African political leaders exercised political power in the form of

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what Chabal refers to as “neo-patrimonialism.” According to Chabal, the African political elite in post-independence Africa employed official political institutions for their own patrimonial purposes or interests without considering how this might negatively influence the system of governance in a given region. For example, they believed that what legitimized a person in authority and, for that matter, in political authority was his or her ability to provide for his own “ethnic constituents.” Chabal points out the implications of such a system of governance. First, since political office holders had to maintain their so-called legitimacy and standing, they had to provide for their ethnic groups on a regular basis. In other words, they had to focus on feeding those networks that maintained them in power to the neglect of the overall development of the national economy. An underdeveloped economy produces poverty and economic distress, a recipe for violent unrest in the long run. Secondly, since the only way politicians could provide for their own ethnic groups was to continue to have access to government assets and institutions, they were often ready to exploit their ethnic affiliation in order to remain in power. Thirdly, ethnic groups who lacked representation in the central government and therefore lacked political influence felt neglected and discriminated against. This too often led to unrest and conflicts.

Chabal’s idea of the nature of politics in post-colonial Africa, characterized by a form of neo-patrimonialism, strikes a chord with Wamwere’s idea of the ‘philosophy of ethnic eating’. Speaking about negative ethnicity and ethnic politics in Kenya,

46 Ibid., 4
47 The expression ‘ethnic eating’ should be taken together with the expression ‘national cow’. The philosophy of ethnic eating is the belief and practice whereby the ethnic group that is predominant in government tends to favour people from its ethnic group, in terms of developments, jobs, the provision of goods and services etc, to the disadvantage or neglect of other ethnic groups. The national cow refers to the
Wamwere refers to the philosophy of ethnic eating, which has characterized not only the political landscape of Kenya, but of many African countries. It is the philosophy which stipulates that the elite of an ethnic group must have a larger share of the national ‘cow’ that is to be eaten or, worse, that they must eat it alone, excluding the elite of other ethnic groups. According to Wamwere, himself a Kikuyu, the first president of Kenya, the Kikuyu Jomo Kenyatta, did not set a good example here. Even though Kenyatta did not favour every Kikuyu elite, he consciously favoured the latter in terms of jobs, infrastructural development and enrolment into national institutions as the military and the police.\textsuperscript{48}

When Arab Moi, who belonged to the Kalinjin tribe, became president after Kenyatta, he announced that he was going to continue in the footsteps of Kenyatta. The Kikuyu elite understood that he was going to continue to favour them. On the contrary, he meant that he was going to favour the Kalinjin elite and people just as Kenyatta had favoured the Kikuyu. This was precisely what Moi did. Moi systematically ensured the trimming down and the removal of Kikuyu elite from the civil service, the army, institutions of higher learning, the business sector and the cabinet. He then replaced them with people from the Kalinjin tribe.\textsuperscript{49} Moi was not simply out to remove Kikuyu elements

\textsuperscript{48} Wamwere, \textit{Negative Ethnicity}, 64.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 75. See also Dominic K. Agyeman, “Ethnic Conflicts and Politics in Ghana,” 192. During Ghana’s Second Republic (1969-1972) under Dr. Abrifa Busia and his Progress Party, ethnic politics had reached a considerably high level. Unlike under Nkrumah, where cabinet had a fair regional representation, under Busia, the cabinet was made up of the following: Akans-14, Northern Groups-3, Ga-1, and Guan-1. There was no Ewe in the Cabinet. It is important to note that Busia himself was an Akan and, according to Agyeman, did not see anything wrong with tribal or ethnic politics. Busia has also been criticized for dismissing 568 civil servants, the majority of whom were Ewe and people from other ethnic groups believed to have supported the opposition parties. This is particularly revealing when we know that the military junta that prepared the ground for Busia and his Progress Party had, through political propaganda, instilled in many Ghanaians an anti-Ewe sentiment and that the Akan and the Brongs had regarded the
who opposed him and his government, he was out to dislodge the Kikuyu elite from political influence entirely. While this was going on, progressive and highly qualified professors who belonged to the Kikuyu ethnic group were removed from the country’s universities and replaced with professors of the Kalinjin tribe, some of whom were less qualified. This is an instance where the instrumentalists are right where politicians propagate and exploit ethnic identity for political ambitions and interests. The fact that politicians in post-independence Africa propagated and exploited ethnic identity for their own interests might suggest that they believed something about the essence of their own tribe as the primordialists do.

Negative ethnicity and ethnic politics affected and continue to affect both the political elite and ordinary citizens in the African continent because of the African idea of ethnic association. Ordinary rural folk are likely to identify with a presidential candidate from their ethnic group as they take pride in him or her and because they believe that in some way they are sharing in his or her power, thus confirming the claim that ethnic identities do draw on very deep layers of emotional sensitivity especially in the African tribal context. While it is true that ethnicity and ethnic identification played a positive role during the colonial era when ordinary people easily identified with indigenous political figures and their cause against colonial rule, the same reality negatively influenced the nature of politics thereafter. It was the reason why African politicians were able to exploit ethnic solidarity to their advantage. It was also the reason why they have been able to form ethnic associations and have influenced voting patterns along ethnic lines.

Progress Party as their own. In fact, the political party that competed against Busia and had lost was the National Alliance of Liberals led by Gbedemah, an Ewe by tribe.
It must be noted that what negative ethnicity and an uncritical kind of ethnic identification has produced is the phenomenon of ethnic patriotism which has remained a threat to national patriotism. This has worked, and continues to work, against the ideal of nation-building and national unity that some of the pioneering African leaders in the early part of decolonization had envisaged. Ethnic patriotism, a consequence of negative ethnicity, has often led to wars and destruction, either within countries or beyond their borders. For example, in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, negative ethnicity and ethnic patriotism were at play. Ethnic hate had been systematically promoted through the educational system and the media against the Tutsi minority who were brutally massacred when the conflict broke out. Paradoxically, ethnic patriotism turned out to be dangerous even for the Hutu ethnic group. Moderate Hutu, who were fair-minded and had opted for national patriotism and against negative ethnicity, were viewed by the other Hutu as traitors and were killed. Ethnic patriotism, characterized by a blind zeal and by the philosophy of ‘kill or be killed,’ left both Tutsi and moderate Hutu in the same predicament.

Speaking about negative ethnicity characterized by blindness and its destructive nature resonates with Bernard Lonergan’s idea of group bias. According to Lonergan, like individual bias, group bias takes place when a group raises questions in search of insights but stop at a particular stage with the deliberate intention of avoiding the situation where it could arrive at conclusions that will go against its interests or desires.\(^{50}\) One might add that this would be an instance of communal selfishness. In this case either the most critical questions are not asked or when they are raised they are not pursued to

their logical conclusion. Moreover, people suffering from group bias tend to see the other not only as a stranger but as one whose presence is threatening, simply because the other does not share in the common sense of the group in question. In fact prejudice against the other prevents a group suffering from bias from taking any genuine steps to understand other people as they truly are. In effect, group bias inevitably leads to discrimination, exclusion, violence and conflicts. This is true with respect to inter-ethnic relations in the African context. For example, because group bias impedes proper understanding of the other, it does not only promote stereotypical ideas and actions against the other, it also promotes an attitude of intolerance against the other. Significantly, as a result of group bias, an ethnic group can focus exclusively on its own interests to the neglect of the interests of other ethnic groups. If it happens to have greater influence in national politics, it may not only direct the resources of the polity to its advantage but actually come up with “doctrines and theories that justify its actions, while at the same time making the misfortune of other groups to be due their depravity.”

Group bias certainly played a role in the Hutu-Tutsi and the Konkomba-Ethnic conflicts, conflicts that would be discussed in the second chapter.

This notwithstanding, it is clear from the above analysis that to belong to an ethnic group and to identify with one’s ethnic group in terms of language, culture, common values, a common ancestry, a common history, etc., in itself is not negative. It is equally true that ethnic pluralism is not in itself a cause of ethnic tensions and conflict. However, ethnic pluralism can become conflictual when real differences and interests essential to the survival of the groups in question enter into a political framework. When

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ethnic identity tends to be exclusive, dominating and oppressive in relation to the other, then inter-ethnic tensions are likely to arise, leading to conflict. However, the very process that engages the tools of exclusion, domination and oppression is often characterized by rivalry and competition. It is to the theory of competition that we now turn.

1.4 The Competition Theory

One of the concepts that plays a significant role in classical and contemporary social theory with specific reference to interpersonal and intergroup relations is the concept of competition.\textsuperscript{52} Competition between groups has centred on such different resources as material resources, ecological resources, political resources and the question of status or honour. From the Marxist and capitalist perspective, intergroup competition is class based. As discussed above, Marxist intellectuals do not believe that ethnic identity or ethnic solidarity is a fundamental category that characterizes inter-group relations. For them, ethnic solidarity or sentiment is nothing but a feature to be manipulated by the wealthy capitalist class, so as to cause division among members of the working class who rise up against them. Contrary to this position, it must be held that ethnic identity and ethnic solidarity are legitimate and important categories deeply rooted in the concrete lives of people.

It is for this reason that competition theorists in recent times have shown interest in finding the link between ethnic competition and conflict. Some competition theorists have argued that the resurgence of ethnic movements and its resultant competition have been due to modernization and urbanization. Modernization and urbanization give rise to

\textsuperscript{52} Joane Nagel, “Resource Competition Theories” \textit{American Behavioral Scientist} 38/3 (1995), 442.
competition for housing, jobs and other resources that are of value to different groups. While acknowledging there is some merit in this assertion, others take the issue further and insist that competition is not just for individual resources like jobs. Whatever resources groups compete for, one must examine it within a larger framework of hierarchy and domination.

Because competition theorists are interested in finding out the connection between ethnic competition and resources on the one hand and conflict on the other, they tend to raise the following questions: What are the bases upon which ethnic boundaries are constructed? How does resource competition lend itself to group formation and to the formation of social or political movements? Are there any historical factors that promote ethnic competition? What causes resource competition to become organized along ethnic lines? What are the conditions that must be present before ethnic competition leads to conflict?

What are the bases on which ethnic boundaries are constructed, and how do we explain the variations that are involved in the process of ethnic construction in relation to conflict? Ethnic boundaries are constructed within the categories of language, colour, religion, ancestry, culture and geography. Ethnicity can be the result of self-identification or ascription. In the case of self-identification, ethnicity is determined or selected by the individual. For example, one determines whether one is Mexican, Latino, Irish, White, Asian etc. In the case of ascription, ethnicity is determined or assigned to one by the larger society. Implied in the case of self-identification is the element of personal choice which, as we stated above, is debatable from the primordialist point of view. In any event, even though ethnicity is here presented as involving an element of
personal choice, it must be added that this can only happen to the extent that the choice is socially or politically allowed. Consequently, if one holds that ethnicity is a result of self-identification or social designation and that both are generally characterized by a set of historical differences such as ancestry, language, religion, culture, etc., one must confront the question regarding ethnic consciousness and external ascription and how these relate to conflict. In other words, one must reckon with the fact that ethnic consciousness and social ascription do vary through time with a direct consequence on the rise and fall of inter-ethnic conflicts.

For instance, in spite of the great linguistic and cultural diversity that exists in Africa today, inter-ethnic relations in pre-colonial Africa were different from those immediately following decolonization. Inter-ethnic relations were largely characterized by a number of factors including conquest, trade and migration. Most of these migrations resulted in integration and sometimes even in assimilation. Even though there were some occasional clashes, the “populations coexisted for centuries without any vassalage or subordination since they were no major state formations. Consequently, they were able to forge many alliances between them to ensure peaceful coexistence.”

This generally positive picture of inter-ethnic relations in pre-colonial Africa is markedly different from what obtained in post-independence Africa, especially during the process of nation-building. During this period, the number of African subnationalist movements and inter-ethnic conflicts increased. Following the breakdown of colonial rule, there was a need to restructure African polities and economies. This process of reconstruction saw various regional African leaders competing for power in the central

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53 Ibid, 443.
54 Ibid., 443.
government. For example, we see this play out in Ghana’s politics in the years leading up to independence and at the dawn of independence itself. The formation of regionally and ethnically based parties began to take shape. These parties were formed purposely to compete with the Convention Peoples Party under the leadership of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana (1960). There was the National Liberation Movement Party (NLM) in the Asante and Brong Ahafo regions, the Togoland Congress Party (TC) in the Volta Region and the Northern Peoples Party (NPP) in Northern Ghana. According to Agyeman, these were all pro-federalist parties that were formed with the support of traditional rulers.  

Agyeman’s analysis is corroborated by that of Victor Ametewee who examines both the phenomenon of ethnicity and ethnic relations in Ghana. In his analysis, Ametewee examines the reasons for the upsurge of ethnic consciousness and ethnic affiliations in Ghana’s urban centres and the corresponding inter-ethnic competition for political and socio-economic resources. He also examines the importance of ethnicity in the rural areas of Ghana and argues that an unequal access to opportunities and resources has often determined the nature of inter-ethnic relations and their outcomes. However, it is in Ametewee’s examination of Ghana’s elite and ethnicity that he corroborates Agyeman’s discussion of the formation of ethnically based federal parties. For Ametewee, the demand made by Ghanaian elites for power and economic resources, apparently on behalf of their own ethnic groups, immediately following decolonization was “most overtly reflected in the pre-independence demand for a separate region and federal government by ethnic-based political parties such as the National Liberation

Movement (NLM) in Ashanti, the Northern Peoples Party (NPP) in Northern Ghana, and the Togoland Congress (TC) in the Volta Region. Ametewee contends that of the three ethnically-based pro-federal political associations, the NLM was the most forceful in its demands as it sought to break away from the national cause of the then Gold Coast. For Ametewee, the decision of the NLM to break away “can be explained by the inability of the Asante elites to have their way in the political arena vis-à-vis the dominant nationalist Convention Peoples Party (CPP).”

In fact a number of reasons associated with the process of nation-building gave rise to this situation. Motivated by a strong desire to promote national patriotism and a sense of national unity, and to root out regional and ethnic politics, Nkrumah sought to eliminate altogether the influence of chiefs in politics or at least to minimize their influence. Only with the permission of the government could a chief be instooled or distool. Fearing that the institution and its influence in national life might be

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58 Ibid., 32.
59 For an elaborate discussion of how Nkrumah attempted to reduce or eliminate the influence of chiefs in both local and central government, see for example, Richard Rathbone, Nkrumah & the Chiefs: The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana, 1951-60 (Oxford, UK: James Curry, 2000). In this work, Rathbone gives a balanced analysis of the forces that were at play that accounted for the antagonism between the chiefs and the CPP under Nkrumah. Like other coastal elite nationalists, Nkrumah, who in 1951 had won elections which gave him and his party representation in the Legislative Assembly, viewed chiefs essentially as agents of colonial imperialism. Naturally the fight against colonial rule and for self-determination meant that Nkrumah and his party would be against chieftaincy as an institution and especially against those chiefs who were openly against the CPP. Secondly, chiefs were regarded by the educated elite like Nkrumah as people who were incapable of bringing about needed development, even if there were some chiefs who were quite progressive and creative in this regard. It is equally important to note that Nkrumah and his CPP Party, had been greatly influenced by the socialist ideology of the Eastern Bloc, and so had began to propagate, through the print media in particular, the idea of fighting for the rights of the commoner and the peasant. Chiefs were depicted as people who suppressed and exploited their subjects in order to enrich themselves, and the CPP Party often called upon ordinary workers to wage a revolution against oppressive institutions. See, for example, 21-28.
60 To instool a chief refers to the traditional ceremony by which a chief is invested with authority as head of his subjects and custodian of traditional norms and patrimony. In fact, among some ethnic groups, such as the Ashanti, the King sits on the Golden stool as a symbol of his authority. To distool a chief refers to the ceremony by which the invested authority is rendered null and void.
obliterated completely, chiefs quickly rallied around their native political leaders who formed these pro-federalist parties, for they believed that this was the only way their influence in Ghanaian society could be maintained.

Since the chiefs were giving their support only to these regionally and ethnically based pro-federalist political parties competing with the CCP’s government led by Nkrumah, there must have been other reasons beyond the need to maintain the autonomy of chiefs in traditional politics. One such reason concerned the issue of the balance of power during the process of nation-building. In pre-colonial times, the Asante Empire in what was then called the Western Sudan was a strong military force to be reckoned with. Its strength is attested to by the fact that between 1816 and 1901, the British fought six battles against the Asante Empire before they could defeat it. Apart from the advantage of more sophisticated weapons, the British also recruited warriors from among the coastal ethnic tribes of Ghana. This latter action had left in its wake feelings of hostility by the Ashantis towards the coastal people. In the meantime, the Asante and Brong people had always viewed the Nkrumah-led government as one dominated by coastal people, a situation they resented. What confirmed their suspicion and probably increased their resentment was the Nkrumah government’s acceptance of the recommendations of a commission that the constituencies of the country be re-demarcated. The Asante and Brong people feared that this could increase the CPP seats in parliament and consequently ensure the predominance of coastal peoples in Ghana’s politics. Naturally, it was to be expected that such dominance would be strongly resisted, particularly by the Asante who had been a strong imperial power. In other words, a dominant presence of coastal peoples in the CPP government might significantly shift the balance of power. To

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ensure that this would not happen, educated Asante, with the support of rich cocoa farmers and traditional leaders, formed the National Liberation Movement (NLM) in 1954.

Another reason why the National Liberation Movement was formed had to do with economic interests and the well-being of the people of the Asante and Brong Ahafo regions. Nkrumah had reduced the price of cocoa at a time when the price in the international market was reasonably good. Asante leaders and rich cocoa farmers interpreted this to mean that Nkrumah was out to sabotage the economic well-being of people of cocoa farming areas inhabited mainly by the Asante and the Brong people.

Even though the above illustration does not contain examples of violent inter-ethnic confrontations in terms of wars, it demonstrates how the process of nation-building, which includes the immediate period before independence and that period immediately after independence, involved competition for power in the central government as the first government attempted to restructure the political and economic life of an African state. Our example also confirms the assertion that ethnic consciousness and social ascription vary through time, directly linked to an increase or a decrease in inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts. In this case, competition saw the formation of ethnically and regionally based movements or parties and the reality of ethnic conflicts, even if of a covert type.

Another important point regarding the building blocks of ethnicity is that they vary in relation to time and place. There is no guarantee because language, for example, has been a reason for ethnic cohesion, identification and mobilization in a particular country, that this will always be the case. In the future of the same country, religion or
some other factor might become the prevailing source of ethnic identification. Moreover, what might constitute an important source for mobilization and conflict in one country may not do so in another country. For example, in Canada language difference has been a source of mobilization and tension, and yet in Africa and Asia, where there is greater linguistic diversity, conflict has often been due more to religion, economic deprivation and culture. It is clear that differences in language, religion, culture, etc. can become sources of ethnic identification, inter-ethnic tensions and conflict. Resource competition theorists believe that ethnicity becomes a source of division in society when people begin to compete for economic and political resources. However, there are conditions and situations that tend to favour competition along ethnic lines.

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62 There is a wide range of literature that links natural resources to conflict. See for example, Paul Richards, “Rebellion in Liberia and Sierra Leone: A Crisis of Youth?,” in Conflict in Africa, ed. Oliver Furley, (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995), 134-170. Here Richards presents a comparative analysis of the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. He argues that ethnicity was only a secondary cause of the two civil wars which emerged in the course of these conflicts. Economic interests and the political culture of the youth were the principal factors responsible for the two conflicts. In other words, even though the intention of the two rebel groups was to overthrow regimes that they believed were entrenched and corrupt, a major interest was the control of the mineral and forest resources. After taking control of resource-rich areas, the rebel groups extracted these resources, especially diamonds, for sale to international markets. The wealth accruing from the extraction and the control of the trade was an incentive on the part of the rebels to prolong the war. It was also the reason why young people readily rallied around rebel commanders and politically ambitious business tycoons. Lacking education and employment, young people saw the extraction and sale of resources through armed violence not only as the only alternative but as a lucrative one at that. Competition for resource control is therefore a significant factor here. This is corroborated by the research done by Indra de Soysa who raises a fundamental question as to whether civil wars are driven by rapacity or by paucity. To take the position that civil wars are driven by rapacity is to argue that an abundance of mineral wealth is positively and significantly related to armed conflict. An abundance of mineral wealth becomes an incentive or a source of attraction for rebel groups. Soysa is, therefore, on the greed side and less on the grievance side of the debate. The grievance side of the debate says that the scarcity of resources is positively and significantly linked to armed violence caused by either total deprivation or an unequal distribution of the wealth accruing from the mineral resources. See Indra de Soysa, “The Resource Curse: Are Civil Wars Driven by Rapacity or Paucity?,” in Greed & Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars, eds. Mat Berdal and David M. Malone (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 113-135. See also Paul Collier, “Doing Well Out of War: An Economic Perspective,” in Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars, eds. Mat Berdal and David M. Malone (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 91-111. Like Soysa, Collier stresses the greed dimension of the debate and ultimately the issue of competition for natural resources and how it relates to violent conflict. See also Abiodun Alao, Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa: The Tragedy of Endowment (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 112-156.
These conditions or situations can be summed up into two sets: historical and emergent.\textsuperscript{63} According to Nagel, the historical aspect finds expression in ideologies both present and past, in institutions and in how society is organized. The set of conditions that make up the emergent is rather contingent in nature since they are the result of current processes involving the demographic, economic and political landscape of a country.

Regarding the historical, the concept and the reality of the so-called cultural division of labour is significantly related to ethnic conflict. Here cultural division of labour does not merely refer to the situation where a particular group of people is restricted to particular jobs; it is a situation in which a minority group is politically dominated, economically exploited and socially denigrated by a dominant group, a situation that has a historical past and pattern. Moreover, cultural division of labour creates a situation where there is segregation between ethnic communities, a situation “characterized by great inequalities of wealth, power and status.”\textsuperscript{64}

What happens when, for example, two ethnic groups compete with one another for employment, especially when one group is paid a lower wage? This will certainly reinforce the ethnic boundaries that already exist between them. This is also likely to increase the possibility of inter-ethnic conflict. Even though there seems to be some merit in this position, other theorists have wondered whether competition per se is sufficient to lead to conflict. They argue that competition must assume a certain quality or dimension before it leads to conflict or inter-ethnic hostility. For example, Sarah Bélanger and Maurice Pinard assert that two conditions are necessary before ethnic competition can lead to conflict. The first condition is that competition must be perceived to be unfair.

\textsuperscript{63} Nagel, “Resource Competition Theories,” 446.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 446.
Second, “for an unfair ethnic competition to lead to conflict, the competitors’ relationships with each other must… be as uncomplementary as possible.” There is a third factor that is significantly related to conflict but is not a necessary condition. It speaks to the scope and intensity of conflicts. For a conflict to be widespread and intense, it must be social and the goods over which ethnic groups compete must be collective rather than individual.

In their research regarding the link between competition and inter-ethnic hostility with specific reference to Quebec, Sarah Bélanger and Maurice Pinard, as already mentioned, assert that for ethnic competition to lead to conflict it must be perceived to be unfair. Ethnic competition is perceived as unfair when recognized and accepted norms are violated. A violation of accepted norms can express itself in concrete acts of discrimination against an ethnic group. Competition can be said to be unfair also when the outcomes of the competition itself are viewed as being unbalanced. A concrete example is when one ethnic group has more access to government allocations than another. However, it is important to note that the perceived unfair competition is placed within a structural framework characterized by grievances that negatively influence the relationship between the competing ethnic groups. This structural framework or context within which the perceived unfair competition takes place can be one of “ethnic inequality, subordination or disadvantage of a class/economic nature.”

The contribution that Bélanger and Pinard make to the competition theory that I find relevant is the emphasis they place on the category of perceived unfairness in inter-

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66 Ibid., 450.
67 Ibid., 448.
68 Ibid., 449.
ethnic competition. In doing so they challenge the previously held assumption that competition necessarily leads to conflict. For Bélanger and Pinard, if it is the case that the desire to appropriate scarce goods implies competition, the reverse is not necessarily true. There can be competition between groups, and in fact there have been competitions without conflict. For example, competition in sports between two teams or between business entrepreneurs does not have to result in conflict provided the rules of the game, so to speak, are respected and observed. However, by examining the category of unfairness within the broader context of “hierarchy, domination, coercion or exploitation,” they show their support for such competition theories as the internal colonial theory and the cultural division of labour theory. In other words, even when a competition theory singles out a particular variable for analysis, its proponents often eventually place it within a broader spectrum.

It is equally important to note that the category of complementarity or interdependence is significantly related to the question of competition and conflict. The logic is that people who compete either over individual goods or collective goods are first and foremost relational beings. With respect to ethnic groups, it can be said that the higher the level of complementarity or interdependence, the greater the possibility that the relationship between them will be viewed as mutually beneficial. The contrary is equally true. The possibility of inter-ethnic tensions and conflict is higher when the level of complementarity or interdependence is low. In the latter case the inter-ethnic relationship is just as competitive as the goods over which they compete, and with greater potential for conflict. Be they purely competitive inter-ethnic relationships, or be it inter-ethnic competition for economic and political resources, or negative ethnicity, or a

69 Ibid., 449.
combination of all these that have led to conflicts in Africa, it must be noted that these
causes, as a general rule, have a historical and cultural context. This historical context is
commonly referred to as colonial legacy, believed to be closely connected to
contemporary conflicts in the African continent. It is to this legacy that we now turn.

**1.5 The Colonial Legacy Theory**

Colonial legacy as a theory asserts that most contemporary conflicts in different parts of
the world, including Africa, can be traced to colonial rule and the policies that colonial
governments employed in the administration of their colonies. In this regard, the
fundamental question that is often asked today in connection with inter-state wars, intra-
state wars and ethnic conflicts is this: To what extent did colonial policies or legacies lay
a foundation for all these conflicts? Of all the colonial powers, the British had by far the
largest colonial empire which employed the indirect rule system in its colonies. This
policy, often referred to as the divide and rule policy, has been greatly criticized as one of
the policies that caused divisions, tensions and conflict among African peoples. It has
also been criticized for promoting a structural framework characterized by hierarchy,
domination and subjugation, thus laying a solid foundation for unhappy inter-ethnic
relations and conflict. But in what precise ways did colonial rule prepare the ground for
some of the conflicts in Africa?

As mentioned above, inter-ethnic relations in the pre-colonial era, though not
completely devoid of violent conflict, were on the whole characterized by peaceful co-
existence. With the advent of colonial rule, this changed. In some cases, colonial
authorities separated people who were hitherto assimilated and had been living as one
group, or they brought people together who had until then lived as separate and independent groups, under one political administration. In the case of the latter, colonial authorities effectively tolerated or even created a situation where certain ethnic groups were given political monopoly and dominance over others. The promotion of political monopoly and ethnic nationalism were unfortunate because such decisions would eventually give rise to ethnocracies after the colonial era. Ethnocracy, which is the domination of one particular ethnic group, would become a fertile ground for inter-ethnic tensions and conflict. This, for example, would play out in the Hutu/Tutsi conflict in the aftermath of a Belgian colonial rule which had privileged the minority Tutsi over the majority Hutu, even though this allegiance would shift in favour of the Hutu on the eve of the independence of Rwanda.

Against this background it is important to ask which European countries were involved with Africa at this time and to what extent this involvement shaped the economic, social and political landscapes of African states. Belgium, France, Britain, Germany, Portugal and Spain had decided what shape the political map of Africa would take at the famous Berlin conference of 1884-85. At this conference, they took formal political control over territories which until then were described only informally as areas under their sphere of influence.

Changes in Europe and North America at this time had much to do with the partition of Africa. According to Morag Bell, by the end of the nineteen century opportunities for economic growth both in Europe and North America had become limited. This was in the wake of the industrial revolution. Europe and North America

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“turned to the less-developed world as a source of new raw materials, a market for Western products and as a profitable field for productive investment.” For Bell, then, the spread of capitalism, by the West around the world, a system based on competition, is an important process that was to shape the political map of the African continent. Moreover, other Western countries like France, Germany and the United States had begun to challenge the monopoly that Britain had over both the capitalist global economy and trade in Africa. Britain had enjoyed this monopoly during the first half of the nineteen century, but this had begun to change at the turn of the century. Export products from West Africa over which Britain had great control had also begun to decline in value because community production around the world had increased. In the meantime, the international market for certain Western products was “declining in relative terms and the competition for this market was therefore becoming more intense.”

According to Bell, even though these economic developments in the West were important in the shaping of the political map of Africa, they do not constitute a sufficient reason for, nor did they in themselves trigger, the partition of Africa. Political changes in Europe were the immediate cause. It is clear that both economic and political changes

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71 Morag Bell, Contemporary Africa: Development, Culture and the State (London: Longman, 1986), 69. See also G. N. Sanderson, “The European Partition of Africa: Coincidence or Conjuncture?” in European Imperialism and the Partition of Africa, ed. E.F. Penrose, (London: Frank Cass, 1975), 10-11. Sanderson discusses economic theories and how these theories are linked to the partition of Africa. European policy makers in the 1880s had already begun to think of how African countries might become rich markets for European economies which had begun to stagnate in the early 1870s. Trade, not territorial annexation, seems to have been the primary factor. Like Bell, Sanderson explains how Britain’s economic power and near monopoly over the coast of Africa was a source of contention. Britain resisted any attempts by other European countries to place limits over its monopoly. Consistent, however, with his presentation, Sanderson points out that these theories did not apply to every European country at the same time. For example, he argues against a link between economic depression and the partition of Africa in the case of Belgium at the time of Leopold.

72 Bell, Contemporary Africa, 71.

73 Ibid., 71. Bell speaks about the actions of Belgium and Germany here. For example, the decision of Germany to gain territorial control over a number of African states was meant to accomplish two purposes. First, it was to afford Germany a reasonable amount of control over the world market, especially as at this
in the West were responsible for the partition of Africa. How this affected Africa in terms of ethnic divisions and affiliations is our major concern. Bell draws our attention to how the decisions at the Berlin Conference affected the demarcation of boundaries and inter-ethnic relations as he states:

The boundaries defined imposed a new uniformity on the political organization of space which changed very little either during the colonial period or independence. Discussed and delineated on maps in European corridors of power following the Berlin Conference (1884-85), they were geographical curiosities which paid little regard to pre-existing divisions of territory by cultural group. A reliance on lines of latitude and longitude in the absence of geographical details resulted in tribal groups being politically divided, a particular feature in West Africa. For example, the Ewes were split between the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Togoland, and Yorubas between Nigeria and Dahomey (now Benin).

The reverse also happened. Ethnic groups that differed very much in terms of customs, social and political organizations were often brought together for the first time under one political authority, even if they had been traditional rivals.

In their essay “Post Cold War Africa: Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict and Security,” Abiodun Alao and Funmi Olonisakin examine the relationship between ethnicity and conflict in post-Cold War Africa. They take a closer look at ethnic related conflicts in Africa, focusing on how the character of ethnic conflicts changed after the Cold War and how this could change still further with the passage of time. As part of their analysis, they examine the root causes of ethnicity and how ethnicity is linked to conflicts in post-independence Africa.

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74 Ibid, 71.
Alao and Olonisakin trace some of the root causes of ethnic conflict in post-independence Africa to colonialism. Like Bell, they argue that for reasons of administrative convenience, colonial authorities created artificial national borders which brought together people who had different ethnic, social and religious identities, thereby sowing the seeds of ethnic tensions and conflict. Alao and Olonisakin further contend that what made the attainment of national unity more difficult when the new African states were being formed was the fact that some of the groups that had been brought together had been in rivalrous relationships in the pre-colonial era. This meant that “right from the time they were forced to co-exist, rivalry, tension, and mutual suspicion had been at the background of their relationship.”  

It is for this reason that it has been asserted that contemporary conflicts in Africa have a link with colonialism.

Before the colonial era in Nigeria, for example, the Arabs of Bogo had been assimilated with other ethnic communities, but they were later declared by British colonialists to be foreigners. The fragmentation and the polarization of populations along ethnic lines had a great potential for inter-ethnic tensions and conflict. In some colonies, the colonialists employed a deliberate and a systematic approach of ethnic classification. For instance, in Burundi and Rwanda, where the people had one language and culture, Belgian colonial policy eventually created and intensified ethnic consciousness. The Tutsi were spoken of as a people of a superior race, a well-bred race, associated with beauty, intelligence and leadership qualities. Because of these qualities, they were regarded as those who should rule over the Hutu. This ethnic classification was

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given an official stamp through the issuing of ethnic identity cards. Ethnic identification became a source of discrimination and exclusion in the competition for such resources as the provision for goods and services and the job market. Through these mechanisms, ethnic consciousness and ethnic hatred were promoted, and they eventually boiled over into the genocide of 1994.

Colonial authorities have often been criticized for laying the foundation for conflicts in Africa by also manipulating and exploiting ethnic differences for their own interests. In Morocco, for example, the French played the Arabs against the Berbers. The French took concrete steps against what they claimed was the attempt by the Arabs to impose the Islamic religion and Arabic language on the Berbers. To counter this attempt by the Arabs, the French established Franco-Berber schools among the Berbers, which were meant to replace the Qu’ranic schools. They also introduced Christianity to the Berbers. However, a closer look at these actions reveals that they were inspired not by a French concern that the Berbers might be converted into Muslims and become Arabs, so to speak; rather, it was because they feared Arab nationalism. Their actions were therefore aimed at undermining the rising nationalism of the Arabs. This created a situation of opposition between the two groups, even if in the end things turned out differently. In fact, the attempt to Christianize the Berbers by force made them identify more closely with their fellow Arab Muslims.77

The French also created antagonism between the Moors and the Black population in Mauritania. The French portrayed the Moors as a docile and hardworking people, for which reason they were considered to be very much like the French. The Arabic language was officially declared the language of instruction in the schools whereas the African

77Ibid., 19.
languages were rejected. Moreover, the Moors were not only taxed less than the Black population, eventually they were exempted from taxation. This meant that the surplus revenue had to be borne by the already heavily taxed Black population. The French showed preferential treatment towards the Moors because most of the minerals in Mauritania were located in the areas inhabited by the Moors. France needed those minerals for its capitalist mode of production. This economic interest led the French to initiate antagonism between the two ethnic communities. These actions by the French “laid the foundation for the conflicts which have periodically erupted between the Moors and the Blacks in Mauritania.” 78

This imbalance continued even in post-independence Mauritania. The Toucouleur and the Soninke, the principal Black groups, sought to redress the injustices that Black Mauritanians suffered with the implicit support of the government. This led to renewed tensions between them on one side and the government and the Arabs on the other. These tensions came to a head in the late 1980s. In 1984, the Force de Liberation Africaine de Mauritanians (FLAM) was formed. By June 1986, it published a manifesto which spoke about the oppression of Black Mauritanians. 79 This movement drew attention to an apartheid political arrangement, presumably akin to what obtained in South Africa at that time. It also drew attention to the government’s attempt to turn the entire Mauritanian society into an Arab state. These inter-ethnic tensions led to an attempted coup in October 1987, which in turn resulted in greater repression of the Black populations. These tensions had regional implications as Senegal and Mali were drawn into the conflict, with Senegal on the side of the black Mauritanians and Mali accused of

78 Ibid., 20.
supporting the government. It is developments such as these that support the assertion that some contemporary ethnic tensions and conflicts in Africa can be traced to colonialism.

If a capitalist system of production led colonial governments to manipulate and exploit inter-ethnic relations, thereby sowing seeds of antagonism between different ethnic communities, the nature of colonial economy itself did not help. In a number of colonies, the economy was often organized around regional enclaves. A fragmented and loosely connected colonial economy produced two effects. First, it produced a preferential developmental structure to the neglect of other areas. Second, it caused division among the emerging African elite along regional and ethnic lines. For example, the cocoa enclave in Ghana did not involve the Ewe as much as it did the Asanti. Elite from different regions began to view their regional enclaves as their exclusive preserve while regarding other elite from other regions as unwelcome intruders. Concretely, this meant that if an area were endowed with mineral resources, the elite of that region thought of such a resource as their own. In this way, another potential for conflict was established.

Even though there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that many contemporary ethnic conflicts in Africa can be traced to colonial policies, it would be wrong to blame colonial rule for all the ills of the African continent and for every conflict in Africa. It is clear from the above that colonial rule in some cases did create the structure that would eventually cause inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts in Africa, but it is also true that many of the African elite who emerged as leaders after decolonization found it convenient to continue to organize politics along ethnic lines for their own political interests. This

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trend led to the creation of ethnically based nationalist movements in some African countries, which after independence gave rise to the formation of “weak political parties, badly compromised constitutions, fragile democratic arrangements, unstable socio-economic policies, and essentially weak structures incapable of withstanding the pressure independence was to bring.”

Obviously, unstable socio-economic policies negatively influenced the growth of African economies and ultimately led to conflict. In his essay “Introduction: Africa: The Habit of Conflict”, Oliver Furley draws attention to the rise of violent conflicts in the world, especially in the developing world. According to Furley, the vast majority of these conflicts have been on the African continent with such great consequences as the increase in the number of refugees, the spread of disease, the problems of malnutrition and starvation, economic and social decline and the deterioration of morality. Furley argues that even though ethnicity has been significantly linked to conflicts in Africa, the question of the economic performance of the African elite who took over from the colonial authorities is equally important. In fact, Furley identifies the inadequate economic performance of most African countries as the most basic and long term cause of conflicts.

Furley gives a range of statistics to support his point. In the 1970s, according to World Bank information, the output per person in Africa was slower than anywhere else in the world. Seven countries in Africa had negative growth of Gross National Product (GNP), and eight more had negative per capita rates of growth. In sub-Saharan Africa,

\[83\] Ibid., 4.
the per capita growth rate in food production dropped by 1% while the population grew by 2.7% per year. Coupled with the debt problem was the reality of poor private capital inflow into these countries and insufficient foreign aid. According to Furley, this created a situation of economic despair and economic discomfort which boiled up to conflict. Furley also contends that following decolonization and the gaining of independence, institutions like the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now known as African Union (AU), deliberately refused to revisit the controversial issue of inter-state borders established by colonial authorities. Since the sole purpose of the OAU was to promote unity and peace among African states, it feared that revisiting such a controversial and delicate issue might cause discord and animosity, thereby derailing the very purpose of its existence. So the situation in which people of the same ethnic group were divided by border demarcations did not change with decolonization. In the event of a class or an elite-led conflict, factions have tended to appeal to people of the same ethnic group across the border for support. This for example, was the case in Uganda when Idi Amin easily recruited soldiers from across Sudan who belonged to his own Kakwa tribe. These developments indicate that although colonial rule must have laid the foundation for a number of conflicts in Africa, the problem goes beyond colonial legacy. Negative ethnicity, the shape that politics in post-independence Africa generally assumed, competition for economic resources, the availability of mineral and natural resources as an incentive for war and the economic performance of most African states since independence are all factors significantly related to the phenomenon of conflicts in general and ethnic conflicts in particular.

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84 Ibid., 4.
85 Ibid., 3.
Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been on three related areas; the question regarding theories of conflict, the phenomenon of collective violence or group action as a social category and the discussion of theories of conflict proper. Expounding mainly the thoughts of Gurr and Esman, regarding the validity and applicability of universal conflict theories in relation to conflicts everywhere including Africa, I take the position that both thinkers have put forward. Universal conflict theories may be applied to conflictual situations in Africa but with a modification. In other words, a universal conceptual and prescriptive framework, in the case of Africa, must take into consideration those elements that are distinctively African and speak to the African condition. For example, how does culture factor into the understanding of conflict? How does the shape of politics in post-independence Africa relate to contemporary ethnic conflicts? How does competition between groups for scarce economic resources relate to ethnic conflicts?

Our discussion about collective violence or group action as a social category reveals a number of ideas that are equally related to ethnic conflicts. First, collective violence or group action is aimed at impeding or bringing about a social change. Second, the macro-dimension of collective violence deals with real concerns, which may be social, economic or political. Deprivation leads to aggression, group mobilization and violence. All of these ideas can be applied to the situation of inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts.

Our discussion of the three conflict theories namely, ethnic identity theory, competition theory and colonial legacy theory confirms the fact that the phenomenon of conflict in general and ethnic conflict in particular is a complex and multifaceted reality
that defies a simplistic approach. Our examination further reveals that the theories of conflict overlap and this overlapping further indicates that in analysing any particular conflict, one must be critical about how the different causes relate one to the other, even if there is a trigger factor or a major factor. Ultimately, one must always keep in mind the connection between the emergent and the historical factors in the case of most ethnic conflicts. For example, this chapter has demonstrated with the help of sufficient evidence, how the creation of ethnocracies by colonial authorities or the exploitation of ethnic differences, either for reasons of administrative convenience or because of a homeland capitalist production system, laid the foundation for a number of contemporary ethnic conflicts in Africa.

A narrative analysis of two contemporary ethnic conflicts namely the Hutu-Tutsi conflict in Rwanda and the Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict in the Northern Region of Ghana, will confirm how different factors including competition for scarce resources especially political power and influence, inspired by horizontal inequalities, unfairness either real or perceived, politicized ethnicity and colonial legacy, all combined to cause these violent conflicts in Africa.
Chapter 2

A Narrative Analysis of the Hutu-Tutsi and the Konkomba-Nanumba Ethnic Conflicts

Introduction

In this chapter, I will present a narrative analysis of two contemporary ethnic conflicts: the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict and the Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict. The Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict, described as a genocide, not only attracted international attention and involvement, it had regional implications and produced a large number of refugees. The same cannot be said of the Konkomba-Nanumba conflict, even though its consequences in terms of the loss of lives and property cannot be taken lightly, overshadowed as it was by the Rwandan atrocities.

In this narrative analysis, I am guided by the following questions: What happened, why it happened, and what were the consequences? My contention is that themes addressed in chapter 1: negative ethnicity, competition for economic and political resources and colonial legacy played significant roles in both conflicts. This is not to suggest that these are the only causes of the conflicts under consideration. Rather, it is to suggest that they constitute some of the main causes.

I will first examine the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict and then the Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict. In both cases, after discussing rivalrous inter-ethnic
competition for resources, I will show how it can be traced to a historical context—
colonial rule. The conclusion will highlight significant categories that will receive further
analysis and appropriation in the final chapter.

2. 1 The Hutu-Tutsi Ethnic Conflict

2.1.1 Trigger Factor

Between April and July 1994, within a period of approximately hundred days, “some five
hundred thousand to one million Tutsi were killed, along with pro-democracy
Hutu.”86 The claim by many world leaders including leaders from the United Nations and
the United States of America that the genocide happened so quickly that it could not have
been prevented is not tenable. This is because throughout the early 1990s Human Rights
Watch (HRW) did not only document the increasing inter-ethnic tensions and violence in
Rwanda but also signalled early warning signs of the genocide. Tragically, these
observations went unheeded.87 In any event, the genocide that followed included massive
and organized killings targeting Tutsi and moderate Hutu.88

The perpetrators of the genocide were the Presidential Guard, members of the
regular army, the Hutu Militia, commonly referred to as Interahamwe, meaning ‘those
who attack together’, along with ordinary Hutu civilians. Besides those who carried out
the killing, one could speak of the actual organizers of the genocide in terms of those who
gave orders, those who propagated ethnic ideation and those who provided the weapons

86 Samuel Totten and Rafiki Ubaldo, eds., We Cannot Forget: Interviews with Survivors of the 1994
Genocide in Rwanda (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2011), 8.
87 Ibid., 1.
88 While it is the case that pro-democracy or moderate Hutu were targeted and killed during the genocide by
their fellow Hutu, from the Giradian point of view, it is possible to allude to Girard’s idea of unanimity. For
collective violence to work, a single dissenting voice is sufficient cause for worry. Ordinarily, an attempt
would be made to win such dissenting voices over. Could a failure in this regard lead to their lynching?
and logistics. This group of top government officials made up of the military, politicians and financial experts, for both ideological and material reasons resisted political change, an imminent reality they perceived as a threat.89

I will look at the events leading up to the genocide with specific attention on how a ‘theology’ the Hamitic hypothesis was used to rationalize the scapegoating, first, of the Hutu ethnic group in colonial Rwanda and then the Tutsi ethnic group, from the time of the social Revolution through independence till the genocide itself. I begin with the immediate cause of the genocide.

The immediate cause of the genocide was the assassination of the Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu. While returning from Dar es Salem, Tanzania, where Habyarimana had met with other regional leaders to discuss the implementation of the Arusha Accords, his plane was shot down at the Kigali airport on April 6, killing him and the Burundian president, Cyprien Ntaryamira.

Who were behind the assassination of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi and what was their motive? Different theories have been advanced in an attempt to answer the above questions. One theory blames the current Rwandan president, Paul Kagame, [a Tutsi], for masterminding the assassination of Habyarimana.90

In his examination of theories related to the assassination, French historian Gérard Prunier rejects the claim that the RPF might have been responsible. Prunier presents two

89 Prunier, The Rwanda Crisis, 242.
90 See Daniel Kroslak, The Role of France in the Rwandan Genocide (London: Hurst & Company, 2007), 46. Accordingly, one Bruguière, a French judge even sought to obtain international warrants against Kagame, who was commander of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), at the time of the genocide, as well as against other high ranking members of the RPF. Even though Bruguière was not speaking on behalf of the French government, some have always viewed his position as revealing what France has always believed, that the RPF was responsible for the assassination.
arguments in support of his position. He argues that it certainly was not in the political
interest of the RPF to kill President Habyarimana because the RPF, from the Arusha
agreement, “had obtained a good political settlement … and could not hope for anything
better.”91 In fact, the RPF had received four political positions only one position less
than the ruling government.92 As part of the peace initiative, the RPF had “called for an
end to the misuse of public office, the establishment of social services, democratisation of
the security forces and a progressive foreign policy.”93 Under great pressure both from
within Rwanda and from the international community, Habyarimana, against the will of
his supporters and government in Kigali, agreed to power-sharing as part of the
democratization process that included the creation of a new transitional government.
Habyarimana’s agreement to power-sharing and, especially, the allocation of the four
political positions to the RPF must have caused resentment and displeasure among some
of his conservative supporters.

According to Prunier, the most plausible theory is that President Habyarimana
was killed by those of his followers who had embraced a certain extremism. This group
was against the democratization process because for them a multi-party democracy which
encouraged the formation of opposition parties and in effect gave a voice to the RPF
meant the return of Tutsi rule and hegemony, under which the Hutu had suffered from
since the colonial era until the 1959 revolution. These ‘extremists’ believed that two
related actions had to be taken in order to halt the hated democratization process. First,
influential people in favour of multi-party democracy had to be killed. Second, all Tutsi

91 Prunier, The Rwanda Crisis, 220.
92 Ibid., 54.
93 Dixon Kamukama, Rwanda Conflict: Its Roots and Regional Implications (Kampala, Uganda: Fountain
Publishers), 46.
had to be killed. To kill all Tutsi and all moderate Hutu would solve the ethnic problem
and put an end to the democratization process respectively.\(^{94}\)

If Prunier is correct that the President was killed by extremist Hutu who were
dissatisfied with the terms of the Arusha accord, then one implication is clear: The death
of the president was used as a ploy to begin what had been planned for years. For
example, one Theoneste Bagosora, a powerful military officer of the Habyarimana
government and a leader of the Hutu militia, was disgusted about the peace agreements
and vowed to return to Rwanda to bring about an apocalypse.\(^{95}\) From a Giradian point of
view one can say that the death of the president ignited a destabilization of society that
provided an opportunity for the scapegoating of Tutsi as well as moderate Hutu.

A number of pro-government media houses such as the Radio Télévision Libre
des Mille Collins (RTLM) called on people to ‘avenge the death of our president’. People
were asked to go out and kill the enemy. To kill the enemy and to fill the graves was
described as a good deed. The massacres that were carried out in Kigali immediately
following the death of the president were carried out not only by Hutu militias but also by
the presidential guard. This means that both groups were already on the alert. “…
[D]eath-lists had been carefully distributed to future killers, who acted in coordinated and
systematic ways in order to catch their intended victims.”\(^{96}\) What this suggests is that
supporters of the Hutu-led Habyarimana government were not only responsible for his

\(^{94}\) Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 222.
\(^{95}\) Immaculée Ilibagiza, *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Genocide* (Carlsbad, California: Hay House, Inc., 2006), 36. The theory that the president was killed by an extremist wing of his
government as part of a ploy can be supported by the events that unfolded in Kigali less than an hour after
the presidential plane was shot down. Roadblocks were set up and Tutsi tracked down and killed.
\(^{96}\) Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 224.
death; they had also intended to use it as a ploy to start the genocide while using the media to exploit the existing ethnic hatred in Rwandan society.

As already mentioned, the victims of the genocide were mostly of the Tutsi ethnic group since all Tutsi were targeted for death.\(^97\) Ethnic identity cards became death warrants for Tutsi and for Hutu who looked like Tutsi. Hutu who looked like Tutsi were often not believed because the killers saw in their claims one more example of Tutsi deceit and cunning. Because an entire ethnic group was targeted it can be said that ethnic hatred and rivalry, deeply rooted in Rwandan society, eventually led to the genocide itself.

However, neither ethnic hatred nor the genocide itself happened all of a sudden. In their analysis of the genocide, Emmanuel M. Kolini and Peter R. Holmes, assert that the genocide “was not an explosive, isolated one hundred-day event. Instead it was part of a darker history of Rwanda going back into the 1800s.”\(^98\) Kolini and Holmes trace the genocide to the preferential treatment given to the Tutsi by the colonial authorities, a policy which created distrust and jealousy between Hutu and Tutsi. Distrust and resentment led to the Hutu uprising in 1959, and this in turn created a large number of Tutsi refugees who fled into neighbouring countries. Thus, Kolini and Holmes argue that

\(^97\) Ilibagiza narrates her experience regarding the killing of Tutsi by her Hutu neighbours who had heeded the call to exterminate all Tutsi in Rwanda. She and five other Tutsi women were cramped into a bathroom of the house of one Murinzi, a Protestant Pastor and a Hutu by tribe. On many occasions, her Hutu neighbours, who formed themselves into a group of killers, searched the Pastor’s house on suspicion that the Pastor was hiding some Tutsi. On one occasion, just before this group entered to search the house she could see them through the window. She did not only recognize some of them but heard the frightening call in these words: “Let us hunt them in the forests, lakes, and hills; let us find them in the church; let us wipe them from the face of earth!” See Ilibagiza, *Left to Tell*, 77.

the genocide began in 1959 and ended in 1994. Ultimately, ethnic hatred, a significant cause of the 1994 genocide had evolved through time.

Coupled with the reality of ethnic hatred was the question of ideology. A Hutu supremacist ideology had emerged after the 1959 social revolution. This ideology involved the perception and propagation of the idea that the Hutu were the embodiment of democracy and the Tutsi the embodiment of feudalism, a system opposed to democracy. Therefore, the architects of the genocide understood themselves as representing a larger social circle on whose behalf they were carrying out a good and justifiable deed; they believed genocide was necessary for the survival of the Hutu ethnic group. In other words, they interpreted the so-called democratization process, and the return of the RPF, as an attempt to rob the Hutu people of what they had rightly acquired. New social and economic opportunities had been opened to them by the social revolution, and they had attained a sense of dignity. Within the context of the social revolution, democracy was more a reality of numbers than anything else. Sadly, this Hutu self-understanding and the willingness to use violence to maintain it had acquired a sacred character. But what circumstances led the Hutu to this ideology? What led to the ethnic hatred between Hutu and Tutsi which in turn led to the genocide? The answers to these two questions can be found in the structure of traditional Rwandan society and how other social forces, including Belgian colonial rule, shaped it.

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Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 226. See also René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 92. Lemarchand points out the so-called Hamitic myth which had been imported into Rwanda by Catholic missionaries from nineteenth century Europe, one which presumed the innate cultural superiority of the Tutsi and legitimized the latter’s rule over the Hutu under Belgian colonial rule and how this was now being reversed. The process of reversal saw the Hutu emphasizing the foreign origin of the Tutsi, a people they regarded as cunning and perverse and who had used the feudal system to exploit others. Ultimately this reversal saw the creation of the Hutu ideology and their ascendancy during the latter years of colonial rule.
2.2 Historical Factors or the Roots of the Conflict

2.2.1 The Impact of Colonial Rule

As to the root causes of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict, different positions have been advanced. The debate around the origin of the genocide has been centred broadly on three issues: ethnicity, colonialism and leadership. A closer examination of the available evidence supports the thesis that all three elements have been important sources of conflict. What was the shape of traditional Rwandan society and what influence did colonial rule have on it?

Those who stress ethnicity as the main cause of the conflict argue that even before colonial rule, Rwandan society had been stratified, composed of three main sub-groups: the Tutsi, the Hutu and the Twa. A caste or a near-caste society obtained in pre-colonial Rwanda. The implication is that there were already ethnic inequalities, with the Tutsi on top of the social ladder and the Hutu and Twa on the lower rungs. Accordingly, these ethnic inequalities survived into the colonial period where they were consolidated. The conflict was therefore a result of an attempt to redress the inequalities and the general social imbalance of the past. Both Hutu and Tutsi had resisted domination at different times in Rwanda’s history.

René Lemarchand argues that what made the ethnic conflict in Rwanda particularly brutal and savage were the myths that evolved around Hutu and Tutsi society. Lemarchand uses the term “myth” in both its conventional and metaphorical senses. In its

100 Kamukama, Rwanda Conflict, 5.
conventional sense, myth refers to a legend which often explains the origins of a people and its social cohesion. Metaphorically, “mythmaking involves the deliberate denial or distortion of historical reality in a situation of crisis and conflict. The aim of mythmaking of this sort is to inspire division and to inflame ethnic passions.”

Mythmaking in pre-colonial Rwandan society involved both dimensions. For example, the traditional myths of origin have always portrayed Tutsi as superior to their neighbours. According to the findings of historian Marcel d’Hertefelt, five themes which claim Tutsi supremacy have been identified. These include the following: the celestial origins of the Tutsi; the fundamental and “natural” differences among Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa; the superior civilization that the Tutsi brought to Rwanda; and the threat of divine sanctions against those brazen enough to revolt against the monarchy and the notion of divine kingship.

As if to argue that Tutsi supremacy and rule has a divine origin, there exists a Rwandan folktale which says that God entrusted a pot of milk to the care of Gahutu, Gatutsi and Gatwa in order to test their dependability. Each was to watch over his pot of milk throughout the night. At dawn, it was discovered that Gatwa, a glutton, had drunk his milk, and Gahutu had gone to sleep and spilt his milk. Only Gatutsi had guarded his milk, having stayed up the whole night in a spirit of watchfulness.

For Lemarchand, these myths served two related purposes: to make the past intelligible and to legitimize the present. The conservative Tutsi elite held onto the idea of Tutsi supremacy even after the social revolution. Between 1959 and 1962 the attempt by both Tutsi and Hutu to

102 Ibid., 53.
103 Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, 53. See also Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, 80. The myth is the same except that it is the king and not God who puts his three sons to the test. Both Tutsi supremacy and the monarchy are accorded a sacral sanction. It is also important to note that even though the myth underlines a common fraternity, the superiority of Tutsi ethnic group is demonstrated not only by Gatutsi’s watchfulness but especially by his ability to transcend bodily desires and urgings.
remember their past entered into their respective political agendas with far-reaching and deadly consequences. Lemarchard’s notion of myth in the metaphorical sense of the word where truth is compromised, resonates well with Girard’s argument regarding the victim mechanism where in ancient mythologies, the truth is compromised leading to an expulsion or lynching. In any event, for the conservative Tutsi elite, there was no room for reconciliation and equality since they believed that their ancestors, who belonged to the ruling class, had subjugated the Hutu. The Hutu political elite believed such denigrating ideologies called for a change through revolution. That revolution took place in 1959, and from it flowed a complex network of processes that eventually led to the genocide of 1994.

One reason why Tutsi social superiority may have evolved is Rwandan perception of people who own cattle. Cattle are a sign of wealth, power, and upward social mobility, and most owners of cattle were Tutsi. However, it would be simplistic to view the difference between Tutsi and Hutu as merely socioeconomic, that is, as a difference between rich and poor and between pastoralists and agriculturalists. Some Hutu owned cattle, and so must have enjoyed both the wealth and social prestige that came along with cattle possession. However, the fact that most of the people who owned cattle were Tutsi meant that by and large the Tutsi ethnic group enjoyed a higher social and economic standing over the Hutu ethnic group. That an ideology of Tutsi supremacy existed in a stratified pre-colonial Rwanda cannot be ignored. However, this ideology was consolidated and intensified when Rwanda came under colonial rule (1892-1962).

Rwanda came under German rule in 1892 followed by the Belgians in 1919. Because the German presence in Rwanda was light, and because they needed the central
state as a tool of colonization, the Germans gave their official stamp to the native institution of the monarchy and, by extension, to the control that chiefs exercised. Prunier explains: “The German presence was structurally essential since it inaugurated a colonial policy of indirect rule, which left considerable leeway to the Rwandese monarchy and acted in direct continuation of the pre-colonial transformation towards more centralisation, annexation of the Hutu principalities and increase in Tutsi chiefly power.” An increase of Tutsi chiefly power was consolidated under Belgian rule with far reaching consequences. André Sibomana in his examination of the role that colonial rule played in the eruption of the genocide explains that colonial officials upon arrival in Rwanda chose to deal with the mwanmi [the king] and his court because they wielded political, economic, cultural and religious power over large parts of the country. For Sibomana, whether colonial officials acted out of short-sightedness or for reasons of administrative convenience, their decision had negative consequences. He states:

If power had not been given to one group (the Tutsi) to the detriment of the other two groups (the Hutu and Twa) and if subsequently, it had not been taken away in its entirety from that group and handed over in its entirety to another group (the Hutu), we might have been able to avoid a genocide. If colonization were to be put on trial, that is where the accusations would be levelled. The Belgian settlers implanted racist stereotypes which we were not able to shake off.

In traditional Rwandan society, there were three types of chiefs. First, there was the ‘chief of landholdings’ who was in charge of agricultural production, taxation and the

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104 Prunier, The Rwanda Crisis, 25.
105 André Sibomana, Hope for Rwanda: Conversations with Laure Guibert and Hervé Deguine, trans. Carina Tertsakian (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 86-87. Sibomana is objective and fair when he admits that the responsibility of Belgian colonial officials in this regard should not obscure the fact that both Hutu and Tutsi extremists, at different moments in Rwanda’s history, exploited these stereotypes in order to conquer or hold on to power. Sibomana, a Rwandan, is a catholic priest, a journalist and a leading human rights activist. He worked tirelessly for independent investigations into human right violations in Rwanda and was one of the very few independent voices in Rwanda unafraid of speaking out against the abuses of past and present Rwandan governments. During the genocide, he risked his life trying to save lives. His work is a personal testimony of an eye witness to the events leading up to the 1994 genocide.
attributed land. Second, there was the ‘chief of men’ who essentially was in charge of recruiting men for the king’s armies. Third, there was the ‘chief of pastures’ who controlled the grazing land. Even though most of the chiefs were Tutsi, a number of chiefs in charge of land were Hutu since they were mainly farmers.¹⁰⁶

Under Belgian rule, chiefly power was now concentrated in the hands of one individual who almost always was a Tutsi. Secondly, for reasons of taxation and what was often referred to as ‘public works of interests’, the hated forced labour system was introduced. Whereas before, the King dealt with whole lineages, thereby respecting the African idea of collective solidarity and responsibility, the Belgians personalized forced labour by making it compulsory for every able-bodied male. Belgian authorities needed the forced labour for the construction of roads, stores and railway lines.

Kamukama points out that Rwanda was subjected to the economic interests of metropolitan Belgium. The introduction of cash crops, which had no immediate benefit for the people, was intended for Belgium’s “metropolitan industrial sector.”¹⁰⁷ The raw materials so much needed for Belgium’s industrial sector had to be produced at a minimum cost, the reason for the introduction of the hated forced labour system.¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, two methods were employed: 1) duress through beating and 2) taxation. The system itself and the methods used for its implementation were very much resented by the people and became very unpopular. Because the state functionaries used by the Belgian colonial authorities were mostly Tutsi, “the whole exercise accentuated class

¹⁰⁶Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 12.
¹⁰⁸See Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, 109-111. Mamdani describes in detail the harsh nature of the system of forced labour which served both the infrastructural development agenda of Belgian colonial authorities and individual Tutsi chiefs, and how this led to massive emigration of many Hutu into neighbouring Uganda.
consciousness and widened the ethnic rift.” The hatred that the people harboured because of the oppressive colonial policies was directed at a state machinery dominated by the Tutsi. From the Girardian point of view, one can argue that the Belgian colonial authorities were paving the way for the future scapegoating of the Tutsi.

While it is true that Belgian colonial authorities manipulated the Tutsi to implement their administrative policies, the Tutsi should not be seen as passive instruments. For example, knowing that they had the support of the Belgian administration, the Tutsi decided to take advantage of it. They obtained the legal backing of Belgian colonial administration for the privatization of an important institution—the privatization of grazing land. Until then, grazing lands were seen as native collectivities belonging to entire lineages. Under the new law, such lands were considered unoccupied and could be taken and redistributed. Given their preferential treatment by the Belgians colonialists, the Tutsi were certainly the beneficiaries of this new development.

According to Prunier, Western capitalism had found its way “into the traditional collective folds of an ancient society.” This form of capitalism found expression not only in the privatization of grazing land but also in the traditional practice of ubuhake.

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111 Ibid, 13, 29. Basically, *ubuhake* was a form of clientship contract entered into by two men, the patron and the client. Perhaps in its classical form, this meant a Tutsi patron giving a cow to his Hutu client. Since cattle were seen as a sign of wealth, power, good breeding and social upward mobility, the giving of a cow to a Hutu client was regarded as a benevolent act intended to ‘tutsify’ a Hutu, so to speak. Also a poor family whether Hutu or Tutsi, could seek the financial support of a wealthy patron and in turn render services to him. See also Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, 64-66. Mamdani, points out the different types of patron-client relationships and how they evolved through time. In their original form, client lineages were expected to give cattle to patrons in return for protection. The purpose must have been to ensure social cohesion between elite groups. In a later form, it was the patron who gave a cow to the client in lieu of the latter’s loyalty and services. It was precisely in this second form that the element of reciprocity was devalued and inequality intensified. This arrangement also gave patrons the opportunity to exploit their clients at will.
Prunier is critical of the position that claims that this practice is typical of traditional Rwandese culture. On the contrary he argues that *ubuhake* as a social practice was “largely a synthetic product developed by colonial Tutsi chiefs under the benevolent sponsorship of the Belgian administration.”

While pro-Tutsi writers see *ubuhake* as typical of Rwandan culture and even contend that it enhanced social cohesion, those on the side of the Hutu interpret it as a system that has been greatly exploitative.

Like Belgian colonial authorities, Christian missionaries, especially Catholic missionaries played a significant role in the transformation of the Rwandan society. Accordingly, the arrival of Catholic missionaries in Rwanda in 1900 set in motion a long and contentious relationship between Christianity and traditional Rwandan religion. For example, the Catholic missionaries did not only support the existing privileges of the Tutsi, but in 1931, collaborated with the British colonial administration to depose King Musinga who was then replaced with his son Rudahigwa. The missionaries disliked King Musinga, a polygamist, whose moral life they held in disdain and who they believed was “as an obstacle to the Christianization of Rwanda.”

Rudahigwa eventually converted to Catholic Christianity and with it there followed a mass conversion. Until then, the majority of Christian converts had been poor and marginalized people, some of whom probably saw the Church as a charitable organization. It is possible that many Tutsi converted to the Catholic faith at this time because they realized that “a necessary prerequisite for membership in the élite of the

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113 Totten and Ubaldo, *We Cannot Forget*, 3.
new Rwanda the Belgians were creating was to become a Christian.”¹¹⁴ Since the Church had a monopoly over education and had always viewed the Tutsi as those who belonged to the chiefly class, they were favoured so that the Church could ensure and enhance its control over the future elite of the country. This intention of the Church found expression in the educational policies of the missionaries.

The first group to build a western type of school in Rwanda were the Missionaries of Africa, popularly known as the ‘White Fathers’. Given the objective of the White Fathers’ educational policy, Mamdani asserts that it was consciously designed to favour the Tutsi. The objective was to ensure that the children of Tutsi, regarded as the ‘born rulers’ of Rwanda, would emerge as an elite group, capable not only of understanding the meaning of development and progress, but more importantly of putting these ideas into practice, “thus functioning as auxiliaries to both missionaries and the colonial administration.”¹¹⁵ After 1930, when government schools had been phased out, the missionaries assumed total control of education in Rwanda. In schools where both Tutsi and Hutu children were recruited, they were kept apart and instructed in different streams. The Tutsi children were given a ‘superior’ type of education in French whereas

¹¹⁴ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 31. Questions have been raised regarding the methodology that the White Fathers employed in their evangelizing mission, that is, conversion from above. In the case of Rwanda, it was not a straightforward decision. The White Fathers were well informed about the traditional political organization in Rwanda and to some extent exhibited a certain level of sensitivity. In the south, there existed a regime of a centralized, single monarchy, dominated by a Tutsi lineage; whereas in the North, the people were under the rule of several Hutu kings. The centralized authority in the south made attempts to extend its influence over the north. This was resisted. Seeing these tensions and divisions, some members of the White Fathers’ society proposed that a gradual Christianization of the Rwandan population should be the preferred option. Others however preferred to rely on the conversion of the leaders. Eventually, it was this latter approach that was adopted according to the intention of their founder, Cardinal Lavigerie. Against the background of the genocide and its atrocities, a common question that has been raised is whether large conversions of the masses, inspired by the conversion of the King, meant true conversion of souls. During the genocide, people could be seen wearing medals of the Virgin Mary around their necks while holding a machete in their hands making violent gestures. See Sibomana, *Hope for Rwanda*, 81-82 and 96.

the Hutu children were given an ‘inferior’ type of education in Kiswahili. Beneath this separatist educational policy was a political implication—whereas the Tutsi were foreseen as state functionaries or as part of Belgian colonial political structure, the Hutu were not only excluded, they were being “prepared for manual labour.”  

Both colonial and Church educational policy led to the marginalization of the majority Hutu. The Hutu could obtain post-secondary education only in theology. Hutu graduates often became embittered and frustrated as they could rarely find employment in secular society suited to the type of education that they received in Catholic seminaries. From the above, one cannot fail to see how the transformation of traditional Rwandan society by Belgian colonial authorities and Christian missionaries exacerbated ethnic differences, inequalities and fuelled hard feelings between Hutu and Tutsi.

While Belgian colonial educational and administrative policies helped create a local hierarchy that became very conscious of its supremacy, it was the census organized in 1933-34 that officially classified and distinguished Hutu from Tutsi. According to Mamdani, what the Belgians did “was to take up an existing sociopolitical distinction and racialize it.”

Even though Belgian colonial authorities cannot be exonerated from either creating inter-ethnic inequalities or intensifying them thereby laying the foundation for the 1994 genocide, it must be pointed out that a nineteenth century European racial

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116 Ibid, 90. See also 111-114 where Mamdani, besides exposing the imbalance in terms of quality and numbers between Tutsi and Hutu in the area of education, draws attention to how the few educated Hutu found themselves discriminated against and in fact excluded from the job market both in the public and private sectors. Faced with this situation, Hutu elite saw their new position not only as a means to a livelihood but more importantly as an opportunity to articulate the main grievance of the Hutu ethnic group: their exclusion from all avenues of social advancement, institutionalized in the form of the Tutsi monopoly, supported by the Belgian colonial administration.

theory, the Hamitic theory or hypothesis shaped their *modus operandi*. An analysis of the Hamitic hypothesis is important for two reasons. It sheds light on how a Eurocentric and racial ideology permeated the Rwandan society and influenced negatively the core elements of ethnic identity and difference. Second, it sheds light on how Rwandans themselves, especially those who have the power to change things, namely politicians, intellectuals and policy makers, reproduced colonial patterns of relations by their own interpretations of the Hamitic hypothesis. Ultimately, it reveals the fact that to the extent that both Hutu and Tutsi remembered their history selectively, a history that each group mythologized, political polarization would be inevitable. In fact differences that had been conceptualized would later on be turned into political programmes by both Hutu and Tutsi extremists on the eve of the genocide.

2.2.2 The Hamitic Hypothesis

The Hamitic hypothesis in broad terms is a stereotype of the black person in Western imagery which resulted from different disciplines including theology, biology and anthropology. Its basis is traced to the Hebrew Scriptures in the book of Genesis (cf. Gen 9:18-27). This text speaks about how Ham, the son of Noah was cursed for laughing at his father’s nakedness. Even though the text itself does not say that black Africans are Ham’s descendants, this eventually found its way into the Judeo-Christian tradition and for centuries, “both Christian and Judaic theology taught that the enslavement of blacks, the offspring of this unworthy son, is a punishment willed by God…”\(^\text{118}\) According to Mamdani, “The biblical curse—‘a servant of servants shall he be’—was taken to mean that

the Negro was clearly preordained for slavery. So the Negro could be degraded while
remaining a part of humanity—without disturbing Christian sensibilities.”

From the outset, it is important to state that the Hamitic hypothesis received
varied interpretations at different historical moments, which accounts for the shift in
themes. In broad terms, there is a movement from the theme of curse and servitude which
is applied to the black race as a whole, to the theme of foreign origins with respect to
African civilization, where the Tutsi in Rwanda are seen as the agents of civilization in
that country and for which reason they are seen as ‘Europeans with black skin’ so to
speak. Just as it was the mission of the Europeans to bring civilization to Africa through
colonization, the Tutsi are believed to have fulfilled a similar mission in Rwanda through
migration and conquest. Consequently, the Tutsi are described in essentialist terminology
as a people who have an innate capacity for leadership and who are superior to the Hutu.
However, in independent Rwanda, when the hypothesis is reversed by the Hutu elite, it
would be interpreted within the framework of Marxist ideology where the bourgeois
Tutsi minority must be driven out by suppressed Hutu masses. Specifically, this reversal
would entail two levels—the cognitive and the pragmatic with an emphasis on the so-
called wickedness of the Tutsi on the one hand and Hutu naïveté on the other.

Christopher C. Taylor examines the Hamitic hypothesis with specific reference to
Rwanda and Burundi within the context of the violent crisis in the two neighbouring
countries. As part of his analysis, he presents a brief discussion of the intellectual

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112. Semujanga points out how the Hamitic myth from the 16th century onwards was used to justify the
slave trade and slavery. The inferiority of the African is not only congenital, the African is said to be
marked by an original defect.
antecedents of the Hamitic hypothesis and its ideological appropriation. According to Taylor, the hypothesis itself resulted from three strands of nineteenth century European thought, a combination of which contributed to cooption. These include: theology; biology and anthropology.\(^\text{120}\) The theological strand has its basis in the biblical account already referred to above which emphasizes the theme of the curse. Because of the curse, Ham and his descendants are said to have been banished from entering the Promised Land. They were commanded by God to go south where they would become ‘hewers of wood’ and ‘drawers of water’. Relying on this interpretation, the Boers of South Africa for example, found it justified to enslave black South Africans. Inspired also by Calvinist theology, the Boers saw themselves as the ‘elect’ of God and all black Africans as Hamites, a ‘dammed’ race. God himself, they believed, had condemned Ham’s descendants to lives of perpetual servitude.

This negative image of the African was further confirmed by another theory, the Great Chain of Being theory which resulted from a combination of theology, biological determinism and anthropology.\(^\text{121}\) According to this theory, and from the view point of moral and intellectual capacities, groups of human beings are believed to have followed a ranked order. Proponents of this theory believed that it could be demonstrated quantitatively by measuring the internal volume of the skulls of people of different races. The findings of the research are provocative. “The largest skull volumes were observed among the researchers’ own racial group: white, northern Europeans. Smaller volumes

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\(^{121}\) Ibid., 59
were observed among native Americans, Asians and sub-Saharan Africans." The conclusion was that civilization attained its highest level among Europeans.

However, when early European explorers discovered highly developed art work and state systems, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, “where small-brained specimens could not have been expected to develop anything approaching ‘civilization’”\textsuperscript{123}, another explanation developed: that superior races inevitably conquer inferior races.

This theory was inspired by the explorer John Henning Speke in his \textit{Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile} (1863).\textsuperscript{124} Consequently, it was argued that if Hamites, or black Africans, as was the case in South Africa, were condemned to a life of inferiority and servitude, Tutsi in Rwanda, despite their black skin, must be of a foreign origin who through migration and conquest, brought civilization to Rwanda. It was for this reason that Tutsi were said “to be almost Caucasian.”\textsuperscript{125} In brief, this version of the Hamitic hypothesis speaks to the so-called mobile groups believed to be the architects of every kind of civilization on the African continent. According to Taylor, this manner of thinking based on half truths and lacking in scientific evidence eventually became part of commonsense belief for later explorers, historians, missionaries and anthropologists.

Against the background of the above analysis of the Hamitic hypothesis, especially its link with so-called superior civilization, it is not difficult to understand why

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 59.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 59. In fact, Hamites in this context is a race different from Africans and who are believed to be of Asiatic or Semitic origins. Two opposing images therefore emerged: the dominant Hamites/Batutsi on the one hand and the indigenous Bahutu on the other. The latter alone are regarded as African. Note that in this context when the term Hamite is applied to the Tutsi, it is no longer negative but positive.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Taylor, \textit{Sacrifice as Terror}, 59.
\end{itemize}
it was applied to the Tutsi in Rwanda. The Tutsi were not only the ruling class, they also had a well-organized institution of kingship. According to Prunier, the king lived at the centre of a large court and was treated like a divine being. He was surrounded by elaborate rituals, and his authority was symbolized by a sacred drum called Kalinga. It was believed to be sacrilegious for anyone to revolt against the king. Perhaps the fact that Kalinga was decorated with the testicles of slain enemies\textsuperscript{126} was sufficient warning to any potential group or individual dissenters.

The first Europeans who made contact with Rwanda could not imagine how so-called ‘savage negros’ could have developed a sophisticated political organization. They therefore concluded that the Tutsi pastoralists must have come from elsewhere and then civilized the ‘dark agricultural masses’—the Hutu. Believed to be of a superior humanity to the Hutu, the Tutsi were seen as the natural and best equipped intermediaries between the colonizer and the ‘dark agricultural masses’. Obviously, the Hamitic hypothesis must have inflated the cultural egos of the Tutsi and deflated that of the Hutu, leading to resentment on the part of the latter. One can argue that because the Hamitic hypothesis created opposing categories of power and powerlessness, it provided, from the Giradian point of view, a conceptual framework for scapegoating whole ethnic groups of people. I will return to this point in my final chapter as part of my appropriation of the relevant insights.

That Hamitic themes and images did inflate the cultural ego of the Tutsi is confirmed by the findings of Taylor who did field research in Rwanda from October 1993 till April 1994 when the genocide broke out. Taylor had interviewed many Rwandans

\textsuperscript{126} Prunier, \textit{The Rwanda Crisis}, 10.
including members of the RPF, mostly Tutsi and those who were fighting the government forces and the Hutu militias. One interviewee, a Tutsi, explains that he did not originally support the RPF, when they had invaded the country, in 1990. However, the ill treatment that he and other Tutsi suffered when they were arbitrarily arrested made him to join the RPF after his release. Another interviewee, also a Tutsi, offered his reasons for joining the RPF. “We Tutsi were once the nobles in this land and the Hutu were our slaves. Hutu do not have intelligence to govern. Look at what they have done to this country in the last thirty years.”

It should however be noted that the Hamitic hypothesis does not stand in isolation with respect to the light that it sheds on the relations between Hutu and Tutsi. Rather, it must be placed within the broader framework of the political evolution of Rwanda as a nation. Within this context, Mamdani proposes that the best way to understand Hutu and Tutsi is to see them as dynamic political identities. Changes in Rwandan history necessarily meant that Hutu and Tutsi as political identities would become changing identities as well. Mamdani observes that it was political conflict and political violence which pitted Hutu against Tutsi, and this raised the questions: Who is a Tutsi, and who is a Hutu? Mamdani is drawing our attention to an important point. Whatever differences might have existed between Hutu and Tutsi, they assumed a rivalrous and conflictual status when they entered into a political framework. It is for this reason that Mamdani prefers to see Hutu and Tutsi identities as historicized political identities rather than as market-based and cultural identities.

127 Ibid., 85. Taylor’s conversation with this RPF’s supporter took place in Kigali, February 1994.
128 Mamdani, When Victims Become Killers, 58.
129 Ibid., 59.
identities eventually gave way to political differentiation and the latter to political polarization.

Let us now turn to the 1959 social revolution to see how political differentiation and polarization took place as part of the developments leading up to the genocide.

2.3 The Social Revolution of 1959 and the Struggle for Political Power

The suppression and the exploitation that the Hutu suffered under colonial rule and the monarchy naturally prepared the ground for intense struggle for political power and subsequent violence. The few Hutu who had access to Western education soon formed themselves into an elite middle class. They became very critical of the long held idea of Tutsi superiority and supremacy (bolstered by the Hamitic hypothesis) which had had the support of both colonial authorities and Christian missionaries. In their struggle for political power against both Tutsi domination and colonial rule, the Hutu elite were very much encouraged by the rise of African nationalism that had begun to express itself in the struggle for independence. Rwanda was greatly inspired by the pioneering example of Ghana.\(^{130}\) The African desire for self-determination and the pressure that was mounting must have compelled the colonialists to shift their support in order to ease an inevitable transition.\(^{131}\) Also, Belgium’s own ethnic divide back home may have taught it that its

\(^{130}\) Kamukama, *Rwanda Conflict*, 28

\(^{131}\) It has been suggested that Rwanda’s political evolution, that is, from 1959-1962, has been precipitated by a combination of various phenomena: the emergence of the Hutu elite, the willingness of the Catholic Church and Belgian colonial administration to shift their support for the Tutsi elite to the Hutu elite and the escalation of conflicts between the Tutsi historical elite and the colonial authorities. Accordingly, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the White Fathers had become more sensitive to the ideas of justice and equality and no longer accepted ethnic discrimination which had been to the disadvantage of the Hutu.
political operations in its colony were not only outdated but unethical. In fact, a group of Flemish clergy who had arrived in Rwanda at this time openly showed their sympathy towards the Hutu and against the Tutsi whom they regarded as feudal exploiters, having been influenced by their own ethnic experience back home in Belgium. They belonged to the group often referred to as *le petit clergé* and were therefore of humble origins themselves. They were unlike their predecessors Monsignors Classe and Hirth who, though Flemish, belonged to the upper class and were known for their conservative ideas. Moreover, the general anti-racist mentality that was in vogue in Europe after the defeat of Nazism must have played a part in the change of attitude also in Rwanda.

In any event, the Hutu elite formed a number of movements to address the Hutu cause. They formed the Hutu Social Movement in 1957. This movement called for the abolition of class privileges, jobs for all, education for all classes without discrimination and freedom of expression. In the same year, the Association for the Social Promotion of the Masses was formed; it focused its attention on the poor as well as on those who were at the lower level of the ethnic social strata.

In order to advance the liberation and the political advancement of the Hutu ethnic group, which had suffered under Tutsi feudalism the *Parti du Mouvement de l’Emancipation Hutu* (PARMEHUTU) was formed. It appealed to the Hutu ethnic group and pointed out its disadvantaged status.

In the meantime, the Tutsi elite, especially those trained in Europe had reduced the problem of Rwanda to the issue of white domination of blacks and called for decolonization. By this, they hoped to seize all power in Rwanda and to be seen as champions of a just cause in the eyes of the international community. Whether this was genuine or not, it certainly caused a sour relationship between the Tutsi elite and the colonial administration. See André Sibomana, *Hope for Rwanda*, pp.90-92. See also Totten and Ubaldo, *We Cannot Forget*, 4.

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Given these new developments, Tutsi, who feared that the institution of the monarchy might be destroyed—and along with it their political authority, influence and privileges—acted quickly. They formed the *Union National Rwandais* (UNAR). The first violent clash between the two rival political groups took place in November 1959. This was triggered by an attack on a Hutu sub-chief by UNAR activists. In retaliation, the Hutu attacked a notable Tutsi chief, a member of UNAR, which led to bloody ethnic violence. All Tutsi, including women and children, were considered acceptable targets since the entire ethnic group was seen as a privileged group. These ethnic clashes saw the massacre of many Tutsi. Scores of Tutsi fled to neighbouring countries like Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of Congo as refugees. Tutsi in exile organized themselves into a militant group and in 1963 returned to Rwanda to wrest power from the new government under Grégoire Kayibanda, a Hutu, whose party, PARMENUTU, had won the elections. The attempt to seize power from the government led to more massacres of innocent Tutsi in Rwanda, forcing more Tutsi to flee the country. In the 1990s when the opportunity offered itself, most of these refugees joined the RPF and returned to Rwanda as combatants in the 1994 genocide.

Besides forming political parties and social movements in order to project the Hutu cause, Hutu elite seized the opportunity to recast and reinterpret the Hamitic hypothesis within the context of the new developments. Initially formulated by colonial historiography, it was the yardstick by which distinctions regarding so-called lower and higher orders of humanity were measured in relation to Hutu and Tutsi. Hutu elite, adopting the same hypothesis, reinterpreted it within the context of Tutsi monarchical rule resulting in a militant anti-Tutsi campaign. Those whom colonial anthropologists,
European administrators and Christian missionaries had called Hamites, understood as a superior and civilizing race, the Hutu now called grasping foreigners. As Lemarchand states:

Already in 1959, the Hutu elites seized upon the myth and profoundly altered its meaning. They invoked the same mythical themes once taken to prove Tutsi superiority, but now used them to prove Tutsi foreignness and depravity. The Hamitic race, believed by Europeans to embody all that was best in humanity, was now presented by Hutus as the embodiment of the worst. Hamites represented cruelty and cunning, conquest and oppression.\textsuperscript{134}

The Hamitic hypothesis was not only reinterpreted by Hutu elites, it was synthesized into a clear body of categorical imperatives often referred to as the ‘Ten Commandments of the Hutu’\textsuperscript{135}. This happened in the years immediately preceding the genocide, between 1990 and 1994.

A closer examination of the revolution reveals that it resulted from a political polarization between Hutu and Tutsi. Tutsi consciousness during both pre-colonial and

\textsuperscript{134} Lemarchand, \textit{The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa}, 57-58. For the Hutu elites, the only explanation for Tutsi domination of Hutu must be found in the former’s moral depravity, characterized by cunning, deceit and perversity. Recall that the Hamitic hypothesis has been characterized by a shift in themes. Note also that it was not because the Tutsi treated the Hutu as an inferior group that they were regarded by Europeans as a superior race and therefore closer to them. Rather, the Tutsi were regarded as Hamites by European explorers, anthropologists, etc because of the association between so-called mobile groups and civilization in Africa.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 60-61. See also, Semujanga, \textit{Origins of Rwandan Genocide}, 196-197. Generally, these commandments remind the Hutu people of their identity and the need to rediscover this identity. The Hutu people are warned not to trust the Tutsi people and to be particularly vigilant about them. This ideology was transmitted through the media, especially through the popular anti-Tutsi paper known as the \textit{Kangura}. It is therefore not surprising that such an ideological propaganda would have significantly prepared the ground for the killing of the enemy, the Tutsi, when the genocide began. It is important to add that the use of language and its symbolism did not only aid the act of framing but produced unhealthy and dangerous psychological effects. For example, through the media, the Tutsi, were referred to as ‘cockroaches’ as ‘snakes’ and as ‘dirt’. Dirt must be cleaned out completely. Cockroaches and snakes must be killed. Since a little snake will grow up to be as poisonous as its parents it must be killed too. That explains why unborn Tutsi children and those already born had to be killed. It was for the same reason that Tutsi males, even those who were too young to have children, were emasculated while Tutsi women had their breasts slashed off by their attackers. It was an attack on fecundity and on a group’s capacity to perpetuate its existence through child bearing.
colonial periods had been associated with power whereas Hutu consciousness had been associated with lack of power. For both Hutu elite and peasants, the core of the Rwandan problem had to do with a political monopoly by Hamites, that is, Tutsi foreigners. For Hutu, such a political monopoly meant economic, social and cultural monopolies. This was the situation they wished to redress. It was this reason that the Hutu elite called for a political structure or organization that would allow them to participate fairly in public affairs.

Whereas the Hutu elite demanded democracy before independence, the Tutsi elite demanded independence before democracy. Independence for them meant the restoration of tradition and custom. This meant recognition of the Tutsi social and political supremacy that had existed in both pre-colonial and colonial times. On the basis of this, Tutsi elite rejected the possibility of Hutu ever participating in public affairs since according to tradition the latter have been a subjugated people.

Having tasted reform, though in a limited way, the Hutu elite were convinced that there must be no turning back and that a radical political transformation was necessary. They projected before the Hutu people the possibility of Hutu power which became a reality when Grégoire Kayibanda, a Hutu, became the first president of an independent Rwanda in 1962.

In independent Rwanda under Grégoire Kayibanda (1961-1973) and Juvénal Habyarimana (1973-1994) a number of events took place which further prepared the ground for the genocide of 1994. Both Kayibanda and Habyarimana employed similar

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136 We recall here Barkan and Snowden’s theory of relative deprivation discussed in chapter one. The initial experience of political power by the Hutu elite and the expectation that this experience would get even better for the Hutu ethnic group would lead to greater ethnic consciousness and ethnic mobilization.
political strategies to consolidate their power. Both disallowed the possibility of multi-party democracy. To consolidate further his political power, Habyarimana for example, continued to pursue the policy of ‘demographic or quota’ democracy that had existed at the time of Kayibanda. By implementing this policy, the Habyarimana government not only excluded Tutsis from real political influence, it also ensured that Tutsis were allotted “a quota of 9% of the public job market and in schools.”

Samuel Totten, a scholar in genocide studies at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville and Rafiki Ubaldo, a journalist and independent scholar of genocide studies, conducted interviews in post genocide Rwanda. Their findings do not only reveal the gruesome nature of the massacres particularly of Tutsi but also the discrimination that the Tutsi ethnic group suffered in the years following the 1959 revolution well into the moment of independence. The interview confirms the quota system in the education sector. It also reveals that the only jobs open to Tutsi under the Habyarimana government were nursing and teaching, which at time were very poorly paid jobs. The fact that both Kayibanda and Habyarimana consolidated the ethnic divide between Hutu and Tutsi as part of the process of consolidating their own political power only increased the struggle for political power and for other resources like jobs and education.

Moreover, the Habyarimana government not only endorsed ethnic identity cards, it added to them the holders’ addresses. The purpose was to be able to identify and control the movement of Tutsi around the country. A Tutsi was not permitted to change

137 Kroslak, The Role of France in the Rwandan Genocide, 29.
138 Samuel Totten and Rafiki Ubaldo, eds., We cannot Forget, 40. Accordingly, 85% of the population was Hutu, 14% was Tutsi and 1% was Twa. This means that only 14% of Tutsi could gain admission into secondary School at this time even if they had better grades in comparison to their Hutu counterparts.
residence unless he or she had gained admission to a school or had obtained a job in another city. In the words of Prunier, Rwandan “administrative control was probably the tightest in the world among non-communist countries.”\textsuperscript{139} Administrative control, the exclusion of Tutsi from any political influence, and the discrimination against them in the job market and in education, certainly created resentment among the Tutsi populations both at home and in the diaspora. Consequently, when economic decline in Rwanda, coupled with the democratization process, imposed by both internal and external forces, created a kind of destabilization, the RPF seized the opportunity and invaded the country on 1\textsuperscript{st} October 1990 from Uganda. Without going into details, suffice it to say that the years from 1990 to 1994, during which a complex network of events flowed into one another, provided the immediate background to the horrific genocide.

In discussing the Rwandan genocide and the dynamics that were involved therein, what we sought to emphasize in this overview, has been the role the distorted theology of the Hamitic hypothesis played in the foreground in the massacre and as a rationalization of ethnic scapegoating.

2.4 The Konkomba-Nanumba Ethnic Conflict

2.4.1 The Trigger Factor

In February 1994, a conflict broke out between the Konkomba and Nanumba ethnic groups in the Northern Region of Ghana. This is believed to be the worse ethnic conflict since Ghana’s independence in 1957. The immediate cause of the conflict was a

\textsuperscript{139} Prunier, \textit{The Rwandan Crisis}, 77.
disagreement over a guinea fowl in a local market. Based on existing alliances, the Nanumba were joined by the Dagombas and the Gonjas while the Konkomba were joined by the Bassare, the Nawuri and the Nchumuru.

Given the number of factions that were involved in the conflict, the geographical space that it covered, the duration of the conflict, and the type of weapons that were used, it is not surprising that the war’s consequences were severe and enduring. According to Van der Linde and Naylor, the conflict covered seven districts in the Northern Region. The combatants used both modern and traditional weapons. Fighting was most intense between February and May 1994 and in March 1995. The estimated number of lives lost was 15,000 while about 200,000 people were displaced. Not only did many suffer dislocation, loss of personal property and housing, but government services and infrastructure were also destroyed. Due to the conflict, the agricultural cycle was interrupted; farming activities came to a halt which led to food shortages throughout the country. Budgets for other developmental projects were cut back due to the government’s

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140 Ibrahim Mahama, *Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Ghana* (Tamale, Ghana: Cyber Systems, 2003), 37. See also Ada Van der Linde and Rachel Naylor, *Building Sustainable Peace: Conflict, Conciliation, and Civil Society in Northern Ghana*, (Oxford: Oxfam GB, 1999), 8. The 1994 Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict is popularly known as the ‘Guinea Fowl War’ because it was triggered by a quarrel between a Konkomba man and a Nanumba man over the price of a guinea fowl which both wanted to buy. Accordingly, ethnic insults were traded in the course of the quarrel between the two men.  
141 Van der Linde and Naylor, *Building Sustainable Peace*, 8. There are different figures with respect to the number of lives lost. This variation is explicable given the practice among some tribal groups to hide or bury their dead immediately during wars. It is estimated that as many as 20,000 to 200,000 lives were lost. Apart from the loss of human lives, about 250 towns or villages were either burned down or abandoned. Certain ethnic groups were banned from certain markets to which they had access before the conflict. Many social facilities and development projects such as schools, clinics, storage facilities, water, etc were either badly damaged or completely destroyed. See Emmanuel Bombande, “Conflicts, Civil Society Organizations and Community Peacebuilding Practices in Northern Ghana,” in *Ethnicity, Conflicts and Consensus in Ghana*, ed. Steve Tonah (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2007), 205.
huge expenditures on peace-keeping.\textsuperscript{142} The government of Ghana claims to have spent six billion cedis in maintaining peace since the conflict broke out.\textsuperscript{143}

If the 1994 Konkomba-Nanumba conflict involved other ethnic groups, with consequences for the country as a whole but especially for the Northern Region in particular, it stands to reason that the conflict did not happen overnight. Like the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict in Rwanda, the Konkomba-Nanumba conflict was brewing and was only brought to a head by this seemingly insignificant quarrel over the price of a guinea fowl.

I will examine the causes of the conflict under three main headings: 1) tribal exploitation 2) the demand for paramountcy by the Konkomba and 3) the impact of colonial rule. The first and the second headings deal with a number of themes including the following: the notion of perceived unfairness, the relationship between deprivation and group mobilization, the importance of culture as it relates to authority in the African tribal setting, the competition for resources such as land and the struggle for political inclusion and influence. Because similar themes have already been treated with respect to the Hutu-Tutsi conflict, I refer the reader to my treatment of the first two headings to an appendix.\textsuperscript{144} The main point that is highlighted under both headings is the uneasy relationship between the Konkomba and their neighbours even before colonial rule. I

\textsuperscript{142} Van der Linde and Naylor, \textit{Building Sustainable Peace}, 8.


\textsuperscript{144} See Appendix at the end of the thesis.
discuss here how colonial rule impacted negatively this uneasy relationship and therefore contributed to the 1994 ethnic conflict.

2.5 The Impact of Colonial Rule

How did colonial rule impact this already hostile relationship? More specifically, to what extent can the 1994 Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict be linked to British colonial rule in Ghana? In his essay, *The Past and Present in Ghana’s Ethnic Conflicts: British Colonial Policy and Konkomba Agency, 1930-1951*, Benjamin A. Talton examines the origins of violent ethnic conflicts between the historically non-centralized, so-called chiefless Konkomba ethnic group and their neighbours the Dagomba, the Gonja and the Nanumba. Talton argues that the source of these conflicts have revolved around conflicting notions of authority and political legitimacy which go back to British colonial rule in Ghana. While the centralized ethnic groups interpret the actions of the Konkomba as a disregard for their claim to traditional authority and status, the Konkomba see things differently. For the Konkomba, if they are seen as rejecting the traditional authority and status of their neighbours, that rejection is to be understood as an expression of their desire and resolve to protect their interests and their rights as Ghanaian citizens.

This desire would in the long run upset the established political structure that governed their relationship with their neighbours. According to Talton, as late as the early 1940s Konkomba lived in different clans with very little political relationship among them. As a result of the lack of centralized authority, there were often feuds.

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among the different clans. This began to change in the 1950s, however, when western-educated Konkomba realized that to put an end to these inter-clan feuds and, more importantly, to gain social and political equality with their neighbours, they needed to construct a political identity comparable to that of their centralized neighbours among the Konkomba as a people. A political identity of this kind would at once reverse their previously disenfranchised political standing and make their political status viable. \(^{146}\) This took shape in 1981 when Konkombas began to unite around a “western-educated leadership that sought to assert Konkomba interests locally and nationally, which were invariably in direct conflict with the interests of their centralized neighbours.” \(^{147}\) It is therefore not surprising that the first major Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict took place in 1981. Ultimately, a constructed identity which was both ethnic and political in nature had become increasingly significant in shaping the ongoing relationship between Konkomba and their historically centralized neighbours.

Paradoxically, Konkomba political consciousness and their construction of a political identity of their own were in part results of the British colonial policy of indirect rule which tended to promote the political status and authority of centralized ethnic groups over those of non-centralized groups. Talton contends that for reasons of administrative convenience and effective control, British colonial administrators incorporated non-centralized ethnic groups under centralized groups. \(^{148}\) British colonial

\(^{146}\) Ibid., 46.


administrators determined that the Konkomba, organized only along clan lines and therefore without any central authority, were politically subordinate to the Dagomba chiefs. British colonial officials therefore placed the Konkomba under the Dagomba chiefs whom they recognized as the official representatives of the people to the colonial administration and the voice of the latter to the people in their communities. Having defined the Konkomba as politically subordinate and the Dagomba as dominant, “the British created a political relationship in which the Konkombas had no real political or legal recourse.” Konkomba refused to respect the powers that the British had vested in the hands of Dagomba chiefs against the background of their own subordinate political status. “When pressured by colonial administration to adhere to the Dagombas nas [i.e. Dagomba chiefs’] demands, the Konkombas began to regard violence as the most effective means of challenging their subordinate status and protecting their interests.”

chiefs in some places where before there were none. They also consolidated the power and territorial limits of major paramount chiefs under whom they placed small and so-called unassimilated groups. For example, the Nawuri, Nchumuru, Mo and Vagala were grouped under the Gonja chiefs; the Konkomba and Chokosi were made subject to the Dagomba kingdom. What is implied is that such major paramount chiefs must have been in existence before the arrival of British colonial rule in Northern Ghana. In fact, according to Ladouceur, when indirect rule proper was introduced in the Northern Territories in 1932, it was largely influenced by how the system had been operating in Northern Nigeria. The model in Nigeria called for the recognition of native authorities based for the most part on pre-colonial political structures. This point is important because there has been a debate as to whether these major paramountcies were not created by British colonial officials who then placed the so-called non-centralized tribes under the authority of ethnic groups that already had chiefs. For further information on the said debate see the following: Mahama, *Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Ghana*, 19-25. Basically, Mahama refutes the claim made by the Konkomba that it was British colonial officials who created the four major paramountcies and argues that before the arrival of British colonial rule, the four head chiefs of Dagbon, Mamprugu, Ngbanya and Nanun were already in existence. The British themselves referred to these head chiefs as kings. State Councils were established by law for each of these paramountcies later in 1952 when the State Councils Ordinance was established. State councils would be renamed traditional councils after Ghana’s independence in 1957. Talton, “The Past and the Present in Ghana’s Ethnic Conflicts: British Colonial Legacy and Konkomba Agency 1930-1951,” 45.

It is important to note that the control that centralized tribes like the Dagomba had over the non-centralized tribes like the Konkomba assumed the status of law in 1932 when the British administration formally defined the centralized polities as Native Administrations through the Native Authority Ordinance and the Native Tribunal Ordinance. This meant not only an increase of chiefly powers; it also re-affirmed formally the British notion of an African tribe as a centralized political authority. It also conferred by law a particular political status to certain ethnic groups to the exclusion of others. Ultimately, it meant that Konkomba’s refusal to heed the summons of Dagomba chiefs, or to pay
Individually and collectively, the Konkombas made several attempts throughout the colonial period to assert their political autonomy. This means that there was a constant recourse to the use of violence which was kept in check only by the vigilance of the British colonial officials. For Talton, it is important to note how the British construction of the Konkomba as a chiefless people, and therefore as politically subordinate and illegitimate, brought about dramatic social and political changes. That the British colonial authorities regarded the Konkomba as politically subordinate to their neighbours on the grounds that they were organized along clan lines opened the way for scapegoating from the Giradian point of view. I shall return to this in the final chapter.

Unfortunately, in post-colonial Ghana, the failure of the different regimes to completely dismantle the local political structures created by British colonial rule only helped to foster ethnic discord in Northern Ghana. The attempts by Nkrumah to reduce the powers of chiefs or to eliminate altogether the institution of chieftaincy as a symbol of local political power in Ghana failed. Even though Nkrumah’s intention had some merit, it remains debatable whether the attempt to eliminate altogether such an institution, greatly embedded in some Ghanaian cultures, was the right decision. With respect to land tenure, as I have already mentioned, under President Hilla Limann’s Land Tenure Act (1979) northern chiefs saw the expansion of their authority as land was placed under the taxes to Dagomba chiefs, who were acting as agents of the British colonial administration, would hence forth be regarded as act of illegality. See Ibid., 48-49. That Konkomba in general refused to accept the rule of Dagomba chiefs and sometimes resisted it violently; see Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana*, 8-10. Talton, “The Past and Present in Ghana’s Ethnic Conflicts: British Colonial Policy and Konkomba Agency 1930-1951,” 45. These social and political changes speak ultimately to the situation where the legalization of Dagomba authority over Konkombas by British colonial administration largely influenced the evolution of Konkomba identity as a way of challenging their subordinate political status and as a way of ensuring that they could have a collective political space. It is in this context that Talton contends that inter-ethnic tensions in the Northern Region are an extension of a political structure constructed by British colonial rule, and that the violent ethnic conflicts which occurred between 1981 and 1994 must be understood ultimately within the historical context of British colonial rule in Ghana.
authority of chiefs. Thus, one can speak of continuity between the colonial period and post-colonial Ghana to the extent that power continued to be associated with chiefly tribal groups and powerlessness with non-centralized group. \(^\text{152}\)

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented a narrative analysis of two contemporary ethnic conflicts: the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict in Rwanda and the Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict in the Northern Region of Ghana. In my analysis of what happened I sought to demonstrate that both conflicts have been caused by negative ethnicity, the competition for both economic and political resources and by colonial policies. By drawing upon theories and ideas already established in chapter one and by applying them to two specific conflicts, I sought to do two related things. First, from the methodological point of view I sought to move from the general to the particular with a focused attention on our context. Second, I wanted to show the link between chapter one and two and so stress the element of integration. Significantly, I have raised questions about power and powerlessness as a category that arises from the Hamitic hypothesis and how this relates to the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict. Similarly, from the Giradian point of view, to call the Konkomba acephalous, is to create the conditions for scapegoating. This will receive further analysis in the final chapter as part of the work of appropriation. Ultimately, the work of appropriation is aimed at ensuring that the thesis is cohesive.

Apart from the categories of power and powerlessness, other important categories and concepts present themselves for further analysis and appropriation. In both conflicts there has been ethnic competition and rivalry for material resources but especially for

\(^{152}\) Ibid., 47.
political power, political power understood in both the traditional and modern sense of the word. Again, this will be taken up in the final chapter and given further analysis as I draw upon Girard’s hermeneutic of desire. This will help substantiate the contention that Girard’s anthropology of desire can help explain rivalrous and competitive inter-ethnic relations which sometimes lead to violence.

Finally, in both conflicts we have also observed the elements of horizontal inequalities and exclusion as significant causes. As part of our appropriation in the final chapter I will revisit the question of exclusion where I will draw upon Volf’s Trinitarian theology and his theology of the Cross and propose inclusion as an alternative to the practice of exclusion.
Chapter 3

Violence and the Cross - René Girard and Raymund Schwager

Introduction

In chapter one I discussed theories of conflict in Africa. This received specific treatment in chapter two where I offered an analysis of two contemporary ethnic conflicts, the Hutu-Tutsi and Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflicts respectively. Given this conflictual situation in contemporary Africa with its pervasively negative consequences, and given the importance of religion to Africans in general, the question arises concerning the relevance of theological discourse in this context. More specifically, how can a theology of atonement be engaged as a resource that can help interpret and respond to such an unstable and violent context?

Christian theology could make an important contribution to the healing of ethnic conflicts in Africa with new interpretations of the redemptive aspects of the Cross, particularly with emphasis on reconciliation and the amelioration of ethnic rivalries that lead to violence. Recent interpretations by René Girard (1923- ) and others do indeed have the potential to make a significant contribution in these areas.

This chapter will explore René Girard’s (1923- ) anthropological interpretation of the Cross and its implications for a theology of the atonement. Girard’s anthropological approach will be supported by Raymund Schwager’s (1935-2004) theological engagement with Girard.
Before taking up Girard’s and Schwager’s treatment of the atonement, it is important to discuss Girard’s hermeneutic of desire. I will present an exposition of Girard’s theory of desire for understanding rivalrous and violent human relations. Girard’s reading of myth, biblical texts especially his non-sacrificial reading of the Gospels and the death of Jesus shed light on the desacralization of violence and supports Girard’s argument in favour of a nonviolent God.

3.1 Girard’s Hermeneutic of Desire

Girard is without doubt one of the great French literary critics of the 20th century. “His research spans the fields of literary criticism, anthropology, psychology and theology, and in all of these areas he has left his mark.”¹⁵³ A distinctive mark of the works of Girard is their ability to encompass directly or indirectly almost all the fields of the humanities. Girard’s interdisciplinary approach makes it possible for him to address the basic and vital problems of contemporary societies.

A significant problem in contemporary societies includes the phenomenon of violence and how it is connected to interpersonal relations. For Girard, the greatest anthropological problems of our time concern social relationships among people in societies.¹⁵⁴ Girard does an analysis of the problem of human aggression and violence drawing from different sources, including ancient Greek and Roman mythology, European literary works, ethnology and biblical revelation, and he comes to the

¹⁵⁴ Schwager, Must there be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible, 1.
conclusion that the phenomenon of violence is largely due to mimetic desire—envy. Mimetic desire inevitably leads to rivalry, conflict and violence in human society.

What is Girard’s hermeneutic of desire, and how does desire lead to rivalry and violence? From a purely anthropological perspective, the fundamental identifying characteristic of human beings is mimetic desire. That is, we imitate because we desire what others desire. For example, an infant learns how to interact in the world by imitating his/her parents. For this reason mimetic desire is both good and necessary. However, it can lead to conflict and violence under certain conditions and circumstances especially between siblings.

Let us return to how Girard demonstrates and confirms through his analysis of literary works that desire is mimetic. Miguel Cervantes is the first author with whom Girard deals in his Deceit, Desire and the Novel (1959), and there Girard notes that Cervantes has Don Quixote address his servant Sancho Panza in these words: “…Amadis

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155 It is important to clarify from the very beginning that when Girard speaks of mimetic desire within the context of human aggression and violence, especially when he rejects the ‘natural’ goodness of the human person, Girard is not suggesting that human beings are aggressive by nature nor he is suggesting that desire is instinctual and therefore cannot be controlled. Moreover, we are not to understand Girard’s mimetic theory of desire to mean that it is something that human beings cannot escape. A fatalistic interpretation must be ruled out. See for example, René Girard, Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1978), 197. See also, Wolfgang Palaver, René Girard’s Mimetic Theory, trans. Gabriel Borrud, (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 35. James Williams, The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred: Liberation from the Myth of Sanctioned Violence (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1991), iv.

156 For a succinct summary of Girard’s theory of mimesis and how it leads to violence, see John Dadosky, ‘Naming the Demon’: The ‘Structure’ of Evil in Lonergan and Girard, Irish Theological Quarterly, 75/4 (2010), 357-359. See also James Alison, The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 9-15. Apart from commenting on what Girard means by ‘mimesis’ and ‘desire’, Alison also summarizes Girard’s mimetic theory according to three moments: imitative desire, unifying expulsion and revealed discovery. In another work, Alison, explains Girard’s mimetic theory with simple and clear examples in which one can say that all the main elements of Girard’s theory are highlighted. For instance, Alison highlights how the theory relates to human self-understanding both from the personal and social points of view and why mimetic desire disposes us to conflict. He also highlights the place of social prohibitions, rites and myths in the mimetic process and how the genius of the Judeo-Christian tradition is the subversion of the lie on which human culture is built. See James Alison, Raising Abel: The Recovery of the Eschatological Imagination (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 18-25.

157 Girard, I See Satan, x.
was the pole, the star, the sun for brave and amorous knights, and we others who fight under the banner of love and chivalry should imitate him. Thus, my friend Sancho, I reckon that whoever imitates him best will come closest to perfect chivalry.”

Amadis of Gaul is Don Quixote’s chosen model. He is, in fact legendary, but for Don Quixote, Amadis is the pole, the star and the sun towards which he must move if he is to become a perfect knight like him. From henceforth what Don Quixote desires is mediated to him through Amadis.

The relationship between Don Quixote and Amadis reveals important elements of mimetic desire. First, desire as Girard understands it is not a single linear relation. It is not simply the case that a desiring subject desires an object: the subject desires the object because his or her attention has been drawn to that object by another person who desires that object. Perfect knighthood, for example, becomes desirable to Don Quixote because it has been mediated to him by Amadis, about whom he read from courtly literature. Secondly, the mediation here is external since Amadis is a fictional figure. Because Amadis is a fictional figure, even if Don Quixote wanted to compete with him for the object of desire, such a competition could never have taken place. This is why in this case mimetic desire does not end in rivalry, conflict and violence. Although Don Quixote and his servant Sancho are in the same geographical location and are therefore physically close, there is no danger of rivalry, conflict and violence between them either. This is because the social and intellectual distance between them prevents Sancho from desiring what his master desires. He does covet: “Sancho covets the food left by the monks, the purse of gold found on the road, and other objects which Don Quixote willingly lets him

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have. As for the imaginary island, it is from Don Quixote himself that Sancho is counting on receiving it, as the faithful vassal holds everything in the name of his lord.\footnote{159} With this example, Girard draws attention to factors which reduce the possibility of rivalry, conflict and eventual violence between mediator and the desiring subject: not only geographical distance, but also social distance. However, once the distance between mediator and subject is removed, a dangerous threshold has been crossed, leading to possible conflict, rivalry and violence. It is at this stage that external mediation gives way to internal mediation.

When this happens, the potential for rivalry, conflict and violence is high. Once the mediator begins to desire the object that is mediated then rivalry and competition are introduced into the relationship. The closer the distance, both physical and social, the greater the possibility of a rivalry. Competing desires begin to escalate, accompanied by hatred from both parties because the distinction between mediator and desiring subject is removed with both becoming one and the same, each having become simultaneously both a mediator and a desiring subject. Each party in this situation begins to see the other as a stumbling block to the attainment of the object or objects of his desire.

Girard illustrates internal mediation, which has an even greater propensity towards rivalry, conflict and violence, with similar literary examples. He sees internal mediation play out in the relationship between Monsieur de Rênal and his neighbour Valenod in Stendhal’s \textit{The Red and the Black}.\footnote{160} Rênal intends to hire Julien Sorel as a

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\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 9. \\
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 6. Other novelists whose literary works Girard examines, and through which he unveils the illusion of the ‘Romantic Lie’, laying bare the mechanics of mimetic desire, include the following: Flaubert, Cervantes, Proust and Dostoevsky. In his discussion of the moment when desire turns ugly, Michael Kirwan, commenting on the work of Girard, compares Cervantes to Dostoevsky, the Russian
\end{flushleft}
tutor of his two sons because of an imagined fear that his neighbour Valenod might take
the lead in hiring Julien Sorel. Valenod wants to hire Julien Sorel only when he hears that
he is in the employ of Rênal. In contrast to Don Quixote and Sancho, Rênal and Valenod
are not only neighbours; they are of the same social standing. The imitation between
Rênal and Valenod is a source of anguish and rivalry. Because each has become a
mediator to the other, each has become an obstacle to the other as well, introducing an
element of tension in their relationship as both struggle and compete for the same object
of desire. “Thus, internal mediation always results in what Girard describes as conflictual
mimesis.”

In his essay, *The Nonviolent Cross: Lonergan and Girard on Redemption*, Robert
M. Doran discusses how these two contemporary thinkers have made their contributions
to systematic theology, specifically in the area of Soteriology. According to Doran, both
have addressed the problem of evil and argued that it is the Cross that has transformed
evil into good. As a background to how Girard has made a contribution to the theology of

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novelist whose work had a great impact on Girard’s theory of desire. According to Kirwan, the significant
difference lies in the shift from external mediation to internal mediation. The hierarchical relationship
which acts as a barrier to conflict, rivalry and violence between Don Quixote and Sancho is absent in the
case of the characters in Dostoevsky. In Dostoevsky’s novels, the characters are either of the same social
plane or nearly the same social standing who compete for the same social space. Because the characters
move on the same social plane, their relationship is characterized by a more frenzied world of destructive
mimetic interaction, sometimes leading to murder. There is also that bizarre twist of reality when the
desiring subject knows that the mediator has been an obstacle and a rival and yet is hopelessly dependent
upon his decisions and judgments. This is the kind of relationship that we find between Troussotsky and his
late wife’s lovers. Troussotsky attends the funeral of the wife of his first rival where he displays extravagant
grief. He then attaches himself to Veltschanitoff, his second rival, in a bizarre manner. When Troussotsky
decides to marry again, he wants Veltschanitoff to decide on the gift that he should offer to his future wife.
In fact, Troussotsky’s valuation of his future wife depends on Veltschanitoff’s own appreciation of her. In
brief, Troussotsky is dependent on his rival’s approval in making judgments and decisions. In this analysis,
we see not only the elements of rivalry and conflict, but also an example of metaphysical mimetic desire
since Troussotsky believes that the being of his rivals must be superior to his, the reason why he goes in
search of them after the death of his wife. Ultimately, all this is a reflection of the development of our
modern society where established hierarchies are removed in the face of equality and democracy. See

redemption, Doran explores Girard’s theory of mimetic desire. In this exploration we see a transition from acquisitive or appropriative mimesis to conflictual mimesis. The desire to covet or to appropriate the goods of the other is at the root of violence in human society. Girard believes that the tenth commandment of the Decalogue, prohibiting covetousness, is actually intended to prevent the most serious acts of violence to which the preceding commandments, which deal with murder, adultery, theft and lying, allude. The prohibition against covetousness is the attempt by every human community to deal with internal violence.\(^\text{163}\)

Covetousness or appropriative mimesis can take a number of forms. For example, the desire for a person whom someone else desires is a sure recipe for rivalry and violence. However, appropriative or acquisitive mimesis often gets expressed or “reflected in professional and political ambition— that easily lead to destruction, victimage, and violence, especially if the intersubjectivity entailed is between people who abide on a relatively equal social plane.”\(^\text{164}\) However, appropriative mimesis can transition to conflictual mimesis when the object of desire “for all practical purposes drops out of


\(^{163}\) Girard, I See Satan, 9. For Girard, the prohibition contained in the tenth commandment concerns a perverse desire, the kind that led to original sin. Though perverse in nature and might seem as though reserved to hardened sinners, covetousness is actually a desire that is at the heart of human society. In other words, it is universal and affirms the fact that we are inclined to desire the desires of the other or the goods of the other. If there were no religious or cultural prohibitions, thanks to this basic desire, even the most intimately knit institution, the family, would be destroyed.

\(^{164}\) Doran, “The Nonviolent Cross: Lonergan and Girard on Redemption”, 53. See also Girard, I See Satan, 17. Here Girard discusses the issue of mimetic rivalry and the different forms that it takes: political, economic, athletic, intellectual and even religious. Even though Girard is not speaking specifically about appropriative mimesis but about mimetic rivalry in general, it should be noted that appropriative mimesis could create a situation of rivalry and violence. Secondly, there is a link between appropriative mimesis and Girard’s exposition on scandal. When one desires what the other desires and what the other possesses, the latter tries to prevent the former from desiring what he desires and from taking what he possesses, but the more the latter tries, the greater the intensity of the desire of the desiring subject. Ultimately, both become mimetic rivals, and each tries to prevent the other from appropriating what each desires or possesses, but because the desire is mutual, they never really succeed. Instead they collide in a manner that is confrontational and violent.
sight, and the subject becomes concerned only primarily with the model or mediator, at times to the point of obsession. Conflictual mimesis leads to an open conflict which has the potential of destroying the entire community unless something is done to put an end to it and to restore harmony and ensure reconciliation. It is here that the process of scapegoating and the single victim mechanism comes in. How does conflictual mimesis lead to the phenomenon of the single victim mechanism, and how is the latter resolved? To answer these questions it is important to examine Girard’s treatment of how mimetic desire affects the larger society.

3.2 Mimetic Desire at the Social Level

Having illustrated with examples how mimetic desire generates conflict and violence in interpersonal relationships, Girard takes his theory further and grounds it within a broader context, that is, within the context of human society as a whole. The questions that Girard raises are these: What happens in human society when rivalry between two parties intensifies and becomes widespread? What happens when the object, over which the desires of both subject and model have converged, disappears and the subject becomes primarily concerned with the model? Girard speaks of the emergence of “pure desire” when this happens. That is, the subject and model collide directly as antagonists. As antagonists, they also become doubles, since from the point of view of antagonism there is no difference between them. Paradoxically, the more they try to evade the differences between them, the more they become identical in their acts of rivalry and violence. Girard uses the term “reciprocity” to describe this state of affairs. Given the

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166 Girard, Things Hidden, 26.
conflictual nature of the relationship, reciprocity in this case is inevitably negative. The participants imitate each other in their hostility. When one trades a gesture of hostility, the gesture is not only repeated by the rival but actually amplified by him or her, thereby causing the antagonism to escalate.

In his *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard demonstrates through an analysis of Greek tragedy how the intensification of mimetic rivalry results in the loss of distinctions and the escalation of antagonism between mimetic rivals. For example, Girard stresses the element of symmetry between Eteocles and Polyneices, two brothers engaged in a tragic combat in Euripides’ *Phoenician Women*. Girard states:

Polyneices loses his spear in the fight, and so does Eteocles. Both are wounded. Each blow upsets the equilibrium, threatening to decide the outcome then and there. It is immediately followed by a new blow that only redresses the balance but creates a symmetrical disequilibrium that is itself, naturally enough, of short duration. The tragic suspense follows the rhythm of these rapid exchanges, each one of which promises to bring matters to a head— but never quite does so.\(^\text{167}\)

Even when both have died, the rivalry and the imitation of each other’s acts of violence do not end with them. Since both have been champions of their respective armies, the symmetry of the battle is re-established and perpetuated on a different plane. Unlike the two champions, their respective armies engage in tragic dialogue proper, with each group claiming victory because the two combatants had fallen at the same time, lying side by side. Significantly, as the two groups engage in tragic dialogue, they trade insults with no solution or end in view. Girard writes:

No sooner is something added to one side of the scale than its equivalent is contributed to the other. The same insults and accusations fly from one combatant

to the other, as a ball flies from one player to another in tennis. This conflict stretches on interminably because between the two adversaries there is no difference whatsoever.  

Girard is making two important points: first, that violence invariably effaces distinctions, thus leading to greater violence, and second, that the effacing of differences between two mimetic rivals or two family members eventually spreads to the entire community. This is what happens in the case of the two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices. This also happens in the case of Oedipus and Laius the king. The conflictual relationship between the latter is not only characterized by lack of distinctions, it is also characterized by symmetry along the lines of desires, suspicion and action. At the end, it is Oedipus who kills Laius, his father, but it is the latter at the crossroads who first raises his hand against his son. “The patricide thus takes part in a reciprocal exchange of murderous gestures. It is an act of reprisal in a universe based on reprisals.” Girard believes the goal of the individual is the destruction of the other, the enemy. This is why Girard is sceptical about modern interpretations of Greek tragedy that categorize the characters as ‘good’ or ‘wicked’. Girard argues that such interpretations not only smack of Manichaeism, they reveal the influence that the Romantic era still exerts on society. This scepticism does not suggest that Girard neglects to make value judgement in relation to good and evil; rather, it suggests that when violence escalates and spreads, the opponents involved become rivalrous doubles. Caught up in the midst of mimetic

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168 Ibid., 45. It is important to stress that whenever there is a crisis of distinctions caused by a general offensive of violence against the community, a number of things happen. There is a collapse of the social hierarchy so essential for showing people their place in society. The loss of distinctions leads to the creation of an undifferentiated community characterized by chaos. Ultimately, the community members lose sight of their identity, that is, regarding what and who they are. In the wake of all this, good and evil, right and wrong, rationality and irrationality no longer exist. See Golsan, René Girard and Myth, 31.

169 Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 48.

170 Ibid., 47.
contagion, their capacity for making judgement becomes impaired\textsuperscript{171} as they trade violence for violence.

Because desire is mimetic, an escalation of antagonism between two mimetic rivals or parties often draws the entire community into the web of mimetic contagion. According to Girard, this is what leads to the war of all against all that has the potential to destroy the entire community at least if it were not for the single victim mechanism\textsuperscript{172}.

What does the process of scapegoating look like, and what are its effects? Girard argues that the process of scapegoating is a natural outcome of the process of mimetic desire. In the wake of a crisis of distinctions it is typically sufficient for one person in the community to designate a scapegoat and to begin to act violently towards him or her. A second person imitates the first person’s hostility towards the chosen scapegoat. A chain of violent hostilities is then unleashed on the designated victim, who has become an outlet for the crowd’s hostile energies.

Meanwhile, through the lens of the persecuting crowd, the victim undergoes a transformation. First, he or she is believed to be the cause of the crisis in the community. Second, he or she is accused of crimes horrific enough to have caused the collapse of the social hierarchy and the loss of social distinctions thereof, and for which reason the community is now experiencing a crisis. The victims are accused of such serious crimes in order to justify the violence against them.

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 51. After his analysis of both Greek tragedy and ancient religions, Girard concludes here that the loss of distinctions creates a situation where no one and nothing is spared. Coherent thinking collapses and rational activities are abandoned. All associative forms are dissolved or become antagonistic. In fact, all values, spiritual and material, perish.

If the victim is from a minority group, either ethnic or religious, his or her physical differences in particular are highlighted so as to emphasize his or her difference, and so cause the community to direct their hostilities towards him or her. There is also the element of unanimity. Unanimity has its own significance since a fragmentation within the community contains the dangerous potential of continuous violence.

Once the scapegoat is murdered or expelled and harmony returns to the community, the victim initially seen as an incarnation of evil, is subsequently seen as a saviour. According to Girard, the transformation the scapegoat undergoes in the eyes of the crowd is part of a larger process which serves two related purposes. First, by this process, the community divorces itself from responsibility for its own violence. Second, the community is able to attribute the violence to an outside source.173

Using ancient religious traditions, literary works, and the Hebrew Scriptures, Girard demonstrates how the phenomenon of scapegoating has been present in human society and has been used as a means of both channelling internal violence and containing reprisals. But a fundamental question of interest both to Girard and to this thesis relates to the effectiveness of such a mechanism in dealing with violence. Ultimately, Girard would demonstrate that its effectiveness is not only temporary but illusionary since it creates future scapegoats and thus perpetuates the cycle of violence. Let us look more closely at Girard’s notion of sacrifice and how it relates to violence.

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173 Golsan, René Girard and Myth, 37.
3.2.1 The Social Function of Sacrifice

In his *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard discusses the relationship between violence and ritual sacrifice. He discusses both the theological and social functions of sacrifice. Basically, the theological interpretation of sacrifice focuses on expiation and propitiation. Primarily, human sin and guilt are believed to be removed through ritual sacrifice. Secondly, ritual sacrifice is meant to appease an angry deity. Girard dwells more on the social function of sacrifice where he sees a strict relationship between violence and sacrifice. Girard contends that ritual sacrifice or religion as such served as a means of containing violence in ‘primitive’ societies. Sacrifice served the purpose of forestalling, at least temporarily, the reprisal of violence or vengeance.

Girard takes seriously the social function of sacrifice as it is found in ‘primitive’ societies and argues that modern society might be tempted to see as absurd the institution of sacrifice, especially because of the blood and violence associated with it. Girard equally objects to the tendency of modern minds to give a merely psychological interpretation to sacrifice. Girard argues that it would be wrong to assume that primitive societies instituted ritual sacrifice merely because they lacked modern institutions like the judicial system. In fact, the judicial system in modern society and the institution of sacrifice in primitive societies, despite some differences, serve a common purpose: the avoidance of the reprisal of violence. Girard believes that even though contemporary society is likely to ridicule religion by focusing on its eccentric dimension, society must not lose sight of what actually can be termed the common denominator that gives efficacy to all sacrifices. This common denominator is the internal violence which religion or sacrifice, for that matter, addresses. The dissensions, the rivalries, the jealousies, and the
quarrels within the community must be handled, and sacrifices are designed to suppress them. Consequently, “the purpose of sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric”. Against the background of the social function of the institution of sacrifice, Girard argues that there is an intrinsic link between violence and the sacred.

In discussing the social function of sacrifice, Girard engages the central elements of all religions: myths, rites and prohibitions or taboos. The combination of prohibitions and rituals seem at first sight to be contradictory. On the one hand, prohibitions ensure that hierarchy and differentiation within the society are preserved so that a crisis does not arise, which may give way to violence. On the other, many rituals seem to call for the opposite, where prohibitions are either reversed or suspended temporarily, and “actions which are normally banned may be carried out in a ritualised setting (for example, ritual incest).” However, both prohibitions and ritual serve the same purpose – averting mimetic conflict even if they do so in different ways and at different moments of the crisis. Accordingly, when the social conditions are still relatively stable, prohibitions are the normal way of averting the crisis of mimetic conflict. However, when mimetic

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175 Ibid., 19. See also the following, Girard, *I See Satan*, 72. Here, Girard points out the element of double transference from the community onto the victim, that is, demonization and then divinization after harmony and calm return to the community after the victim is either expelled or killed. Girard contends that for the second part of the projection to take place, the mimetic contagion must be strong enough. Kirwan, *Discovering Girard*, 67-68. Religion for Girard is founded on the scapegoat mechanism and the idea of the sacred violence is significantly linked to the preservation or the re-establishment of order when this is threatened. For this to work, the persecutors must be ignorant at two levels. They must be ignorant about the innocence of their victim. They must also be ignorant about the mimetic pull that brings them together against their common victim. James G. Williams, ed. *The Girard Reader*, (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 3. Here, Girard speaks about the victim mechanism not only from the perspective of ‘primitive’ religions but also from his study of Greek Tragedy in which the concept of *pharmakos* is important as it denotes the double meaning of poison and cure. In the same work, Girard traces the presence of the victim mechanism in biblical revelation right into the Gospels where he outlines the element of concealment with the symbolism of the tomb and shows how the Scribes and the Pharisees shared the same mental structure with their forebears who murdered the Prophets.
176 Kirwan, *Discovering Girard*, 55. See also Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 104.
contagion escalates, the community through ritual re-enacts the original crisis, and by this, violence is safely channelled and the social fabric is restored. Myths, on the other hand, narrate the lynching or the expulsion of the victim from the perspective of the persecutors and therefore conceal the truth about victimization and the sacralization of violence.

If religion in ‘primitive’ societies has been able to contain violence, it did so only temporarily as the re-enactment of the original crisis attests. When violence casts out violence, more violence will eventually erupt. Therefore, the process cannot ensure true peace and reconciliation in human society, especially during moments of conflict. Girard proposes a nonviolent theology of atonement as an alternative response to conflictual and rivalrous relations. It is to Girard’s nonviolent or non-sacrificial interpretation of the Gospels, especially his interpretation of the Cross that our thoughts now turn. However, before I address this particular subject, I must examine briefly Girard’s reading of myth and biblical text. This provides a background to Girard’s anthropological interpretation of the Cross and his presentation of the Christian God as a nonviolent God.

177 See Girard, I See Satan, 79-81 and 88-93. Girard discusses the origin of ritual and makes some significant observations. He observes that human beings are so constituted that they always fall back to their mimetic rivalries. When this happens, members of the community recall the original crisis and the process of the single victim mechanism, a mechanism that is conflictive and disintegrative on the one hand and unifying and reconciling on the other. They recall with gratitude the victim whose expulsion or murder restored the cultural order, and they decide that a ritual re-enactment of the original crisis would produce what is most needed at this moment – unanimous violence that is capable of ending violence rather than intensifying it. This is why the ritual is not only repeated several times but done so with precision. Thus Girard contends in the same book that human societies are the daughters of religion and that humanity is the child of religion. The sacred is not only linked to the foundation of human culture and civilization, but it also plays a role in maintaining and restoring cultural order. By themselves, human beings are incapable of mastering mimetic rivalry and its effects, so they resort to scapegoats whom they call gods. Girard believes that religion has an important place in human society. Religion cannot be relegated to the periphery of society: it is not irrelevant.
3.3 Girard’s Reading of Myth and Biblical Text

In ancient religious traditions, myths tell the stories of the violent origins of religion and culture in such a way that the truth about the violent origins is hinted at but never explicitly revealed. In contrast, biblical revelation, especially the Gospels, tells the truth of violent human origins and shows the lie involved in the sacralization of violence: “This revelation occurs gradually, throughout the Old and New Testaments, but finds its clearest expression in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus, and in the Christian doctrines which reflect upon him.”\footnote{Kirwan, Discovering Girard, 69.} Here we need to ask this fundamental question: How does the Bible in general and the Gospels in particular, dismantle the violent sacred, expose it and neutralise it? To answer this question, I will examine briefly Girard’s reading of the story of Cain and Abel and the story of Joseph. I will merely allude to the story of Job\footnote{Like the first two stories, the story of Job is presented from the perspective of the victim and not from that of the persecutors. That is why at the end of the story Job is vindicated and his accusers are forced to ask for forgiveness. The attempt to mythologize the story, to project the perspective of the persecutor, and to maintain the guilt of the victim fails. This failure takes places against the background of Job’s own determination to deny his guilt and to defend his innocence. The failure of Job’s friends, who are but representatives of a violent and murderous community, but who nonetheless pose as representatives of God, signals the beginning of the desacralization of violence. What this story adds is the attempt by Job’s friends to supplicate Job in the course of the dialogue. Their intention is to fool Job into accepting the charges that they bring against him. According to Girard, this is important. Even a single dissenting voice makes it impossible for the community to rid itself of its responsibility with regards to its violent actions. Total unanimity is required. More importantly, Job by defending his innocence is able to wrestle God out of the process of persecution and violence and so is able to present God as God of the victim and not of the persecutor. See the following: René Girard, I See Satan, 117, Golsan, René Girard and Myth, 94-98, Palaver, René Girard’s Mimetic Theory, 207-209.} and indicate what it adds to the first two accounts. I will show the contrast between these biblical stories and myths.
3.3.1 Cain and Abel

In his *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, Girard presents his own reading of the story of Cain and Abel as a biblical myth. Girard’s interpretation reveals not only the similarities between biblical myths and ancient mythologies but also what is distinctive about the former. Girard sees the murder of Abel by his brother Cain as a classic example of founding murders as they appear in ancient mythologies.

Girard compares the story of Cain and Abel with that of Romulus and Remus. In both cases, there is discord between brothers and order is established only after a violent expulsion through murder. But Girard points out an important difference between the two narratives. Even though the murder of Remus by Romulus is regrettable, it can be reasonably justified. Romulus, whom Girard sees as the embodiment of Roman power had prescribed rules that had to be observed if the city of Rome was to be founded. Remus had flouted these rules with impunity, and so his death can be explained as the consequence of his transgression. The same cannot be said about Abel, and therefore Cain’s action cannot be justified. Cain killed his brother because of envy, a vice he failed to master even though he was warned by God. As Girard states: “By contrast, even if Cain is invested with what are basically the same powers, and even if he has the ear of the deity, he is nonetheless presented as a vulgar murderer. The fact that the first murder precipitates the first cultural development of the human race does not in any way excuse the murderer…”

Moreover, there is a moral judgement which depicts Cain as a person who refused to be his brother’s keeper. This ethical dimension of the story is significant since it reinforces the fact that the condemnation of the murder takes precedence over all

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other considerations. Both God and the Bible on moral grounds take the side of the victim. But if God takes the side of the victim, why does he intervene to protect Cain from attacks that might kill him?

Girard interprets the mark that God places on the forehead of Cain for his protection as “the establishment of a differential system, which serves, as always, to discourage mimetic rivalry and generalized conflict.”\(^{181}\) For Girard, then, this particular divine action must be understood as a way of establishing the social hierarchy necessary for pointing out the identity of any group of people but also for preserving the cultural order. Paradoxically, there is a second element that cannot be missed – the element of vengeance. A sevenfold vengeance is required of anyone who attacks Cain. Vengeance is still the means of containing violence. Ultimately, the story demonstrates that a culture built on violence only returns to violence. This is exemplified in the call for greater vengeance by Lamech, a descendant of Cain who himself becomes a murderer.\(^{182}\) When Cain’s seven victims become, through Lamech, seventy-seven, the borders between legalized punishment, vengeance and blood feud have been erased.\(^{183}\) An increase in the number of victims, a sign of more violence, is made even worse by the flood. The flood itself results from “an escalation that involves the monstrous dissolution of all differences: giants are born, the progeny of a promiscuous union between the sons of the gods and the daughters of men. This is the crisis in which the whole culture is submerged, and its destruction is not only a punishment from God, [but] …is the fatal conclusion of

\(^{181}\) Ibid., 146.
\(^{182}\) Golsan, René Girard and Myth, 90.
\(^{183}\) Girard, Things Hidden, 148.
Girard gives credit to the biblical authors for demonstrating that a culture founded on murder retains a thoroughly murderous character which is ultimately self-destructive. It is also to their credit that the story “desanctifies the violent origins of culture first by revealing the innocence of the original victim, Abel, and then by showing that Cain’s violence does not eradicate violence…”185 In fact, Abel is but the first among several other victims “whom the Bible exhumes and exonerates.”186

3.3.2 Joseph and His Brothers

To advance further his contention regarding the essential difference between myth and biblical text, Girard presents a lucid and engaging comparison of the story of Joseph with the story of King Oedipus. Girard notes the striking parallels between the two stories in order to distinguish with greater clarity the essential difference between the two accounts. That essential difference is “a thoroughgoing refusal of mythic expulsions…”187 by the biblical account.

Structurally speaking, a mimetic cycle underpins both narratives. A mimetic cycle is characterized by three phases: crisis, collective violence and sacred revelation. Girard’s analysis reveals that the first two phases apply to both narratives. In the case of Oedipus, the crisis is precipitated by a divine oracle that Oedipus would one day kill his father and marry his mother. Frightened by this prediction, Laius and Jocasta decide to kill their son.

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184Ibid., 148-149.
185 Golsan, René Girard and Myth, 92.
186 Girard, Things Hidden, 149.
187 Girard, I See Satan, 112.
Oedipus narrowly escapes death but is expelled by his own family. In the case of Joseph, the crisis is unleashed by jealousy on the part of his brothers who initially wanted to kill him but eventually sold him to merchants who took him to Egypt. Oedipus, after becoming king in Thebes, is expelled a second time because, unknown to himself, he had actually killed his father and married his mother. In both stories, we see the moment of crisis followed by collective violence which restores the social order. Both Oedipus and Joseph exemplify the single victim mechanism.

Girard argues that the striking parallels between the two narratives do not in any way detract from their essential difference. Whereas myth answers in the affirmative that the expulsion or lynching of victims is warranted and even justified, the biblical text holds a contrary position. From the perspective of the Bible, collective violence is not justifiable. That is why Joseph is in the right against his persecutors – his brothers, the wife of Potiphar and the Egyptian people. They all had been blinded by the evil of mimetic contagion. Whereas Joseph is innocent, Oedipus is not. Oedipus is presented as guilty of the crimes that had been foretold by the oracle. This confirms the assertion that in myths the victims are always wrong while their persecutors are always right.  

It is against this background that Girard sees the Bible as a critique of myth. As a critique of myth, the Bible reveals the evil of violent mythic expulsions and takes the side of victims against their persecutors. It reveals that the problem lies with the “agitated crowds that are incapable of identifying and criticizing their own tendency to expel and murder those who cannot defend themselves, scapegoats that they always take for guilty for the same

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188 Ibid., 109. See also Palaver, René Girard’s Mimetic Theory, 207.
stereotypical crimes…” It is true that in biblical myths there have been expulsions of so-called evildoers, and yet they differ from myths in that they are capable of questioning or being critical of the phenomenon of violent expulsions. Girard contends that if one were to rewrite a myth against the background of the light that the Bible now sheds on myths, the process of scapegoating might still be found. However, one thing of utmost importance will be absent – the guilt of the victim. The victim will no longer be held responsible for the crisis of the community as he was in archaic mythologies. This novelty in Girard’s view is the anthropological truth of the Bible even if it is not its entire truth.  

Another significant difference between myth and biblical text made known through the story of Joseph is the renunciation of idolatry (Gen 50: 18-19). Joseph refuses to take the place of God, and his brothers in turn resist the temptation to deify him. Girard writes:

The ten brothers resist the temptation to idolatry. They are Israelites, and so they don’t deify human beings. Mythic heroes typically have something rigid and stylized about them. They are first demonized, then deified. Joseph is humanized. The narrator bathes him in a warm luminosity that would be unthinkable in mythology. But this is not basically due to “literary talent,” for the genius of the text is its renunciation of idolatry.

The renunciation of idolatry affirms a truth of Jewish monotheism but also points to another important truth. Because Joseph is not deified, God is not victimized. In other words, the humanization of Joseph is the liberation of God from the violent sacred, an

189 Girard, I See Satan, 110.
191 Girard, I See Satan, 119.
accepted reality in ancient mythologies. “For the first time in human history the divine and collective violence are separated from one another.” \(^{192}\) Yahweh is not responsible for human violence. Of course, Girard is aware that a total desacralization of violence is not contained in the Jewish Scriptures and that this will take place only in the Gospels, especially in the Passion narratives. \(^{193}\)

A final difference between myths and biblical accounts in this analysis is not simply the triumph of Joseph over his enemies, resulting in the happy ending denied Oedipus, but Joseph’s ability and willingness to forgive his brothers. Both myth and biblical text take up the question of collective violence but arrive at different points where the latter in a radical way replaces obligatory vengeance with pardon. \(^{194}\) Whereas the solution to violence in mythology engages violence, Girard proposes forgiveness as an alternative to dealing with violence and the cycle of reprisals. If the humanization of

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\(^{192}\) Ibid., 119.
\(^{193}\) See Golsan, *René Girard and Myth*, 98. Golsan examines how the Bible is an antidote to violence. He presents Girard’s own analysis of the story of Cain and Abel, Joseph and Job. Even though the victim’s perspective ultimately triumphs and the process of demythologizing sacrificial violence begins in the Hebrew Scriptures, the latter is still an imperfect tool when it comes to a complete demystification of the scapegoat mechanism. Violence is not completely desacralized given the fact that vengeance is still attributed to Yahweh, even if he is presented as less and less violent and more and more benevolent. The assertion that violence has an exclusively human origin is not yet revealed. This will be revealed in the Gospels. By pointing out how Joseph reverses the cycle of collective violence by forgiving his brothers, Girard underscores the difference between two worlds: the world where arbitrary violence triumphs without being recognized and the world where this same violence is identified, denounced and finally forgiven. See Girard, *I See Satan*, 114.

\(^{194}\) Girard, *I See Satan*, 111. It is important to note that Joseph not only forgives his brothers, but welcomes the entire family to Egypt, and so brings about reconciliation. Prior to this family reconciliation, Girard interprets the action of Judah in the same positive light. During the second visit, the brothers are tested by Joseph to see if they have experienced a change of heart. By detaining Benjamin, Joseph wanted to see if his brothers would fall into the same sin, the sin of abandoning their youngest brother, the weakest and the most vulnerable. Only Judah passes the test; the rest fall into the same evil. Through his willingness to take Benjamin’s place, Judah breaks the original violent unanimity against a brother. In other words, Judah’s action is in total opposition to the original deed of collective violence, and so both cancels and reveals it. For Girard, this is a powerful conclusion to the narrative, not only because it combines in itself both the intellectual and ethical dimensions of the Bible, but more importantly because it points to what the Bible looks forward to. The Bible looks forward to a world where all men will treat each other not as rival brothers but as real brothers, a world in which the cultural violence that has divided and separated human communities in the past is entirely revealed and abolished. See Girard, *Oedipus Unbound*, 112-113.
Joseph signifies the liberation of God from the violent sacred, his act of forgiveness signals Jesus’ forgiveness of his persecutors and Jesus’ willingness to absorb and transform the violence of the Cross into a means of human salvation. Taken together, both signal in advance the true face of the Christian God, a nonviolent God. This has significant implications for this thesis.

3.4 Girard’s Non Sacrificial Reading of the Gospels.

If Girard’s comparative reading of myth and biblical text sheds light on the desacralization of violence and gradually reveals the Christian God as a nonviolent God, it is in the Gospels, but especially in the Passion narratives, that this revelation assumes its clearest form. Contrary to the spirit of mythology and religious rituals in ‘primitive’ religions and Western mythology, Girard presents a non-sacrificial reading of the Gospels. This allows Girard to argue that a significant shift has taken place in scriptural texts with the coming of Christ. This shift is characterized by both continuity and discontinuity and in a certain sense even by a complete break. The life, death and resurrection of Christ mark the end of sacrificial violence for the first time: “the end of divine violence and the explicit revelation of all that has gone before.”195 Against this background, we may now examine Girard’s non-sacrificial reading of the Gospels.

Girard argues that even though the death of Jesus brought about human salvation, it should not be thought of in terms of sacrifice. Girard contends that if the death of Jesus were to be conceived as a sacrifice, then the very meaning and function of the Passion would be lost. The meaning and function of the Passion is “one of subverting sacrifice

195 Golsan, René Girard and Myth, 98.
and barring it from working ever again by forcing the founding mechanism out into the open, writing it down in the text of all the Gospels.” Girard rejects the idea of a secret pact between the Father and the Son and therefore rejects a sacrificial reading of the Crucifixion. This so-called pact is based on the assumption that the Father for some obscure reason required the Son to sacrifice himself and the Son obliged. By willingly sacrificing himself at the request of the Father, the Son secretly colluded with the Father in an act of violence. Girard rebuts this claim with a Johannine text which reads: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15).

Girard contends that if we keep to the passages in the Gospels that speak specifically about the Father of Jesus, we will not find anything in them that attribute violence to him. On the contrary, we will find in them a God who is foreign to all forms of violence, a God who is not vengeful. In Girard’s opinion, the text that best affirms this claim is found in the Gospel of Matthew where it is stated:

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matthew 5, 43-45).

God who is a God of love repudiates violence and vengeance and even provides for the needs of his ‘enemies’. If God provides for those who reject him, then he cannot be held responsible for the infirmities, illnesses and catastrophes suffered by innocent

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196 Girard, Things Hidden, 181.
197 Ibid., 184.
198 Ibid., 183.
victims, especially in the case of conflict. Conflictual interpersonal relationships can no longer be polarized on a deity. The situation where human beings made a god responsible for all of humanity’s ills as we find in ancient religions and in mythologies can longer ring true in the case of the Gospels. In fact, the shifting of the source of violence to God is not only exposed by the Gospels, it is repudiated by them. Moreover, when violence erupts and reconciliation is called for, it is no longer necessary to have recourse to bloody sacrifices. “Reconciliation with God can take place unreservedly and with no sacrificial intermediary through the rules of the kingdom. This reconciliation allows God to reveal himself as he is, for the first time in human history.”

But if the Gospels present a non-sacrificial reading of the death of Christ and so present a non-violent God, how do we explain the violence that is associated with God in the so-called apocalyptic texts contained in the Gospels? Would not these texts have to be removed from the Gospels if Girard’s argument is to be sustained? Would not the Gospels be divided into two unequal halves: the good, anti-sacrificial humanist text and the bad, sacrificial and theological one? For Girard, neither of these solutions is necessary since both can be accommodated within a non-sacrificial interpretation. Girard contends that the apocalyptic texts point to the phenomenon of mimetic rivalry and sacrificial crisis that we find in ancient mythologies. According to Girard, if the violence described in these texts takes on such a virulent proportion and such graphic imagery, it is not only because they are drawn from the Old Testament, it is particularly because the sacrificial crisis and its resultant violence lacks a deity who acts immediately in order to halt the escalation. The escalation of violence in the midst of such outlandish phenomena will eventually produce a situation of apathy and indifference in interpersonal relations.

199 Ibid., 183.
Ultimately, people will experience meaningless conflicts everywhere in the world. Implied in Girard’s argumentation is the assertion that apocalyptic violence originates from human mimetic behaviour. Girard states: “We must realize that the apocalyptic violence predicted by the Gospels is not divine in origin. In the Gospels, this violence is always brought home to men, and not to God.” Since apocalyptic violence is human in origin, Girard argues that even when the Gospels take up Old Testament texts which seem to portray the wrath of God, the Gospels do what they are known to do well. They remain faithful to their true spirit, the spirit of desacralizing violence.

Girard’s argument that the apocalyptic texts in the Gospels do not represent a sacralization of violence, a position that would otherwise undo his arguments in favour of a non-sacrificial reading of the Gospels and of Jesus’ death, is corroborated by Raymund Schwager’s interpretation of Jesus’ judgement and Hell sayings. According to Schwager, Jesus in his kingdom proclamation had spoken of the goodness of God, who graciously turns towards his enemies—sinners. Jesus speaks of God as Abba, “Papa”, thereby indicating God’s love for and nearness to his people. If such is the nature of God, how are we to reconcile this with Jesus’ harsh judgement and Hell sayings? One approach would be to attribute these sayings to the post-Easter community and not to Jesus. But even if this approach were adopted, it would still be necessary to indicate what kind of authority should be accorded these sayings. If, for example, they are accorded the same kind of authority that is usually accorded to sayings believed to come directly from the lips of Jesus, the problem, which is both theological and ethical, remains unresolved.

Schwager examines this problem against the background of Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God. According to Schwager, Jesus understood his task essentially as

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200 Ibid., 186.
an event, that is, as God’s action which has its time of fulfilment. Therefore, Jesus’
judgement and Hell sayings must be understood in this context. Unlike the prophets of
the Old Testament who first demanded conversion as a condition for salvation, the
reverse was the case in Jesus’ proclamation. Jesus did not first demand conversion as a
condition for the offer of grace and salvation. Rather, he offered grace in order to awaken
in his hearers the process of conversion. This means that in the kingdom proclamation,
the offer of grace and salvation on the one hand and the pronouncement of judgement on
the other should not be seen together as belonging to the same appeal. The offer of grace
is primary, and judgement must be understood as a consequence of the rejection of the
offer of salvation. Ultimately, the problem of judgement and Hell sayings actually arises
from the side of the human subject in his or her decision to accept or reject the message
of the kingdom. Thus Jesus’ sayings do not contradict the graciousness of God nor can
they be taken to suggest a violent and vindictive God. In fact Jesus’ proclamation of the
kingdom was intended not only for the salvation of humanity but also for the unity of
wills. As Schwager states: “It was the aim of the kingdom of God to unite wills, the will
of God with the will of people, and people among themselves as brothers and sisters of
Jesus (Mk 3: 31-35 and parallels).”

201 Schwager, Jesus in the Drama of Salvation, 58-59. See Girard, Things Hidden, 202-205. In his
discussion of the relationship between the kingdom and the apocalyptic predictions of Jesus, Girard like
Schwager points out the importance of the response of Jesus’ listeners and the unfolding of the kingdom as
an event. Girard contends that if the people had accepted Jesus’ message, there would have been no
apocalypse and no Crucifixion. Girard also points out why the Gospels, especially the Gospel of Matthew,
speak first about the preaching of the Kingdom and only then about Jesus’ apocalyptic predictions and the
Passion. Between the two lies a negative event with its own terrifying consequences - the failure of the
preaching of the Gospel because of the indifference and disdain of those who were its immediate audience.
Jesus’ apocalyptic predictions are not only consequent to the preaching of the kingdom but more
importantly they constitute a warning out of love for Jesus’ immediate audience and for the rest of
humanity that they need not continue to trod the old path of violence. The kingdom is proclaimed as a
substitution for sacrificial religions and violence.
Similarly, Schwager presents a thorough analysis of the problem of divine violence as it is found in the Old Testament and comes to the conclusion that there are four series of text which speak about divine violent retribution. First, God is apparently presented as a being who is irrational, who kills or wants to kill without a reason. Second, God is said to react to evil deeds perpetrated by humans by way of revenge. Third, God punishes evildoers by delivering them in his anger to other human beings. Fourth, the wicked are punished by their deeds recoiling on themselves.202

Schwager explains that texts that depict God as killing or wanting to kill without any apparent reason are rare. He contends that such texts might be remnants of old notions that betray how the Old Testament understanding of God is radically connected to archaic sacred conceptions. According to Schwager, the difference between the second and third types of text is verbal rather than real. Whether God intervenes directly or uses a human agent to punish human evil, is essentially the same. For example, the Prophets often spoke of how God in his anger would destroy human beings. However, a closer examination of the stories of the Prophets points to the situation where one nation invaded another nation. Schwager therefore concludes that “we may assume that human violence is meant when there is talk of divine anger and retribution.”203 Regarding the fourth text, Schwager raises the question as to whether the idea of direct punitive intervention contradicts or complements the idea of evil falling back onto the head of the evildoer. Schwager believes the two are complementary. He speaks about prayers of petition in the Old Testament where an individual or a group, too weak to pay back an evil deed, petitions God for help or revenge. Even when the persecuted individual

203 Ibid., 63.
engages countermeasures, he or she does not act independently but first assures himself
or herself of divine assistance. Schwager cites Psalm 7 as a text that expresses most
clearly the complementarity between the two ideas. The psalm describes how the
perpetrator arms a deadly weapon against himself and how his violent deed recoils on his
head. Yet it is a prayer in which the supplicant laments that there is no one to save him
except God, and so he petitions God to rescue him from his persecutors. For the
suppliant, God is a righteous judge and would exercise righteous indignation in his
favour and against his persecutor. Because of this, Schwager believes that “self
punishment and punishment at God’s hands are therefore not two distinct realities.”
Schwager argues that this conclusion may be reversed: wherever divine anger and
vengeance are mentioned, the reference is to concrete deeds of human beings by which
perpetrators punish themselves. Schwager therefore contends that all this points to one
reality – human violence: “The passages concerning God’s direct or indirect avenging
activity and the statements about the perpetrators’ self-punishment thus point to one and
the same reality: violence is always committed by human beings.”

That is why it is always necessary to juxtapose texts that speak about divine vengeance with those that
report exclusively on human violence.

From his survey and explanation of the problem of divine violence in the Old Testament and that of Jesus’ judgement and Hell sayings, Schwager exonerates God from
violence and vengeance. This concurs with Girard’s non-sacrificial reading of the
Gospels which in effect constitutes a desacralization of violence.

204 Ibid., 65.
205 Ibid., 66.
Girard argues that the significance of the kingdom is to be found in how it seeks to bring about reconciliation between warring factions as well as an end to mimetic crisis. Girard believes that only an unconditional and absolute renunciation of violence and “if necessary, [a] unilateral renunciation of violence can put an end to the relation of doubles.” ¹²⁰⁶ Every form of vengeance and reprisal in interpersonal relations is completely and definitively rejected by Jesus’ kingdom proclamation.¹²⁰⁷ For Girard, the kingdom of God is the kingdom of love,¹²⁰⁸ where people can be liberated from violence which is a pervasive lie that enslaves.

Girard contends that in order to be able to leave violence behind, we must accept the rigorous objectivity of the methods that Jesus himself proposes to us, that is, by giving up retribution unconditionally.¹²⁰⁹ Girard proposes that this renunciation must be carried out individually and separately. Each individual, without looking at the other or waiting for the other, must take the initiative to renounce violence and the right to reprisal. For Girard, to do so is to obey the rule of the kingdom. It is the rule of the kingdom and obedience of this rule that produces the real human subject in place of the subject of the well-known mimetic structure.

¹²⁰⁷ Ibid., 197. Girard cites Jesus’ teaching on non retaliation in Mt 5: 38-40 in support of his assertion.
¹²⁰⁸ Ibid, 197. Girard’s discussion of what he refers to as an epistemology of love in the New Testament sheds further light on the kingdom as the kingdom of love and not of violence and retribution. Relying on the first Epistle of John (1 Jn 2: 10-11), Girard identifies love with the divine being itself, that is, with God. On the basis of this identification Girard argues that love in this context means neither a renunciation of rationality nor the embracing of ignorance. On the contrary, this love contains the truth that sheds light on the violent illusions often experienced by mimetic doubles. It is this love that can free them from the spirit of revenge and recrimination. For Girard, it is only Christ’s perfect love that can achieve without violence the perfect revelation that he has been pointing to. It is a revelation of the violent foundation of both human culture and religion and how this is reversed in the Gospels, especially through Jesus’ death and resurrection. See Girard, *Things Hidden*, 277.
Girard’s non-sacrificial reading of the Gospels supports the thesis of a nonviolent God. Girard takes this position further in his interpretation of the Cross and how the Cross unmask human violence. It is to this that we now turn.

3.5 The Cross and the Unmasking of Violence

In his interpretation of the Cross, Girard takes his thesis of a nonviolent God further and argues that the death and resurrection of Christ actually unmask human violence. That the Cross unmasks the victim mechanism, the foundation on which human culture and ‘primitive’ religions are built, affirms Girard’s discovery that the Judeo-Christian tradition, unlike ancient mythologies, is not built on the same mechanism. But how, according to Girard, does the Cross unmask violence? Before answering this, it is important to examine briefly Girard’s anthropological interpretation of the Cross. Through his anthropological interpretation of the Cross Girard is able to show that the victim mechanism is at work in the events leading to the death of Jesus. Because this is the case, the violence of the Cross does not come from God requiring the suffering and death of his Son on behalf of sinful humanity.

From an anthropological perspective, Girard presents an analysis of what is going forward with regard to the part played by all the agents in the events leading up to the death of Jesus. We have first the religious leaders, the politicians and then the crowd. All of them “participate in the action – at first separately, but gradually more and more in unison.”

According to Girard, all the agents involved are so in the order of their importance, starting with the weakest and ending with the strongest. Pilate is the one who

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has real power. When Pilate is not yet under the influence of the crowd, and the voice of
the Roman law, of legal rationality, is speaking through him, he declares the innocence of
Jesus. Pilate is convinced that Jesus is innocent, and this conviction is confirmed by the
message that he receives from his wife who urges him to have nothing to do with
condemning Jesus. Girard believes that the introduction of Pilate’s wife at this moment of
the drama is significant. As his wife, she is the closest to Pilate and to his very existence.
There is nobody better placed than she to influence Pilate’s religious fear. She asks Pilate
to resist the crowd. It should have been easier and more natural for Pilate to accept her
plea, especially as he too was convinced of Jesus’ innocence. Torn between two poles of
mimetic attraction, his wife on the one hand, a woman close to him who wants to save an
innocent man, and the crowd on the other, a crowd that is totally anonymous and
impersonal, Pilate falls prey to the demands of the crowd. Not only is the power of
mimetic contagion displayed here, but also the fact that during the moment of crisis there
is the loss of distinctions and hierarchy. In the midst of a violent crowd, Pilate, the one
who has the authority to change the course of affairs, fails to uphold truth and conscience.
The narrative also points out that, once a crisis begins, social order gets restored only
after the crowd is polarized against a single victim. Jesus is that victim.²¹¹

²¹¹ That Jesus is a scapegoat, the victim of a violent crowd seized by mimetic contagion, is discussed in
various ways by Girard. Girard raises the question of why Jesus is spoken of as sign after the example of
Jonah. According to Girard, we fail to grasp the full meaning of this comparison if we merely focus on the
symbolism of the whale. We must see in the narrative the situation where Jonah in the midst of the
turbulence of the sea is chosen by lot and thrown into the sea in order to save the ship from distress. This
narrative, apart from depicting how calm returns after the death of Christ, more importantly depicts how the
scapegoat pays for others in some ways and very often with his or her life. This idea is captured very aptly
through the voice of Caiaphas the High Priest. There is a crisis caused by the excessive popularity of Jesus,
and the council debates about how to put an end to it. The debate is indecisive, reflecting the nature of the
crisis, until Caiaphas makes the suggestion that it is better for one man to die than the whole nation to
perish. According to Girard, by speaking thus Caiaphas shows himself to be an astute politician presenting
a political solution; the use of violence as the last resort to limit or avoid greater violence. Girard contends
that this political solution places emphasis on social utility, thereby omitting the transcendent qualities of
the scapegoat mechanism. Seen in this light, it can be said that the scapegoat mechanism is present but in a
It is not only Pilate who acts under the influence of mimetic contagion, but also Herod, the unrepentant thief and even Jesus’ own disciples. Not only do Jesus’ disciples desert him, Jesus is denied by Peter. Girard links Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus to the influence of the violent contagion, refusing to limit it merely to Peter’s psychology and temperament. Girard does not deny Peter’s sincere love for Jesus nor does he deny that Peter had been singled out by Jesus as the rock on which he would build his Church. Yet he notes that when Peter enters into the violent crowd, he is not able to resist its hostile influence. In Peter’s denial of Jesus, we have a spectacular example of how infectious and dangerous collective violence or mimetic contagion can be.\(^{212}\) Girard believes that mimetic contagion and the single victim mechanism factored very strongly in Jesus’ violent death. He states: “From the anthropological aspect of the Cross is the moment when a thousand mimetic conflicts, a thousand scandals that crash violently into one another during the crisis, converge against Jesus alone.”\(^{213}\) The crowd violently and collectively converged against Jesus, but did it also deify Jesus, its victim?

For both Girard and Schwager, the deification of the victim, when applied to Jesus, takes on a different meaning or interpretation. Whereas Jesus’ divinity is affirmed, weakened form. Girard, however, believes that the suggestion of Caiaphas must be understood in the evangelical sense. In this context, it constitutes a revelation of the scapegoat mechanism by the Passion narratives. We have here, then, the victim mechanism not of the text but in the text. Ultimately, Caiaphas is more than an astute politician: he is a sacrificer who puts victims to death so that others might live. See Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 112-114, 117. As scapegoat Jesus is also referred to as Lamb of God; this points to his innocence.

\(^{212}\) Girard, *I See Satan*, 19. See also Raymund Schwager, *Jesus of Nazareth: How He Understood His Life*, trans. James G. Williams, (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 138-148. Like Girard Schwager describes in a vivid manner the drama of Jesus’ trial through which he is plunged into the darkness of death and how this is characterized by mimetic contagion. The crowd that gathers against Jesus is violent, nameless, faceless, and bonded together by a common unanimity against Christ. They cry out together that Jesus deserves the death penalty and must be crucified. Even the pilgrims from Galilee who had followed Jesus and had acclaimed him King of the Jews now join the mob, believing that the preacher from Nazareth has always had a suspicious character. The priests, the elders and the Scribes who constituted the high council, put aside their difference in opinion and are glad for the moment to be gathered against Jesus. Even Herod and Pilate, who have been enemies, became friends on this occasion, obviously against a common victim in the person of the condemned Christ. Jesus’ disciples abandon him out of fear and return to Galilee.

it is a discovery, in fact, a revelation, and not a creation by his persecutors. Jesus is divine not because he is crucified; he is crucified precisely because he is divine. Jesus’ divinity is proclaimed only after the resurrection which is interpreted as an act of God. The resurrection is God’s own way of intervening in order to vindicate Jesus the innocent victim. It is God’s own way of affirming that the Spirit of truth was on Jesus’ side rather than on the side of his opponents and persecutors. Moreover, the proclamation of the divinity of Christ is not by all, but only by his small band of disciples, who on the authority of the evidence of the resurrection appearances and their own pneumatic experience in the post-Easter community, against all odds, spoke of the resurrection of Jesus always in relation to his death.

What is implied here is that the resurrection of Jesus and the experience of the Pentecost event in the post-Easter Christian community are significant moments of that Christian revelation which helped Jesus’ disciples not only to admit their own complicity in the death of their Master, but to break out of the unanimity that usually results after the expulsion or the murder of the victim as is found in mythologies. This same revelation is the reason behind their willingness and ability to name in a direct and explicit manner the phenomenon of the victim mechanism and to reject it. This mechanism has been “abrogated, broken and revoked” decisively and definitively in the New Testament, especially through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

214 Ibid., 123.
215 Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 103. See also 107-108. Peter the Apostle in Acts 4 quotes here from Psalm 2 in speaking about the death of Jesus. There is a coalition composed of the crowd on the one hand and the leadership on the other against the Lord’s anointed. Girard notes that this coalition remains invincible at the level of brute force because it has been able to put Jesus to death, but at the level of significance it has failed, having acted in vain. It has failed because it has not been able to impose its viewpoint. By putting Jesus to death, it actually fell into a trap because the secret it wanted to hide becomes inscribed in the account of the Passion. Moreover, the disciples after Pentecost are not only strengthened but begin to understand the meaning of the death of Jesus and so spread this understanding to the rest of the world. We
Girard illustrates this definitive revoking or unmasking of violence when he engages a Pauline text which allows him to speak of the victory or the triumph of the Cross. The text reads:

[Christ has] cancelled the accusation that stands against us with its legal claims. He set it aside, nailing it to the cross. He thus armed the principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them, drawing them along in his triumph. (Col. 2:14-15)

The accusation that has been hidden since the foundation of the world in myths and has in fact enslaved humanity is now nailed to the Cross and therefore has been made public. It is the so-called guilt and expulsion of the victim. By showing his innocence as is found in the Passion accounts, Jesus has revealed the falsity of this accusation and has, in fact, liberated all victims who lived before him. Also, the powers and principalities too have been nailed to the Cross. This is why Girard compares the triumph of the Cross to the victory of a Roman military general. A victorious military general would usually make a public spectacle of the leaders of the enemy that has been defeated.

Theologians who have unpacked the work of Girard have shown with clarity how the Cross unmasks violence by stressing the innocence of Jesus. For example, S. M. Heim contends that while the pieces in the Passion narratives are similar to those in myths, there is an essential difference. In the Passion narratives, the pieces are visibly in place. The narratives have persecutors themselves speak about the innocence of Jesus. Judas confesses that he has sinned by betraying innocent blood. The centurion in Luke’s Gospel at the moment of Jesus’ death declares Jesus’ innocence, and one of the thieves crucified with Jesus admits that they are suffering justly for their sins but declares Jesus innocent. What we have here are profound counter-confessions, voices of dissent raised at the very moment when all dissent should be ended. By declaring the innocence of Jesus through the lips of his persecutors, the narratives bring to the fore the guilt of the different characters who participated in the death of Jesus. They also reveal the truth that a combination of fear, hatred and contagion are the factors that underpin the inner dynamic of the collective violence carried out against Jesus. See S. Mark Heim, Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 116-118.
by means of a procession into the city. In the same way, Girard contends, that unknown to the powers and principalities that put Jesus to death on the Cross, with the intention of hiding once against the truth of mimetic violence, that very act has nailed them to the Cross, thereby exposing them and the hidden weapon with which they have hitherto always successfully invoked. Christ is the victorious general, and the victory is the Cross. For Girard, then, the Cross is a representation of human origins and the culture of violence that has resulted from it. Christianity through the Cross has conquered and destroyed the violent mechanism.

But Girard draws attention to an important difference between how the Roman general makes a spectacle of his enemies and how the Cross made a spectacle of the powers and principalities. The first is accomplished through military might while the second is done through nonviolent submission. Christ achieves his victory through the renunciation of violence. Because the renunciation is absolute, “violence can rage to its heart’s content without realizing that by so doing, it reveals what it must conceal, without suspecting that its fury will turn back against it this time because it will be recorded and represented with exactness in the Passion Narratives.”218 Also, whereas the enemies of the Roman general are put on display because they are defeated, the powers and principalities are defeated because they are put on display.219 The very act of being displayed is the defeat.

To argue that the Cross has unmasked satanic violence is to argue that the Passion has both anthropological and demystificatory significance which in turn supports a non-sacrificial reading of the death of Jesus. Girard supports his non-sacrificial reading of

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218 Girard, I See Satan, 140.
219 Ibid., 143.
Jesus’ death by signalling two types of transcendence: the transcendence found in ancient religions and mythologies that replaced real victims and the transcendence or divinity of Jesus. Jesus is divine because he is the begotten Son of the Father from eternity.220 On the Cross, Jesus is challenged by his persecutors to prove his divinity by coming down from it (Mt 27:39-44). Girard believes that Jesus’ refusal to do so is a confirmation that the violence witnessed on the Cross is not a divine action. The Cross is not one more example of the violent sacred.

Girard’s reading of the prologue of the Gospel of John against the background of the opening chapter of Genesis further substantiates his position. In the Fall narrative, two significant things take place. First, Adam and Eve desire to be like God. It is an instance of metaphysical mimesis rather than just acquisitive mimesis.221 Second, Adam and Eve are expelled from Paradise by God, an act that seems like a precautionary measure. As the story stands, it presents the relationship between God and human beings as one characterized by rivalry and agitation, and even God does not seem to come out too well.

When we turn to the Prologue of John, we find a reversal of the Fall narrative. It is the Word of God, the Son of God, the one whom the world did not receive – it is he

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221 In his article, ‘Naming the Demon’, John D. Dadosky explores the contributions of Girard and Lonergan in terms of evil. Drawing upon implications from an earlier work where he had engaged the theme of mimetic theory for a renewed understanding of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, he sets out to clarify not merely the structure of evil but more importantly evil within the context of the redemptive work of God. Dadosky believes that the ability to recognize the pattern of the cycle of violence is an important step towards reversing it and healing it. Ultimately, for both Girard and Lonergan, the solution lies in the triumph of the Cross. Dadosky argues that while mimetic theorists with their emphasis on envy have overlooked the role of pride at the heart of human sin and violence, their insights are helpful in clarifying a mimetic component to the sin of pride. He points out that mimetic appropriation has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. It is horizontal when it is directed towards human beings by other human beings. In the concrete, this is caused by envy which leads to the desire to have what the other possesses. It is vertical when human beings, as was with Adam and Eve, desire to be like God, beyond their nature. This is metaphysical desire and it is caused by pride. See John D. Dadosky, ‘Naming the Demon’: The ‘Structure’ of Evil in Lonergan and Girard, Irish Theological Quarterly, 75/4 (2010), 356.
who is expelled. This expulsion of the Word by the world “is of course, the act of violent rejection which is the Crucifixion.” What we have here is not merely a reversal of a mythological account but more importantly a revelation. Unlike in the Genesis narratives where attempts are made to evade the truth – for example, Cain denying that he is responsible for the murder of his brother Abel – here the true origin and direction of violence is revealed once and for all.

If the Cross unmasked violence and revealed a nonviolent God who rejects retribution, how did the death of Jesus on the Cross transform human evil? How did Jesus identify with the actions of his adversaries – condemnation and crucifixion – so as to transform not only these actions but humanity itself? This is important because it not only further strengthens the thesis of a nonviolent God but also introduces the element of inner conversion or transformation that is required in any violent conflictual situation. I will rely mainly on Schwager’s treatment of Jesus’ death within the categories of identification and transformation.

3.6 Interpreting Jesus’ Death within the Categories of Identification and Transformation

According to Raymund Schwager, if we are to arrive at a proper understanding of how Jesus’ death is a transformation of evil, the meaning of the concept identification as it is

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222 Kirwan, Discovering Girard, 83.
223 Ibid., 83. Girard also explains the expulsion of Jesus in relation to his divinity in another sense. With respect to his divinity, Girard contends that because Jesus in his humanity is the only one who is perfectly united to God in his divinity, he becomes the only mediator or bridge between the kingdom of violence and the kingdom of God. A nonviolent deity can signal his existence to humankind only by having himself driven out by violence. By allowing himself to be driven out by violence, Christ demonstrates that he is not able to establish himself in the kingdom of violence. Jesus does not belong to human culture and the violent foundation on which it is built. Rather, remaining absolutely faithful to God’s Word in a world that did not receive the Word, Jesus has been able to communicate to humanity its true vocation – the renunciation of violence. See Girard, Things Hidden, 216-219.
used in this context must be clarified. To do this, Schwager asks: “how was the crucified one able to identify himself with the actions of his opponents (condemnation and crucifixion) if he did not wish (indirectly) to destroy himself?”

Schwager examines briefly one of the main ideas contained in Maximus the Confessor’s doctrine of redemption. Maximus the Confessor had compared the expulsion from the Garden of Eden to the Cross of Christ. In this comparison, Maximus recognized the reality of death in both cases. Death was imposed on humanity by God in the Garden of Eden as a punishment for sin. Jesus’ death on the Cross transformed this first death into a means of salvation from sin. In this context, the concept ‘identification’ must be understood in direct relation to the idea of transformation.

How the two concepts are connected is revealed by two opposing intentions that surround the event of the Cross. On the one hand, the opponents of Jesus were intent on punishing a criminal. On the other, Jesus intended to give himself up for the many (cf., Mk 14:22-24; Mt26:26-28; Lk 22:19-20; 1Cor 11:23-25). In the light of the opposing intentions, Schwager states: “It follows that if Jesus was able to identify himself with the actions of his opponents, then this was possible because he thereby managed at the same time to transform their actions.

The event of the Last Supper remains the clearest moment of Jesus’ identification with the actions of his adversaries and by extension with the rest of sinful humanity. Schwager believes that there are two things that happened at the Last Supper which can be traced to the historical Jesus. First, Jesus offered himself in the form of food and drink. Second, he referred to the cup of wine as his blood which he

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224 Schwager, Jesus in the Drama of Salvation, 186-187.
225 Ibid., 187.
226 Ibid., 187.
then gave to his disciples to drink, an act that is offensive to Jewish mentality (Cf., Lev 7:26ff; 17:1-14; Deut 12: 23-25). The presence of these two ideas in the early Christian community, which was still entirely Jewish, means that “the praxis can only derive from him who in fact brought something new and to whom the community knew itself bound.”

How do the words and actions of Jesus symbolize identification and transformation? How do they effect transformation? For Schwager, there are no gifts that can be so directly and intimately appropriated by the receiver than gifts offered in the form of food and drink. Because of this, Jesus at the Last Supper “gave himself to his disciples through identification with bread and wine so that he would be one with them as food which is consumed becomes one with the eater.” Henceforth, the Kingdom of God will be present to people not only in the form of external sayings and symbolic actions but in a form that could enter into their inner wills so that it could transform the rebellious forces within them – forces that had made them reject God’s offer of grace and unlimited goodness.

Schwager explains that there are two related forms of Jesus’ self-giving here which shed light on each other. First, there is the self-offering in the form of food and drink. Second, there is the offering of his [Jesus’] life in a nonviolent way to a violent death. Jesus’ self-offering to a violent death on the Cross is no mere ethical example when this is interpreted against the background of his self-giving in the form of food and drink. This is because, as already indicated, the body that is offered in the form of food

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227 Ibid., 103.
228 Ibid., 113.
and drink infiltrates, as it were, into the defensive and rebellious wills of a people who had rejected the Kingdom message. The infiltration takes places precisely for the transformation of that defensive and rebellious human spirit that opposes God and God’s Kingdom message. Therefore, Jesus’ death on the Cross is salvific and transformative.

Second, Jesus’ self-offering in the form of food and drink, a non-violent act in the face of a violent death, means that only a nonviolent approach, moved by love for the enemy, would ensure that the Kingdom message and the salvation that it promises does not fail, especially in the light of its initial rejection. Jesus showed ultimate love for his enemies by responding in a nonviolent manner to their violent rejection of his Kingdom message “with a still greater offering up”.

This greater offering up of self in a nonviolent way is not only a manifestation of Jesus’ love for his enemies but also a transformation of evil into good by his surrender. His natural human instincts for survival notwithstanding, Jesus was prepared to share the destiny of his opponents and to suffer in advance the consequences of sin, lies, violence and even death. In other words, because Jesus was able to identify with the actions of his opponents, he was at the same time able to transform those actions into an act of surrender to the Father. It was a surrender made through the Spirit. In the Gospel of Mark we read: “Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed out the Spirit” (Mk 15:37; see Mt 27:50). Luke is even more direct than Mark and Matthew. In Luke we read: “And Jesus cried loudly, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit’” (Lk 23:46). Schwager interprets the death of Jesus as sacrifice, not in the sense of the Father being responsible for the death of the Son or requiring his death in order to appease his wrath, but as self-offering. A

\[229\text{Ibid., 113.}\]
combination of three things constitutes the sacrifice of Christ: the act of dying, the completion of the mission and the handing over of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{230}

Because the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, forbearance, gentleness, etc., \textit{(Gal 5: 22-23)}, and because the presence of the Spirit signifies freedom \textit{(2Cor 3:17)}, Schwager argues that Jesus’ death must be understood as a willing surrender of self to the Father by which he transformed the actions of his adversaries. It is for the same reason why it is not tenable to speak of Jesus’ death in terms of self-destruction.\textsuperscript{231} This position finds support in the work of Denny J. Weaver.\textsuperscript{232}

On the Cross Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of his persecutors in these words: “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing” \textit{(Lk 23:34)}. Jesus is by no means approving the actions of his persecutors. Rather, he recognizes that when his persecutors decided to condemn and crucify him, they were not fully conscious of what they were doing. They were, in fact, acting under the rule of a power beyond themselves. They were victims of the power of sin, albeit they remain culpable. It was to sin and its dark forces which ruled over his opponents that Jesus surrendered himself, so that he could lead them back to God.

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 188.
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 186.
\textsuperscript{232} Denny J. Weaver, \textit{The Nonviolent Atonement}, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 77-80. Weaver discusses the sacrifice of Christ according to the Letter to the Hebrews. First, he highlights the idea of self-offering. Jesus is seen primarily as the high priest. As high priest, Christ offers up himself. Like Schwager, Weaver wants to confirm the freedom with which Jesus offered himself and that Jesus is not a passive victim like the other victims of ancient mythologies. But this also means that contrary to all appearances, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews is not advocating the satisfaction model of the atonement theory where the death of Christ is required by both God and law so that honour may be restored to God. On the contrary, by stressing the unity of wills between the Father and the Son, the focus is on the meeting of the two wills, and by extension, on Christ’s obedience, and not on the act of killing per se which God requires. Also, as an innocent and nonviolent victim, Jesus’ blood, unlike that of Abel, does not cry out for vengeance. On the contrary, it speaks about mercy and forgiveness.
Here one cannot fail to see the Girardian idea of the unconscious and its influence on Schwager. Jesus’ condemnation and death are characterized by mimetic contagion where Jesus is a victim. Both mimetic contagion and the scapegoat mechanism are characterized by rage, violence, lack of objectivity and, ultimately, are under the influence of the unconscious. In biblical terms and in this context, sin and the power of evil are the reasons for the phenomenon of the unconscious. Unanimity and social order may have been attained through the scapegoat mechanism, but Jesus’ opponents could not free themselves of the guilt of sin by the same mechanism. It would take Jesus’ identification with sinners and with sin and the transformation of the latter to take away the guilt of sin. By his incarnation, death and resurrection, Jesus would justify sinners by taking upon himself human sin and by rendering human souls righteous through the gift of his own righteousness.233 Ruled over by evil, human beings are victims of their own sins but are now forgiven and redeemed by Christ.

If Jesus’ words and actions at the Last Supper are significant in relation to how he identified with sinners in order to transform them, the same can be said of the pneumatic experience of the post-Easter community. Whereas the historical moment of the resurrection appearances was marked by fear and doubt, the story is different from the time of Pentecost onwards. Jesus’ disciples are so transformed that they courageously step into the open to bear witness to their “murdered and resurrected Lord.”234 At Pentecost, Jesus’ disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of the risen Christ. The pneumatic experience of the disciples reaches to their innermost being. This is important because it is the innermost part of their being that was transformed.

233 Schwager, Jesus in the Drama of Salvation, 169.
234 Ibid., 142.
This is in consonance with the meaning that I have already elaborated on in connection with the Last Supper and Jesus’ violent death on the Cross. For Schwager, because the crucified one allowed himself to be drawn into the dark world of his adversaries and from where he lived out his obedience to the Father, “the deep godless realms of the human heart themselves will become the place where the divine spirit can from now on reach and touch people.” In other words, just as Jesus at the Last Supper had offered himself in the form of food and drink in order to infiltrate the inner dimension of people’s lives so as to transform them, so does he continue this transformation through his Spirit in the post-Easter community. Transformed by the Spirit from within, Jesus’ disciples are offered another opportunity to accept the Kingdom message and to become its missionaries.

Schwager contends that this transformation continues to take place today whenever Christians gather together to celebrate the Eucharist. Just as Christ on the Cross transformed the power of evil in surrender to the Father through the eternal Spirit, so can we speak of transformation in the celebration of the Eucharist. The epiklesis, the invocation of the Holy Spirit, during the Eucharistic celebration performs two functions. First, the Spirit transforms the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Second, the Spirit has a transforming effect on the congregation that is celebrating. By receiving the body and blood of Christ, Christians receive transforming grace which enables them to surrender themselves along with Christ to the Father.

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235 Ibid., 144.
236 Ibid., 228. According to Schwager because Christ is really present in the Eucharistic celebration, especially in the bread and wine transformed by the Holy Spirit, the element of transformation in the Eucharist should be addressed. First, the transformation is directed at the hearts of the participants in the experience of conversion. Ultimately, this transformation aims at a step by step conversion of the whole of humanity.
Schwager draws our attention to the link between three dramas: the drama of salvation, the liturgical drama and the ethical drama. Theology, divine worship and life should not be dissociated from each other. What the Church celebrates in the liturgy expresses what she believes and what she believes must have a direct and positive influence on Christian living. For example, the decision to make concrete sacrifices for victims of a natural disaster or to champion the cause of reconciliation and peace can be inspired by the conviction that Christ self-giving through the sacrifice of the Cross has become the paradigm for Christians.  

By exploring Girard’s hermeneutic of desire, his reading of myth and biblical text, his anthropological and non sacrificial interpretation of the Cross, this chapter has been able to establish a hermeneutical and a theological framework that will be appropriated in the final chapter. This notwithstanding, it is necessary to present a critique of Girard’s theories and ideas to the extent that they relate to this study. In doing so, I will point out some positive points but also some limitations. In particular, I will dwell more on Girard’s attitude towards sacrifice and the use of sacrificial language with the intention of showing that the use of sacrificial language and the concept of sacrifice are still relevant today, at least in African Christian theology and for African Christianity.

3.7 Some Critical Observations and Comments

Girard’s hermeneutic of desire is not only lucid and engaging; it reveals an anthropology of violence that goes beyond the level of theory. It reflects what obtains concretely in interpersonal relations. Family feuds, inter-tribal conflicts and even civil wars have taken

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237 Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 79. In this regard, sacrifice need not be linked to violence. Sacrifice is understood as self-giving rather than taking the life of the other.
place partly, if not entirely, due to the dynamic of mimetic rivalry. Negative mimesis and how it is linked to the eruption of violence and to its escalation is a fact that cannot be denied.

Girard, however, proposes positive mimesis as an alternative to negative mimesis and this is important. According to Girard, the New Testament and the Gospels do not present to us “a morality of spontaneous action.” A morality of spontaneous action would be an instance of the romantic lie which Girard rejects. Rather, the New Testament encourages imitation – the imitation of Jesus. Girard refers to this as “non-violent imitation.” Girard contends that because in Jesus there is no acquisitive mimesis, the situation where mimetic doubling results in rivalry and violence will never take place.

By proposing positive mimesis as an alternative to negative mimesis, with Jesus as the model, Girard believes that it is possible to redirect human desire in such a way that it does not produce rivalry, conflict and violence. We find a similar idea elaborated by Doran in his discussion of how both Girard and Lonergan have contributed to the theology of atonement.

Doran contends that Lonergan provides a heuristic structure through his idea of the Law of the Cross, revealed in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus and that Girard can provide the relevant data that can fill Lonergan’s heuristic structure. I do not intend to get into the details as Doran has done. I only intend to point out how Doran’s treatment of the two thinkers on redemption lends support to Girard’s idea of positive mimesis, a mimesis made possible through the working of grace.

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238 Girard, Things Hidden, 430. See also Palaver, René Girard’s Mimetic Theory, 219.
239 Girard, Things Hidden, 430.
240 Ibid., 430.
According to Lonergan, the evils of the human race consist in basic sin and moral evil. Basic sin is committed when an individual as a free agent fails to do a morally good deed that he or she ought to have done or does a morally reprehensible deed that he or she ought to have avoided. Basic sin has consequences including bias, the deterioration of human relations and systemic violence. These consequences then make up moral evil.

In the Girardian sense basic sin is the failure to reject mimetic rivalry and its consequences are the victim mechanism and the deterioration of human relations as well. Both Lonergan and Girard therefore signal the reality of human evil and both propose ways of overcoming the problem. For both thinkers, the solution is supernatural. This seems to be more explicit in Lonergan than in Girard. I say so because Lonergan sees the transformation of evil and the reversal of strained human relations in our participation in the life of the triune God. For Lonergan, the Law of the Cross which is God’s self-communication in the incarnation, in the gift of the Holy Spirit and in the promise of the beatific vision, is what provides the way out of both basic sin and moral evil. Through God’s self-communication, evil has been transformed into the supreme good. This supreme good is the whole Christ, that is, Christ and his mystical body the Church. In this new supernatural realm, evil due to sin, has not only been absorbed by Christ, grace makes it possible for strained human relations to be transformed. In the same way for Girard, because Jesus out of love absorbed the violence of the Cross and refused to return it, he has shown his rejection of the mimetic cycle of violence. He has also given us an example to follow. When people reject the mimetic cycle of violence they will be able to

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reverse the deterioration of human relations. Both Lonergan and Girard, therefore, locate the transformation of evil in the supernatural realm. As Doran states:

For both, the intelligibility of the redemption is the victory of God over evil in history precisely through the absorption and the elevation of the plane of living that grace alone renders possible. It is the transformation of the world that arises when evil is transformed into good by a nonviolent response.²⁴²

Even though Girard’s positive mimesis and how he relates it to Jesus and the Cross is commendable, Girard has been criticized for his theory. Girard has been criticized for insisting that the desirability of an object lies not so much in itself as it lies in its being desired by another person. Apart from raising the question as to whether mimetic contagion should be employed to explain all desires and all violence, one wonders whether Girard’s theory can stand in the face of the teaching of Christian tradition regarding the inherent goodness of creation. From a theology that affirms the inherent goodness of creation it can be argued that it is possible to desire something not

²⁴²Doran, “The Nonviolent Cross: Lonergan and Girard on Redemption,” 51. See also Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, 290-295. Volf agrees with Girard regarding Jesus’ nonviolent absorption of violence but adds some critical remarks. Volf agrees with Girard that Jesus’ death on the Cross is the ultimate example where the principle of revenge is replaced by the principle of nonviolence and nonresistance through the absorption of the violence of his persecutors. Jesus refuses to let himself be taken into the violent actions of his adversaries and does not allow himself to be a reflection of their image. Like Girard, Volf believes that the Cross has exposed the mechanism of scapegoating. Volf however adds that Jesus is not arbitrarily chosen as a scapegoat as Girard’s theory of scapegoating implies. On the contrary, Volf notes that in a world characterized by deception and oppression, Jesus’ innocence, his option for truth and justice makes him a scapegoat. Volf therefore argues that Jesus’ nonresistance and his absorption of violence must be interpreted within the larger framework of the struggle for truth and justice; values of the Kingdom of God. Nonviolence must be part of a larger strategy to fight against the system of terror. It is the struggle for truth and justice that can transform nonviolence from pure negativity into a creative possibility. Outside this broader framework, argues Volf, the victim mechanism may not have been exposed and Jesus as a victim would have been forgotten like other victims before him. While agreeing with Girard that the Cross has unmasked violence by objectifying the victim mechanism, Volf believes that Girard has taken too lightly the tendency of people to remask what they have already demasked when it suits them. Volf makes an important point when he speaks of the Cross as a divine embrace of the deceitful and the unjust and proposes that the only alternative to violence is self-giving love, the willingness to embrace the other in the knowledge that truth and justice have been, and will be upheld by God. One can embrace the other because God in the Person of Christ, on the Cross embraced all humanity.
primarily because it has been desired by another person but because one has recognized its inherent goodness or value.\textsuperscript{243}

An important hermeneutical key for Girard has been his nonviolent interpretation of the Cross by which he dissociates God from violence. Girard’s nonviolent atonement theory appeals to people who advocate strict nonviolence on ethical grounds. Also, people who are involved with peace initiatives and the reform of penal systems can turn to Girard’s atonement theory to find in it a theological basis in support of their rejection of violence. In fact, Girard’s theory saves Christianity from the embarrassment of having to deal with a violent God. However, it comes at a price.

Boersma points out how, in his attempt to dissociate God from the violence of the Cross, Girard had great difficulty keeping a clear line of continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Boersma cites an instance where in some of Girard’s early writings, like “Mimesis and Violence” (1979), Girard had actually made a disjunction between the two testaments, thereby making a distinction between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. Girard had contended then that the Gospels had replaced the violent God of the past with a God who advocates nonviolence instead of sacrifice.\textsuperscript{244} Girard’s claim that the Gospel texts had replaced the God of the past highlights the difficulty that he had in incorporating Old Testament stories of violence into a coherent theological framework, especially for his nonviolent atonement theory. In fairness to Girard, it must be added that Girard does not simply posit a disjunction between the two testaments. For example, this is true in Girard’s own

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\textsuperscript{244} Ibid., 140.
\end{quote}
analysis of Old Testament stories involving Abel and Cain, Joseph and Job where Girard recognizes the seed not only of the desacralization of violence, but also the presence of a counter-myth that takes the side of the victim against the persecutor. Girard himself makes reference to the link between a number of Psalms and the Passion narratives not only because he wants to point out the working of the victim mechanism, but also because he wants to point out the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. It seems that Girard in his later writings became more aware of the unity of Sacred Scriptures and affirmed this unity himself. Therefore, Girard cannot be accused of being a disciple of Marcion, a second century heretic who posited two separate and unrelated testaments and made a distinction between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament.\footnote{See Girard, \textit{I See Satan}, 123, 129, See also \textit{Things Hidden}, 175-76. Here, Girard indicates the connection between both Testaments and how for example the resurrection sheds light on the mechanism of violence that had been hidden since the foundation of the world.}

A critique of Girard’s earlier disjunction between the two testaments also points to the question of the use of sacrificial language and the institution of sacrifice as such. In advocating a non-sacrificial reading of the Gospels and of the Cross, Girard rejected the use of sacrificial language and sacrifice as such. A question that has been raised is: Should sacrificial language and sacrifice be rejected altogether? Schwager, one of Girard’s closest collaborators and who engaged Girard’s theory of the scapegoat mechanism in his interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement, has argued that the sacrificial language that is found in the Letter to the Hebrews need not be understood as a text that supports a satisfaction theory of atonement where God requires the death of his Son in order to satisfy his sense of justice or wrath. Rather, the sacrifice of Christ must be
understood as a voluntary self-offering in surrender to the Father for the salvation and transformation of sinful humanity. This point was underscored when we discussed Schwager’s interpretation of the Cross within the categories of identification and transformation.

Christ’s sacrifice, a voluntary self-sacrificing act, would then serve as an example and a challenge to Christians who take up a good and just cause for the well-being of others, even if that cause involves some form of suffering. In fact, it is such alternative readings of the Letter to the Hebrews as we find in Schwager which enabled Girard to change his mind and to become more open to the notion of sacrifice. This can be verified in Girard’s own interpretation of the story of the judgement of King Solomon, narrated in his *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. While this might reflect a positive development in Girard, it does not include the idea of divine punitive justice.

Girard’s theory of atonement may be described as a combination of the moral influence theory and a demythologized form of the Christus Victor theory of atonement. This seems to be the case because of his proposed positive mimesis and his engagement with the Pauline text in which he speaks about the victory of the Cross over satanic violence without implicating God in violence and trickery. Whereas I do not share

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246 Girard, *Things Hidden*, 237-243. Here, Girard notes the difference between sacrifice that involves blood and one that does not and asserts that the latter was made out of love and in view of life and not death. See also Kirwan, *Discovering Girard*, 108. According to Kirwan, it was this text which helped Girard to arrive at a somewhat nuanced understanding of the concept of sacrifice. Before, Girard believed that the term sacrifice had a constant connotation.

247 Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross*, 149.

Girard’s negative attitude towards the use of sacrificial language and sacrifice as such, I do share in his belief in the relevance of the Christus Victor theory of atonement.

The debate regarding the relevance of sacrificial language and the practice of sacrifice has been an important issue in African Christian theology. Even though there has been a difference in opinion regarding the necessity and licitness of African traditional sacrifices for African Christians in the light of Christ’s redemptive work described as a sacrifice, most African Christian theologians seem to agree on three important issues. First, there is a consensus regarding sacrifice as means of salvation in African Traditional Religion. Second, there is a consensus regarding the relevance of sacrificial language as an effective means of communicating the Christian message to the very heart of the African Christian. The need is at both cognitive and existential levels. That is, because the concept of sacrifice and its practice is so pervasive in the religious tradition of the African, the use of sacrificial language is not only an effective tool of communicating the Gospel message but, more importantly, it is a means by which Christianity can effectively address the existential concerns of the African Christian. Third, African Christian theologians are in agreement on the need for discernment with respect to the use of sacrificial language. That is, they recognize the need to determine which characteristics of African sacrifice may be used to communicate the Christian message and which are best avoided.²⁴⁹

3.8 Contribution of Mimetic Theory to African Atonement Theology

Girard’s engagement with the Christus Victor theory of atonement has relevance for the African context. Here I would like to use the work of a Ghanaian theologian named Kwame Bediako to support my claim. Bediako is convinced that African theology must engage in a critical synthesis of the Christian message and African cultural and religious heritage that pre-dates the advent of Christianity to Africa. Bediako argues that such a synthesis would lead to the evolving of a theological framework from which African Christians can draw answers and solutions to questions and problems that are culturally rooted. In his *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience*, Bediako demonstrates this by engaging the Christus Victor theory of atonement in a Ghanaian context, that is, among the Akan of Ghana. Bediako does this by applying this model to the spirit-world of the Akan people which has implications for other African Christians.

The spirit world of the Akan of Ghana, or what John Pobee refers to as the religious ontology of *homo Akanus*,\(^n\) is made up of the Supreme Being, (*Onyame* or *Onyankopon*), the ancestors and the gods or the lesser deities. Nature itself is believed to be inhabited by spirits. These spirits can either harm the living or exert a positive influence on them. In other words, the operations of the spirits are ambivalent. How is Jesus saviour to the spirit-world of the Akan people?

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the position that, while acknowledging the universal significance of Jesus’ redemptive sacrifice, the concept of sacrifice in African Traditional Religion should not be discarded. At the same time, I am in agreement with those who believe that certain African traditional sacrificial practices can be adopted, purified and Christianized. In this regard, Christianity would be a fulfilment and not a destruction of what is good in the African religious and cultural tradition. For a summary of reasons why some theologians including theologians from the West defend the notion of sacrifice and the use of sacrificial language in atonement theology, see Gerald O’Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 167-172.

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\(^n\) John S. Pobee, *Toward an African theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 44.
Against this background of the Akan notion of the spirit-world, where the operations of the spirits in relation to human life is ambivalent, Bediako engages the ‘Christus Victor’ understanding of Christ as saviour. Every spiritual rule and authority has been conquered by Christ and can be conquered by Christ. This certainly includes the malevolent spirits which surround the Akan world. What is more, unlike the spirit-power of the Akan religious ontology that contains in itself an ambiguity expressed in the operations of the spirit-beings, there is no ambiguity in Jesus’ actions towards humanity. Jesus’ action towards humanity is always benevolent. By relating Jesus as saviour to the spirit-power which is an essential part of Akan religious ontology and by extension that of Africa, Bediako brings to the fore the needs and fears of African Christians that must be attended to by the Gospel. If in their faith experience Akan Christians are able to articulate and assimilate the conviction that Jesus has power over Satan and over the entire realm of the spirit-world, which they believe can harm them, then they need not live in fear. Such a conviction is able to produce an African Christian spirituality that is capable of speaking to African Christians in their daily living. It is a spirituality that is nourished by an African Christology which in turn is kept alive by this spirituality.

This mutual interchange and enrichment between an African Christology and African Christian spirituality shows itself in the prayer of praise and adoration to Jesus by Christiana Afua Gyan, an illiterate Ghanaian Christian woman, in a rural setting. Afua Gyan had originally expressed her prayer in Akan, her local language, but this has been faithfully translated by Jon Kirby into English so that the reader can appreciate the depth of the African Christian religious experience of a rural illiterate woman, conveyed in the
traditional thought patterns of the Akan people. Afua Gyan’s prayer of praise and adoration to Jesus clearly demonstrates what difference it can make in the faith experience of the African Christian when Jesus as saviour is effectively related to the spirit-world as ‘Christus Victor’. I quote part of Afua Gyan’s prayer here to confirm the point:

If you go with Jesus to war, no need for a sword or a gun. The word of his mouth is the weapon which makes enemies turn and run. If we walk with him and meet trouble we are not afraid. Should the devil himself become a lion and chase us as his prey, we shall have no fear. Lamb of God! Satan says he is a wolf – Jesus stretches forth his hand and look: Satan is a mouse! Holy One! 

Afua’s prayer of praise and adoration is particularly impressive given the fact that she is illiterate and not a professional theologian. Her deep theology may be attributed ultimately to the working of the Spirit in her own life, but it must also be attributed to how she came to understand and appreciate the saving power of Christ who died and rose from the dead and to relate that to her particular African context and experience. 

Bediako then relates the sacrifice of Christ and his priestly mediation to the Akan and by extension to the African context where sacrifice and priestly mediation play an important role in the religious life of Africans. Inspired by the Letter to the Hebrews, Bediako argues in support of the universal significance and efficacy of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice in taking away human sin. Jesus, who is divine and sinless and who assumed human nature and who willingly offered up himself on the cross, fulfils

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252 Ibid., 8.
perfectly the end of all other sacrifices (Heb 9:12). Jesus’ own sacrifice has been offered once and for all and is therefore valid for all times and for all people. For Bediako, to reject this is to reject knowledge and truth as he states: “To reject the worth of the achievement of Jesus Christ on the grounds of race, ethnicity and cultural tradition, is to act against better knowledge, distort religious truth and to walk into a blind alley …”

In effect, Bediako is proposing the sacrifice of Christ in place of the African sacrificial system as the only sacrifice that is capable of taking away sin. Sin is not merely an antisocial act but brings guilt to the sinner. Against this background, Bediako contends that sacrificial offerings and purificatory rites as are done in traditional African society are ineffectual in this regard.254 For Bediako, this is why Akan Christians, and by extension African Christians, must accept the sacrificial significance of Christ in place of their own sacrificial system.

Regarding priestly mediation, Bediako draws our attention to this fact: in the one Person Jesus Christ, two realities intersect: perfect sacrifice and perfect priestly mediation. As man, Jesus shared our human predicament. His assumption of human nature enabled him to act for humanity. His divine origin empowered him to bridge the gap between the all holy God and sinful humanity. Through his achievement as God-man, Jesus brought about a harmonious relationship between God and humanity. This is what human priestly mediation only approximates. Jesus does not merely act on behalf of humanity; he brings humanity into the very presence of God. This is because Jesus’ sacrificial and priestly mediations do not take place in a temple but in the very presence of God which he at once is and represents. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ, and

253 Ibid., 29.
254 Ibid., 26.
are identified with him, are brought into the very presence of God. Again, Bediako believes that to reject such a gift is to fail to recognize the true meaning and goal of all priestly mediation.255

Even though Bediako believes that the African sacrificial cult is no longer necessary for African Christians, his re-evaluation of sacrifice and priestly mediation in the African religious tradition in the light of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice implies that the use of sacrificial language is still relevant, at least in the African context. By bringing in Bediako’s ‘inculturated’ Christology into our discourse, I sought to do two things. First, I wanted to show my agreement with Girard regarding the relevance of the Christus Victor theory of atonement for the African context. Second, I wanted to give a concrete example of how sacrificial language still has both cognitive and existential significance for the African context. If in western Christian theology, sacrificial language does not seem to be relevant anymore, it remains relevant in African Christian theology. Ultimately, I intended this to be a critique of Girard’s anti-sacrificial stand even if Girard did soften his position somewhat in his later works.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I explored Girard’s hermeneutic of desire with the view to understanding rivalrous and violent relations at both interpersonal and social levels. This exploration underscored three important points that I consider relevant to this thesis. First, it reveals that the effects of mimetic rivalry and mimetic violence are real, concrete and destructive. Second, it reveals the inadequacy of the social prohibitions of human religions and

255 Ibid., 29.
cultures in dealing with internal conflicts. Third, it proposes God’s redemptive work through Christ accomplished on the Cross as the solution to violence and vengeance. These truths are further grounded in Girard’s anthropological treatment of the Cross where the Cross not only unmasks human violence but represents in a real sense the end of sacrificial violence. Schwager’s engagement with Girard provides a theological ground in support of Girard’s thesis of a nonviolent God and proposes a theology of nonviolence that would be appropriated for the African context.

As a critique to Girard I limited myself to those areas that are relevant to our discourse where I pointed out some positive points and limitations. By speaking of contributions of the mimetic theory to African atonement theology, I sought only to highlight that, like Girard, I too believe that the Christus Victor theory of atonement is relevant to the African context. But unlike Girard, I showed that the notion of sacrifice and the use of sacrificial language are equally relevant for the African context.

If Girard’s hermeneutic of desire provides insights for understanding and for interpreting ethnic conflicts in Africa, Volf’s idea of exclusion in its various forms, his notion of hegemonic centrality, his categories of identity and otherness as the framework for understanding ethnic and cultural conflicts, are arguably significant insights in serving the same purpose. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will explore Volf’s Trinitarian theology and his theology of the Cross for understanding the problem of identity and otherness with the view to appropriating these categories in the final chapter.
Chapter 4

The Phenomenon of Cultural and Ethnic Identity as a Theological Task—Miroslav Volf

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I explored Girard’s hermeneutic of desire and how that leads to rivalrous and conflictual relationships at both interpersonal and societal levels. It is a mimetic structure characterized by rivalry, violence, antagonism and negative reciprocity. Girard’s alternative proposal of a positive mimesis with Jesus as the model will serve as part of a Christian response to the amelioration of rivalrous and conflictual relations. More importantly, by exploring Girard’s anthropological approach for understanding the atonement and Schwager’s theological engagement with Girard, a foundation has been laid. A theological and a hermeneutical framework has been established that will be critically appropriated in the final chapter.

In this chapter, I intend to take this theological and hermeneutical framework further by doing the following: First, I will examine the phenomenon of cultural and ethnic identity against a theological background by engaging Miroslav Volf’s ‘Abrahamic revolution’ and its Christian re-appropriation. The question that underpins this engagement is: How does Volf’s Abrahamic revolution and its Christian re-appropriation address the question of identity and difference and so contribute to the desacralization of ethnic and cultural identities, thereby leading to peaceful co-existence?
Second, I will examine Volf’s theology of the Cross which is situated within the broader narrative of God’s dealings with humanity. How does Volf’s theology of the Cross address the question of identity and otherness especially within the context of enmity? How can the Passion be taken as a framework through which both victims and perpetrators remember truthfully so that justice, reconciliation and peace can be attained?

4.1 Identity and Otherness

Volf argues against the belief that the phenomenon of cultural and ethnic conflicts is a reality foreign to modern societies characterized by liberal democracy and the so-called superior civilization. Having received an invitation in 1992 to address a conference in Berlin on cultural and social upheavals in Europe, up to that point in his career, Volf held the images of three cities in his mind. These cities were Sarajevo, the place of his origin, Los Angeles, where he lived, and Berlin, where the conference was to take place. What the three cities had in common was the experience of culturally and ethnically motivated violence. Reflecting on this, Volf came to the conclusion that these incidents of violence were not aberrations but a true reflection of modern society characterized by “a history of vicious cultural, ethnic, and racial strife.”

Volf believes that the unfortunate events in human history where humanity witnessed unspeakable evils like the transatlantic slave trade, the two world wars, the Jewish Holocaust, which was ethnic cleansing, and the war in former Yugoslavia, with its tragic consequences, call for the need to examine the

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256 Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, 14. See also Judith M. Gundry-Volf and Miroslav Volf, A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997), 8-11. Volf believes that the question of group identities must be taken seriously given the prevalence of conflicts linked to cultural, ethnic and racial differences.
problem of cultural and ethnic conflicts within the broader framework of identity and otherness.\textsuperscript{257}

Volf is aware that an objection could be raised that what should occupy the centre of discourse in modern society are issues that concern human rights, economic justice and ecological wellbeing, rather than the issues of identity and otherness. While admitting that these other concerns are relevant, Volf argues that the issues are not mutually exclusive and that all can be taken seriously without dislodging the problem of identity and otherness from the centre. The need to address the problem of identity and otherness is not only important but urgent. An observation of what goes on in the world—in living rooms, in cities, in ghettos and on battlefields—has convinced Volf that “the future of our world will depend on how we deal with identity and difference.”\textsuperscript{258} Drawing upon the ideas of Charles Taylor, Volf confirms his claim by pointing to two types of politics: the politics of equal dignity and the politics of difference.\textsuperscript{259} Whereas the politics of equal dignity stresses what is universally the same and the situation where all are entitled to identical rights and immunities, the politics of difference stresses the uniqueness or distinctness of the individual or a group of individuals. When this distinctness is ignored or being assimilated by a dominant group, it is often regarded as an affront to the formation of the authentic self. This is often resisted. It should be recalled that in chapter

\textsuperscript{257} Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, 16. Volf’s decision to address the problem of cultural and ethnic conflicts within the framework of identity and otherness was bolstered when he visited his native Croatia in the fall of 1992. Seeing that Croatia had been occupied, its villages and towns destroyed and the people driven out, the issue of identity and otherness impressed itself more forcefully on his mind. A devastated Croatia confirmed what he had always known. The problem of cultural and ethnic conflicts is a part of a bigger problem, the problem of identity and otherness. Volf’s own experience back home in independent Croatia after the war taught him that his fellow Croats expected nothing less than total loyalty, total ethnic belonging and cultural distinctness.

\textsuperscript{258} Ibid., 20.

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid., 18-19.
one and in our discussion of ethnic rivalries and conflicts in Africa, especially during the colonial era, so-called minority ethnic groups often resisted being assimilated by dominant ethnic groups, fearing that, among other things, they might lose their distinctness.

According to Volf, the politics of difference rests on two main persuasions. First, our identity as persons is intrinsically connected to the social milieu within which we were born and bred. Here we learn to identify with different people including our parents, teachers and peers. This is reminiscent of the primordialist idea of ethnic identity discussed in chapter one. Second, our identity is partly shaped by the recognition we received in our social setting while growing up. Therefore, when this identity is not recognized or is misrecognized, there are often negative consequences in relation to us and the other. This notwithstanding, Volf is convinced that difference or otherness with regard to nationality, ethnicity, religion and race must not lead to hatred of the other nor should it necessarily lead to violent conflicts, a point we again underscored in chapter one when we examined ethnicity and the different theories regarding ethnic identity.

How should we think about our identity? How should we relate to the other? From what vantage point should we reflect on the character of the self in our engagement with the other? How should we construct or adjust our identity so that we can live in harmony with the other or reconcile with the other in the context of enmity and conflict? These are some of the salient questions that Volf raises as he explores the question of identity and otherness as a Christian response to the problem of cultural and ethnic conflicts. How does Volf’s Abrahamic revolution and its Christian re-appropriation address the question of identity and difference?
4.2 Abrahamic Revolution and its Christian Re-appropriation

One of the criticisms that has often been levelled against Christian missionaries, especially against those of the 19th century, is that they failed to make a clear distinction between the Gospel and the Western cultural accretions with which the Gospel was carried to places like Africa and Asia. For this reason Christian missionaries have often been accused of being part of the process of imperialism where local people were forced to accept Western cultural trappings together with the Gospel. Even though, generally speaking, there is some merit in this criticism, Christians in our contemporary world must not be too quick to point accusing figures at the early missionaries. Volf contends that in our own time and during moments of conflict, some Churches and their clergy, due to an undue attachment to their own cultural identity, have failed to be agents of reconciliation and have rather acted as agents of conflict. When people allow themselves to be trapped by the claims of their own ethnic group, they are bound to exhibit this kind of complicity.

Whereas it is wrong to be bound by the claims of our cultural group, it is even more unsettling and dangerous when we sacralize our cultural identity. Sacralization occurs when we raise up our cultural norms and identify them strictly with religion, be the religion Christianity, Islam or Judaism. With respect to the Christian religion, Volf argues that the sacralization of cultural identity produces a blindness that is potentially destructive. Blinded by the act of sacralization, an evil deed like murder could be interpreted as an act of piety where the murderers see themselves as courageous defenders of the Christian faith. Volf further argues that when Churches and their clergy stop being agents of reconciliation and rather recognize violence and conflict as
legitimate, they are like the biblical salt that has become tasteless (Mt 5:13). In this situation, there is a call for repentance. Repentance in this case involves turning away from “captivity to own culture, coupled so often with blind self-righteousness.” Volf believes that captivity to one’s own culture and its accompanying blindness is a kind of “new tribalism” that is threatening to divide societies, separate peoples and cultural groups and foment vicious conflicts. As Christians, how should we live in this situation? Volf proposes that we need to keep a proper balance between distancing and belonging to our various cultures. Volf explains what this involves by examining the call of Abraham in the book of Genesis and its Christian re-appropriation in St. Paul.

4.2.1 Departing from our Cultures

In discussing the call of Abraham with the intention of indicating the importance of distancing ourselves from our cultures, Volf highlights Abraham’s physical departure and his faith. Abraham is called the father of all those who believe, but before the scriptures speak of his faith, they speak first about the fact that he was called to go forth (Gen 12: 1-3). According to Volf, Abraham had two options opened to him. Given his age and the barrenness of Sarah his wife, he could have chosen to remain in his ancestral home and become inconsequential or leave for the unknown and become a source of blessing to the nations, on the merit of the promise of the divine “I” that had become part of his life. Abraham chooses to depart, trusting in the divine “I”, and only then does he become a blessing to the nations. Volf contends that “the courage to break his cultural and familial ties and abandon the gods of his ancestors (Joshua 24:2) out of allegiance to a God of all

\[260\] Ibid., 37.

\[261\] Ibid., 37
families and all cultures was the original Abrahamic revolution.\textsuperscript{262} What made Abraham an ancestor of all people (Heb 11:8) was the result of two related factors: his departure from his native soil and his firm trust that God would give him an heir.

For a departure to be purposeful and intelligible, it must contain within itself three elements: a conscious acting agent, a specific origin and a definitive goal. To put it differently, there must be subjectivity, intentionality and goal-orientedness. The call of Abraham in itself and the response to it in obedience presuppose these three elements. Abraham leaves his country, kindred and family behind, and his goal consists in receiving the land God had promised him and in becoming a blessing to all nations. Because Abraham’s departure has an origin and a goal, it is not the type that can be spoken of analogically as a stream that flows in every direction, diluting into other streams and eventually arriving at a dead end. Volf rejects the criticism of those who see Abraham’s departure only in terms of transcendence. The criticism is that Abraham, relying on the authority of the divine “I” which is transcendent in itself, ascribes to himself transcendence and becomes the paradigmatic male who seeks separation (“go forth”), independence and glory (“great nation”), who will crush anyone who resists him (“curse”) and show benevolence to those who praise him (“blessings”) and who finally extends this to the ends of the earth (“all the families”).\textsuperscript{263} If transcendence alone apart from immanence were to be ascribed to Abraham, the implication would be that his departure entails a denial of relationality, at least at the horizontal level. The truth, however, is that both transcendence and immanence must be ascribed not only to Abraham but also to Sarah.

\textsuperscript{262} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{263} Ibid., 41
Volf advances three reasons to show that Abraham’s departure affirms, rather than
denies, the need for relationships. First, Abraham is radically bound to God through his
faith. Unlike the builders of the tower of Babel who wanted to make themselves great,
Abraham receives his greatness from God to whom he is totally obedient. Second,
Abraham did not separate himself from Sarah his wife since both departed together.
Third, Abraham was surrounded by a wandering community. Significantly, both
Abraham and Sarah must leave together; remove themselves from the fields of their
ancestral relations. It was by such a removal that they were able to stand as the
protagonist of a new beginning of a history of a pilgrim people, namely the Jewish
people. “Without a departure, no such new beginnings would have been possible.
Novelty, resistance, and history, all demand transcendence.”

An important question that Volf raises in this context is this: How should all those
who trace their origin to Abraham’s departure relate to people of different cultures who
are their neighbours? For example, how should Christians, Muslims and Jews, who all
claim a connection with Abraham, relate to one another? For Volf, all those who see
themselves as children of Abraham must have the courage to depart from their cultures

264 Ibid., 42.
265 This is an important question especially because some conflicts in Africa, even though they might not
have been caused entirely by religious differences, have involved some religious elements. How for
example, should the claim of a common ancestry in Abraham help Christians and Muslims in Africa
enhance inter-religious dialogue and, by extension, peaceful co-existence? This can be an entry point for
inter-interreligious dialogue in Africa as a response to religious conflicts. In fact Volf believes that the call
to love God and the neighbour which is essential in each faith and common to both faiths can be a common
ground for working for peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in the effort to overcome
conflicts. See Miroslav Volf, “A Common Word for a Common Future” in A Common Word: Muslims and
Christians on Loving God and Neighbor, eds. Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad and Melissa
Yarrington, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 18-27. See also
Miroslav Volf, “God is Love: Biblical and Theological Reflections on a Foundational Christian Claim” in
A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor, eds. Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin
Muhammad and Melissa Yarrington, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing
Company, 2010), 137-139.
and the deities that are tied to these cultures. This means accepting the challenge that one’s ultimate loyalty is to the God of all families and cultures. Loyalty to this God was what made Abraham depart and become a stranger. A wrong way of becoming a stranger is to want to impose our culture on others. Volf speaks of the right way of being a stranger with specific reference to Christians and how Christian identity should be primary to all other identities: “At the very core of Christian identity lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty, from a given culture with its gods to the God of all cultures.”

Concretely, Volf believes that our identity as Christians is not only primary; it is that which gives life and meaning to our other identities. This means that we are not to see ourselves first as Africans, Asians or Canadians, for that matter, before thinking of ourselves as Christians.

The primacy of the Christian identity is given a particular focus in the Christian re-appropriation of the Abrahamic revolution. Volf therefore makes a shift from a larger perspective that includes Christians, Muslims and Jews to Christians alone.

### 4.2.2 Departing without Leaving

In his engagement with the Christian re-appropriation of the Abrahamic revolution, Volf raises an important theological question regarding the oneness of God and the particularity of cultures and religions. To believe that God is one is to believe that all people are beneficiaries of God’s blessings, and yet one had to be a member of a particular race, the Jewish people, descendants of Abraham and Sarah, in order to receive God’s blessings. Christian tradition has addressed this apparent tension. Without going

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266 Ibid., 40.
into details, Volf points out two solutions. One way to resolve the tension is to argue that the different religions are particular expressions of the one deity. If this is the case, particularity ceases to be a scandal. In order to attain unity with other religions and cultures, all that the adherents of a particular religious tradition need to do is to dig into their own cultural resources. The more they do so the closer they come not only to the one deity but also to people of other religions and cultures. Drawing upon John Hick, Volf contends that this solution is not tenable because it leads necessarily to the postulation of an unknowable God. An unknowable God is an aloof and distant God far removed from people and whose place is taken over by tribal deities. “Believing in a god behind all concrete manifestations amounts to … not believing in one: each culture ends up worshipping its own tribal deities…”

The worship of tribal deities from the point of view of St. Paul is both a form of idolatry and a source of enslavement (Gal 4:8).

Because the first solution is not tenable, the problem created by God’s universality and the particularity of his self-manifestation must therefore be found elsewhere. It must be found in a God who is both one and yet not hidden behind concrete religions. For Paul, the only true God is the God of Abraham and Sarah. Drawing upon the work of N. T Wright, Volf gives a summary of Paul’s own solution to the tension between God’s universality and his self-manifestation in Jewish culture. “First, in the name of the one God Paul relativizes Torah. Second, for the sake of equality Paul

267 Ibid., 44.
268 Ibid., 44.
discards genealogy. Third, for the sake of all the families of the earth Paul embraces Christ.”

A clear and convincing logic flows from the above statements, and Volf draws our attention to it. To argue that God is one is to argue that God is universal. But if God is universal, then all people must be equal before God. Human equality implies that all people have access to the blessings of God. If one affirms that all people have access to God’s blessings, one must admit that it is incompatible to ascribe religious significance to genealogy since such an ascription necessarily excludes non-Jews. In Christ, the seed of Abraham, two interrelated things take place. First, the genealogical promise made to Abraham is fulfilled. Second, genealogy ceases to be the privileged locus through which people can have access to God. There is therefore a correlation between the religious irrelevance of genealogical ties and the necessity of faith in Christ, the seed of Abraham. Faith in Christ replaces biological descent. Therefore, “all peoples can have access to the one God of Abraham and Sarah on equal terms; none gets that access by right but all by grace.”

A significant way by which all people have access to God through grace is the Cross of Christ which is the foundation of the Christian community. Volf contends that Christ unites different people into one body not simply through his leadership but especially through his suffering. Alluding to a Pauline text (1Cor 10:17), where the one bread effects unity in the Eucharistic assembly because all partake of Christ in the form of bread, Volf points out that this one bread is at once the crucified one. He states: “On

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269 Ibid., 44-45.
270 Ibid., 45.
the surface, the singleness of the bread seems to ground the unity of the body. And yet the one bread stands for the crucified body of Jesus Christ, the body that has refused to remain a self-enclosed singularity, but has opened itself up so that others can freely partake of it.”

Because the crucified one is not a self-enclosed singularity, the unity that he effects does not involve the destruction of differences. What the Cross rejects is not differences but enmity and hostility. Hostility can be put death only through self-giving which Christ attained in an ultimate way on the Cross.

Christ’s self-donation through his death and resurrection is what gave birth to the Church. The Church is marked by both unity and bodily differences (1Cor 12: 13). The resurrected Christ is the locus of unity for Jew and Gentile, male and female, free and slave. The sacrament of baptism through which the Holy Spirit is received does not destroy differences. On the contrary, all people together with their ascribed bodily differences have become one body. This means that the “Pauline move is not from the particularity of the body to the universality of the spirit, but from separated bodies to the community of interrelated bodies—the one body in the Spirit with many discrete members.”

The Spirit creates equality by disregarding differences at baptism even though differences are not destroyed by baptism. This means that these differences will remain, but they are not required as a condition for salvation and obviously not for membership in the Church. This Pauline universalism has important implications for understanding the question of identity and otherness.

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271 Ibid., 47.
272 Ibid., 48.
The first implication is that each culture can retain its cultural specificity. Yet no culture can retain its tribal gods. In practical terms this means that ultimate allegiance must be given to the God of all cultures and to his Messiah who offered his body as home for all people. It also means that “religion must be de-ethnicized so that ethnicity can be de-sacralized.”273 In other words, Christians of whatever ethnicity must resist the temptation of ever raising their cultural norms as the culture which they then impose on others. They must never allow the claims of their cultural group to blind them and make them agents of violent conflicts rather than agents of peace and reconciliation. Unlike Abraham, whose departure is understood in spatial terms, the departure of Christians from their culture is no longer a spatial category. The Christian departs without leaving. One must always have one leg rooted in one’s culture while taking a distance from one’s culture at the same time. This kind of movement is characterized by both immanence and transcendence. The experience of immanence takes place because of our bodily inscribed differences which mark out our particularities, and yet as Christians, who have responded to the Gospel, we experience a transcendence, a universality that we must accept and affirm.

Volf believes that belonging to and taking a distance from our culture at the same time is important. This is because belonging without distance and distance without belonging is destructive. For example, if I assert my identity as a Dagara in an exclusive manner, and I then proceed to shape all people according to my image and by extension the Dagara cultural identity, there are implications. One such implication is that all those who do not measure up to the Dagara cultural identity or who resist being shaped

273 Ibid., 49.
according to this identity stand in danger of being excluded from my world and the world of the Dagara as a people. This would be an instance of belonging without distancing. Conversely, if I deny my particular identity as a Dagara, I do not only end up isolating myself from my cultural group, I might actually end up joining other groups that see themselves as anti-Dagara sects. The challenge for Volf remains: “Distance from a culture must never degenerate into flight from that culture but must be a way of living in a culture.”

As can be seen, Volf’s engagement with the Abrahamic revolution and its Christian appropriation in St. Paul has significant implications for understanding identity and difference. This Pauline re-appropriation has its foundation in a form of universality. Paul in the name of the one God of Abraham opens up a particular group of people to become the one universal multicultural family of peoples. Abraham was to inherit the land (Gen 12: 1), but in Paul Abraham is to inherit the world (Rom 4: 13). Significantly, it is a universality that does not sacrifice particularities and differences but sheds light on them in respect of how they might be used constructively.

The benefits of distancing ourselves from our culture can prove to be an antidote against a destructive use of particularities and differences. Distancing ourselves from our culture produces two benefits. First, it creates space in us to receive the other. That is, just as the crucified one is not a self-enclosed singularity but is open to receive all humanity, so it is with all those who have become a new creation in God. The Spirit of God breaks through the enclosed spaces in which we live and opens each of us up towards the other. This breaking up of the enclosed self which is then moved towards the other becomes

274 Ibid., 50
what Volf calls a “catholic personality.” A personality becomes catholic not only because it is open to the other but this openness to the other allows it to become aware and to admit that others, too, belong to it. This belonging entails the truth that the catholic self is what it is partly because others in different ways have brought their influence to bear on it.

However, a catholic personality cannot live in isolation. A catholic personality must be embedded in a catholic community. A catholic community implies the reality of a catholic cultural identity. When Volf speaks of a catholic cultural identity, he does not have in mind an essentialist notion of cultural identity where two different cultures, for example, interact as self-enclosed entities without any direct influence on each other. On the contrary, Volf is of the view that cultures that intersect and overlap should be open to each other. None should live in fear that its so-called pristine cultural purity is being threatened by its interaction with the other. Each cultural group must face the truth regarding the fluidity of its own cultural identity and in fact affirm its own hybridity.

The second benefit of distancing ourselves from our culture “entails a judgement against evil in every culture.” That is, when a catholic personality in its openness enriches others and allows itself to be enriched by others, it must not take into itself from the other what is evil. For example, one simply cannot feel comfortable with evils such as murder, ethnic cleansing, nationalistic idolatry, etc. Certain ideas and actions by their very nature are inconsistent with any good synthesis worthy of the name. Integration must always be taken together with discrimination or what might be termed discernment.

275 Ibid., 51.
276 Ibid., 52.
277 Ibid., 52.
It is important to note that Volf’s call for judgement concerns evil in all cultures including one’s own. He maintains that judgement must begin first with oneself and with one’s own culture. Those who wish to fight evil must first fight it in themselves. The distance which the Spirit has created in the children of Abraham and those who believe in its future promise has the power to open the eyes of people to the evils of self-deception, injustice and how the self can become destructive. For Volf, this means that “a truly catholic personality must be an evangelical personality—a personality brought to repentance and shaped by the Gospel and engaged in the transformation of the world.”

The fight against injustice, violence and falsehood both in ourselves and in our cultures is impossible without distance. When we have one foot in our culture and the other in God and God’s future, we are better placed to perceive and judge ourselves and others not simply on our own terms but in the light of God’s new world now fashioned by the Spirit. It is a world in which a great multitude “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” is gathered before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev 7:9; 5:9). Volf’s new world fashioned by the Spirit therefore has an eschatological dimension.

Just as a catholic personality must be embedded in a catholic community, an evangelical personality stands in need of an ecumenical community. Volf is convinced that we need an ecumenical community in our struggle against evil, especially evil in our own culture. We need to hear the voices of people from other cultures and Churches. These other voices would challenge us to perceive and face issues that we might otherwise not perceive because we have been blinded by the opinions of our own culture and have, in fact, begun to mimic its practices.

278 Ibid., 52.
If Volf’s Abrahamic revolution and its Christian re-appropriation speak to the question of identity and otherness, it is in his theology of the Cross that the question of identity and otherness receive further grounding. How should one relate to the other, especially in the context of enmity and conflict, against the background of a Christian tradition that teaches that God in Christ on the Cross embraced all humanity? How is the Passion a paradigm through which people can remember rightly in a violent world so that justice, peace and reconciliation are served? Before turning to Volf’s theology of the Cross, it is important to examine his theory of exclusion which Volf believes to be the basis of every sin. What is exclusion? Why do we exclude others? Why is exclusion a sin, and how does the Cross speak to the sin of exclusion?

4.3 Sin as Exclusion

Before engaging critically and extensively the idea and the practice of exclusion, Volf offers some preliminary clarifications and observations. He argues that an adequate reflection on exclusion must meet two conditions: (1) it must help name exclusion as evil with confidence, and (2) it should not dull our capacity for detecting exclusionary tendencies in our own judgements and practices. The fulfilment of these conditions has other benefits. First, it forestalls the situation in which the fight against exclusion creates new and oppressive boundaries, boundaries of which the protagonists may not even be conscious. Second, it prevents the dissolution of all boundaries and the creation of disorder. Third, it allows for the existence of boundaries and identities that are non-exclusionary.

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279 Ibid., 64.
The fight against exclusion is not a fight against difference since difference per se is not an evil. This is the background to Volf’s distinction between differentiation and exclusion and between exclusion and judgement. These distinctions help produce a profile of a self that is at once willing to embrace the other and make non-exclusionary judgements. Volf understands differentiation in the categories of separation and binding where a network of relations characterized by interdependence is formed and maintained. If the self were formed only by separation without binding, it would be a self that is self-enclosed and non-relational, a self which tended to dominate and oppress others. On the contrary, the self that results from separation and binding is open to the other and therefore is relational. For Volf, the self is what it is both because it is distinct from the other and because it has been shaped by the other with whom it has been in contact and relationship. “Identity is a result of the distinction from the other and the internalization of the relationship to the other; it arises out of the complex history of ‘differentiation’ in which both the self and the other take part by negotiating their identities in interaction with one another.” Identity formation therefore includes connection, difference and heterogeneity.

Differentiation is therefore distinct from exclusion. Seen against the backdrop of the creation account in Genesis where creation is understood as turning a formless void into order, exclusion is understood as the undoing of creation, that is, returning things to a formless void, a kind of undifferentiated chaos. An undifferentiated chaos implies that all boundaries are removed. This concurs with Girard’s idea of the loss of distinctions, a sign of a mimetic crisis which leads to the breakdown of social order. Volf believes that

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280 Ibid., 66.
exclusion takes place when there is a violent attempt to reconfigure the pattern of interdependence that has resulted from the act of separating and binding. Volf speaks of two interrelated aspects of exclusion. The first aspect transgresses against “binding” and the second against “separating”. With regard to the first, exclusion takes place when the self cuts itself away from the bond that binds it to the other and removes itself from the network of relations that is characterized by interdependence. The self makes itself an independent sovereign. When this happens, there are consequences. The other is seen as an enemy who must be pushed out of the space of the self and driven out or as “a nonentity—a superfluous being—that can be disregarded and abandoned.”281 In the second case, exclusion happens when we refuse to acknowledge that the other as other in his or her otherness as such belongs to the pattern of interdependence. In so doing, we work against the element of separation which is an essential part of identity formation. The result is that the other is then seen as an inferior being that must be either assimilated or subjugated by us. According to Volf, who borrows the terminology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, we place this deal before the other: “we will refrain from vomiting you out … if you let us swallow you up …”282 In practice we tell the other group of people that they can survive, even thrive, among us provided they are ready to give up their identity and become like us.

In his analysis of the anatomy and dynamics of exclusion, Volf speaks about the ‘politics of purity’ and its dangers in relation to exclusion. For example, when a group decides that its blood, its territory and its origins must be pure, the ultimate outcome is

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281 Ibid., 67.
282 Ibid., 75. For further information on Lévi-Strauss take on assimilation or subjugation of the other, see Claude Lévi –Strauss, Tristes Tropiques (Paris: Libraire Plon, 1955), 417ff.
exclusion of other groups who are believed to be a source of defilement to this envisioned purity. The message that the politics of purity proclaims is that plurality and heterogeneity must give way to homogeneity and unity. Against this background, other groups are seen as ambivalent, polluting and even dangerous.\(^{283}\) Volf believes that the politics of purity is a dangerous programme because it is totalitarian and governed by a logic that “reduces, ejects, and segregates.”\(^{284}\) In extreme cases, it is the reason why people kill and drive others out. Volf holds that this is “the exclusion of elimination, most recently at work with such shameless brutality in places like Bosnia and Rwanda.”\(^{285}\)

Apart from the exclusion of assimilation and of elimination, there is also the exclusion of domination in modern society. This happens when we assign an inferior status to a group of people, making sure that they cannot live in our neighbourhoods or have the same pay or honour as we have. We subjugate them in order to exploit them, either to increase our wealth or boost our ego. Sometimes, because of our desire to increase our wealth, we not only exploit the resources of the people that we have subjugated, but we also tend to justify this exploitation by projecting their so-called inferior status. The evil of subjugation and exploitation is the exclusion of domination. When it is not the exclusion of domination, it is the exclusion of abandonment.

According to Volf, like the Priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:31-32), we simply ignore the other, concerned only about the things that matter to

\(^{283}\) Ibid., 74.
\(^{284}\) Ibid., 74.
\(^{285}\) Ibid., 75. Volf’s exclusion of elimination which includes driving out the other or even killing the other is reminiscent of Girard’s idea of mythic expulsions. Because the practice of exclusion in its different forms explored by Volf, dominates, exploits, abandons and discriminates against the other and in extremes cases involves violent massacres, it is not difficult to see why exclusion is a sin.
us. Two reasons could account for this type of exclusion. First, as long as other people have no goods or services that we want or need, we close ourselves off from them and keep them far away from us so that we are oblivious to their claims. Second, and in an analogous sense, we convince ourselves that there will always be people stripped, beaten and left half dead on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. That is, we allow our consciences and our humanity to be so dulled by the pervasive nature of exclusion and the evils that follow in its wake that we are no longer able to respond appropriately to it.

The practice of exclusion is usually accompanied by what Volf refers to as symbolic exclusion. Volf contends that the practice of exclusion may not take place at all or it may occur with limited success were it not preceded and accompanied by symbolic exclusion. Symbolic exclusion is expressed in two related ways. First, deep within us we believe in the inferiority and the inhumanity of the other, and so we dehumanize the other so that we can then proceed to discriminate against, dominate, drive out or even destroy the other. Second, because of the kind of beliefs that we have about the other, we employ language that depicts the other’s inferiority and inhumanity. For example, if the other is a minority group, the people who belong to it could be described as ‘dirty’, ‘lazy’ or ‘parasites’. The Tutsis during the 1994 Rwanda genocide were described as “agents corrupteurs” and therefore deserving of destruction. Volf argues that it would be simplistic to think that symbolic exclusion is merely the result of ignorance that can be overcome by some kind of enlightenment. Rather, it is the outcome of a deliberate distortion carried out to serve the interests of its protagonists. As he states:

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286 Ibid., 76.
287 Ibid., 76.
Symbolic exclusion is often a distortion of the other, not simply ignorance about the other; it is a willful misconstruction, not mere failure of knowledge. We demonize and bestialize not because we do not know better, but because we refuse to know what is manifest and choose to know what serves our interests.288

Volf’s idea of symbolic exclusion through which the other is demonized and excluded resonates with Girard’s idea of the victim mechanism by which the scapegoat is signalled and labelled with the most heinous crimes as a justification for expulsion or lynching. The difference, though, is that in Girard’s case the community that demonizes and expels the victim is ignorant and unconscious of its deed even though one reason for its ignorance is the real but misguided conviction that the victim is wrong and that the collective is right. Like Girard, Volf believes that both the practice of exclusion and symbolic exclusion elicit emotional responses and are sustained by them. In the concrete, they breed hatred. Volf contends that “some of the most brutal acts of exclusion depend on hatred, and [that] if the common history of persons and communities does not contain enough reasons to hate, masters of exclusion will rewrite the histories and fabricate injuries in order to manufacture hatreds.”289

Why hate the other? Why dehumanize the other? Why do we seek to eliminate, dominate or simply abandon the other? Volf offers a brief explanation. Our dehumanization and subsequent mistreatment of the other may actually be a projection of our own individual or collective inability to confront our own shadows. Sometimes we seek escape into the so-called strangeness of the other because we are not able to confront the strangeness within ourselves. That is, burdened by our own sins and limitations, we seek to unburden our conscience by focusing on the so-called ills of the other who

288 Ibid., 76. This also resonates with Lonergan’s idea of bias especially individual and group bias where an individual or a group seeks only insights that serve their interests and reject those that are not in their favour.
289 Ibid., 77.
happens to be a stranger or a member of a minority group. We exclude because we have created our world of propriety with clear boundaries according to which certain categories of people will necessarily strike us as unwelcome. Volf also believes that exclusion takes place “because we desire what others have.” This is reminiscent of Girard’s idea of appropriative mimesis. Rather than share possessions and power, there is the struggle in our world of scarce resources to secure material goods and wrestle power from the other. The desire to attain what Volf refers to as “hegemonic centrality” is very much linked to the evil of exclusion. Against the background of the sin of exclusion, how does Volf’s theology of the Cross present the alternative of redemption?

### 4.4. Redemption as Embrace

Without placing a limitation on the depth of Volf’s soteriology, it is important to state that there are two related themes that stand out and which are relevant to our discourse. These are the themes of divine self-donation and communion-themes that are ultimately connected to the category of embrace. Volf’s soteriology is very much linked to his Trinitarian theology where he understands the Cross as the externalization, so to speak, of the mutual self-donation that is operative in the immanent Trinity who draws sinful humanity into a life of communion that properly belongs to the Godhead. This has implications regarding how Christians should relate to the other, especially in the context of enmity and conflict.

In his essay, “The Trinity is our Social Program”: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement”, Volf explores the inner life of the Trinity to further understand the question of identity within the context of divine self-donation. What kind

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290 Ibid., 78.
291 Ibid., 78.
of social vision and social practice should result from such a theological exploration? A proper vision and practice can result only from the right understanding of the Trinity. According to Volf, in recent times, there have been debates regarding whether the Trinity should be understood in hierarchical or egalitarian terms. Advocates of a hierarchical understanding insist that such an understanding is called for if the unity and distinctions in the Godhead are to be safeguarded. They are critical of an egalitarian interpretation which they believe is the result of liberal democracy and of a modernity that promotes the reality of functionally differentiated societies. Volf takes the side of the egalitarians and argues that understanding the relations in the Trinity in hierarchical terms is not required for safeguarding the unity and distinctions. Volf argues further that given the perfect love that exists within the Trinity and the fact that they share all divine attributes, the notion of hierarchy is not only unintelligible, it seems to be a projection of earthly hierarchies into the divine realm.292

Volf is critical of the claim that monotheism as it is found in Christianity, Judaism and Islam divides the human society into ‘us’ and ‘them’, that is, into those who believe and those who do not believe. This, they claim, is a recipe for violence. Speaking about monotheism in the Christian religion which is essentially Trinitarian, Volf wonders how monotheism could possibly be blamed for espousing exclusivity and violence. Volf argues that the oneness of God is also about universality, for the one God is the God of all creation and of all people. But more specifically, the identities of the three divine Persons are not identities that are exclusive and self-enclosed. The one God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Moreover, there is not only an element of mutual self-giving within the

Trinity; the identity of each divine Person is defined in relation to the identity of the other. Volf states: “to be the divine “Father” is from the start to have one’s identity defined by another and therefore not to be undifferentiated and self-enclosed”. This kind of Trinitarian monotheism characterized by a mutual self-giving among the divine Persons out of love and whose identities are neither self-enclosed nor undifferentiated cannot possibly be a source of violence.

Engaging the word *perichoresis*, Volf points out that it has been traditionally used in theology to speak to the unity in the Godhead, unity in which plurality is preserved. This is because the divine Persons are described as one without commingling. Volf contends that beyond preserving the plurality in the unity of the Triune God, the word *perichoresis* provides resources for speaking about identity. This is because contained in the word is the idea that the divine Persons are personally interior to one another. Volf writes:

> Every divine person is indwelled by other divine persons; all the persons interpenetrate each other. They do not cease however to be distinct. Rather, their interpenetration presupposes their distinctions; persons who have been dissolved in some third thing cannot be said to be interior to each other. The distinctions of the persons notwithstanding, their identities partly overlap. Every divine person is and acts as itself and yet the two other persons are present and act in that person.

For example, because of this mutual personal interiority between the Father and the Son, Jesus can speak of his teaching not as his own but as the Father’s since he is the Word of the Father and yet that same teaching does not cease to be his own since the Father dwells

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294 Volf, “The Trinity is our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement”, 409.
in him with all that belongs to him. A cycle of simultaneous divine movement and exchange carried out in perfect love in the Godhead is the reason why the dialectic of ‘mine’ and ‘not mine’ is perfectly intelligible. Even though the Son as a distinct person acts in his distinctness as a Person, because the Father dwells in the Son the Father acts together with the Son. Therefore, the teaching of Jesus is also the Father’s. The identity and the mission of the Son are therefore shaped by the Father. The same can be said of Jesus in relation to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is said to have descended from heaven on Jesus and remained with him (Jn 1: 32). Jesus’ mission, including his death on the Cross, can be rightly said to have been carried out in the Spirit. Because of this, it is right to conclude that Jesus’ identity has been shaped also by the Spirit.

Volf raises the question regarding how the dialectic of ‘mine’ and ‘not mine’ as we find it on the lips of the Johannine Jesus can help in the construction of identity. He proposes two outcomes. First, the dialectic reminds us that identity is not reducible. Persons do not get transmuted into pure relations. That is, we are always persons outside of the relation in which we are immersed. If this were not the case, there would be no ‘I’ outside the other to whom the object in question also belongs. Second, it reminds us that identity is never self-enclosed since the other is always already in the self.

Volf situates his reflection on the construction of identity within the narrative of divine self-donation. Volf does so for good reasons. First, he does not want to arrive at

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While recognizing the great contribution of Jürgen Moltmann with regards to the social implications of his theology where Moltmann stresses the theme of divine solidarity, Volf believes that divine solidarity should be examined within the overarching context of divine self-donation. Moltmann, by discussing what he calls the mysticism of the Cross, speaks about the theme of solidarity where all those who suffer or have suffered, for example, the poor, political prisoners, the marginalized etc, identify with the Crucified One as a brother who suffers with them and who restores to them their lost dignity. Moltmann argues that if the Passion of Christ is treated simply as an archetype for those who suffer, it will not only produce suffering and misery but will end in the glorification of suffering and material poverty. Because Jesus’ humiliation and suffering were the result of his preaching of unconditional grace, his exercise of freedom towards the
the formulation of abstract principles that can address only generalities like the relation between plurality and unity, the one and the many and relationality and otherness.

Second, Volf believes that the framework of divine self-donation is the proper context to address the questions of truth and justice. But how should we think of Trinitarian self-donation? How is it related to the world in which we live, a world characterized by deceit, injustice, oppression and violence? What does it mean for human beings to image the self-giving God?

In his analysis of what divine self-giving means, Volf speaks about the perfect love of the world to come which characterizes the self-donation in the Trinity and how humanity should engage this kind of love for the transformation of the world. In this regard, Volf contends that to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48) does not mean emulating the perfect cycle of self-donations found in the Trinity.

Presumably, this is because human self-giving and gift giving is limited by the very fact of human finitude. People cannot give beyond what they have. Secondly, the interpenetration in the Trinity that allows for a simultaneous self-donation and gift giving in the Trinity is absent in human-to-human relation.

Nonetheless, to be perfect as the law and his table fellowship with sinners, his death was not a mere passive acceptance of suffering but a consequence of his actions. These actions were meant to liberate people. Therefore, solidarity with the Crucified Christ must include the struggle for liberation and the embracing of life, not death. The Church of the Crucified Christ without forming parties of its own must intervene in both political and social conflicts on the side of the oppressed. For Moltmann’s discussion of the mysticism of the Cross and the theme of solidarity, see Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 45-53.

Elsewhere Volf explores the nature of the Trinity and how the divine Persons relate to one another vis-à-vis the shape of human living with a focus on giving and receiving among human beings. Volf is aware that we can speak of the imitation of the Trinity only in an analogous sense. Taking note of the God and not-God distinction, it must be admitted that as created beings we can correspond to the uncreated God only in creaturely appropriate ways. This notwithstanding, Volf believes that because we are indwelled by the Trinity through baptism, the nature and relations in the Triune God can and should shape our human living. Like the Triune God, we should give freely to others because of their need. We should give for the sake of their good and out of love. Gift-giving among us should create communion rather than inequalities. If we transpose all these ideas into the realm of conflictual relations, it means that Christians in imitation of the
Father in concrete terms means loving the enemy since God the Father gives gifts not only to the righteous but also to the unrighteous. Love of the enemy symbolizes the kind of giving that Jesus requires of his disciples. It is “the kind that seeks to elicit the nonexistent response of love in those who practice the very opposite of love.” This, says Volf, is what the Cross stands for. The Cross is the result of non-love from the human side of the relation. The Cross is the result of God’s desire to respond to human enmity without violence. “The cross is the giving up of God’s self in order not to give up on humanity; it is the consequence of God’s desire to break the power of human enmity without violence and receive human beings into divine communion.”

That the Cross in the realm of the economic Trinity is the expression of that perfect mutual self-donation in the immanent Trinity by which sinful humanity is taken into divine communion brings us to Volf’s powerful metaphor of embrace and, by extension, to the understanding of embrace as redemption.

As already intimated, Volf’s metaphor of embrace is inspired by a God who embraces hostile humanity into divine communion. Volf believes that this divine act must be a model for how human beings should relate to the other. In a situation of conflict, there is always the phenomenon of exclusionary polarity. Volf contends that the inner 

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297 Volf, “The Trinity is our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” 413. In discussing the character of God as a giver who gives out of love so that people may exist and flourish and not because they deserve the gifts, Volf implies that human beings must become participants in God’s gift-giving. They are to give so that others might live and flourish and not because they deserve the gifts. Our human giving should create communion and friendship among us. But communion and friendship can only be created if we love all including those who practice the very opposite of love. In brief, this will be a concrete way to approximate the perfection of God. See Miroslav Volf, Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 73-74.
298 Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, 126.
299 Ibid., 100.
logic of exclusionary polarity is not irresistible. Those who have the will, courage and imagination can overcome it. Volf believes that it is possible to overcome the ‘us and them’ divide, embrace each other and begin to live together as a community. “People with conflicting interests, clashing perspectives, and differing cultures can avoid sliding into the cycle of escalating violence and instead maintain bonds, even make their life together flourish.”\textsuperscript{300} Volf proposes four ways through which we can move from exclusion to embrace. These include the following: repentance, forgiveness, creating space in ourselves for the other, and the healing of memory.\textsuperscript{301} He presents a theological reflection on the story of the Prodigal son, which is a story of embrace (Lk 15: 11-32).

In his exploration of the metaphor of embrace, Volf focuses on the social significance of the Cross. Basing his thoughts on Jesus’ prayer on the Cross for his perpetrators (Lk 23:24), Volf argues that the theme of forgiveness is very much part of the social significance of the Cross. Volf believes that Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness, inscribed deeply into the passion narrative, is an expression of the “agony of a tortured soul and wrecked body offered as a prayer for the forgiveness of the torturers”\textsuperscript{302} On the basis of this assertion, Volf rejects the idea of seeing Jesus’ death on the Cross merely as the suffering of another innocent victim. In fact, the death of an innocent victim in itself is not redemptive. Rather, it is a manifestation of the evil of violence and injustice.

Volf sees at the heart of the Cross not only divine forgiveness but also divine communion. Jesus creates space within himself and brings into communion with himself the very people who are responsible for his death. Volf interprets the Cross as a climax of

\textsuperscript{300} Ibid., 99-100.
\textsuperscript{301} Ibid., 100.
\textsuperscript{302} Ibid., 125.
a larger narrative, the narrative of God’s dealings with humanity. Despite the manifest enmity towards God, humanity belongs to God and God reconciled humanity to himself through the Cross while it was still sinful (Rom 5: 10). As already mentioned, Volf sees the Cross as the consequence of God’s decision to break the power of human enmity without the use of violence and to embrace humanity into divine communion.

Volf believes that true peace takes place only when there is “communion between former enemies.” Volf is critical of the situation where conflicting parties avoid any physical contact, maintaining the ‘us’ and ‘them’ polarity for the sake of peace. Volf also proposes Jesus’ manner of being a victim as a criterion for the right relationship that should exist between victim and perpetrator. He argues that it is precisely in being a victim that Jesus is the true judge. Jesus refuses to allow the hostility of his enemies to shape his life. He does not ape the enemy’s act of violence and rejection. Rather, he forgives and makes space in himself for the enemy. “By offering to embrace the offenders, he judges both the initial wrongdoing of the persecutors and the reactive wrongdoing of many victims.” Within the framework of the Cross, Volf argues that the suffering that pertains to victimization gets redeemed in the courage to embrace the suffering of forgiveness.

Regarding the process of forgiveness, Volf argues that two forms of exclusion must be avoided. First, we must avoid excluding the enemy who has inflicted pain on us from the community of humanity. Second, we must avoid excluding ourselves from the community of sinners. As long as these two exclusions persist it would be difficult, if not

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303 Ibid. 126.
304 Ibid., 127.
305 Ibid., 125.
impossible, to forgive. Volf, however, points out the difference it makes when conflicting parties place themselves before the God of the crucified Messiah as he states:

No one can be in the presence of the God of the crucified Messiah for long without overcoming this double exclusion—without transposing the enemy from the sphere of monstrous inhumanity into the sphere of shared humanity and herself from the sphere of proud innocence into the sphere of common sinfulness. 306

Volf’s focus on forgiveness does not exclude the need for justice as part of the process of reconciliation. In his essay “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Justice: A Christian Contribution to a More Peaceful Social Environment”, Volf raises and discusses the difficult question of justice and how it should relate to forgiveness and reconciliation. 307

Volf sees the necessity of taking seriously the issue of justice as part of the process of reconciliation and argues that failure to name 308 the evil and to act as though no wrongs have been committed is to fail in two related ways. First, this would be a moral failure at the theoretical level. Second, we would have failed in the transformation of the transgressor and society at large. This notwithstanding, Volf believes that the rightful framework within which justice must be pursued is that of grace and a commitment to nonviolence.

Volf not only believes in the primacy of the will to embrace, he also sees embrace as the framework within which justice must be sought. Volf posits two epistemic stances

306 Ibid., 124.
307 Volf, “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Justice: A Christian Contribution to a More Peaceful Social Environment”, 34-41. Justice as part of the process of reconciliation does not precede forgiveness but is the fruit of forgiveness. We shall return to this discussion in the final chapter.
308 Naming the evil or the wrongdoing and condemning it must be an integral part of forgiveness. However, Volf argues that if it all ended with condemning the evil, there would be no forgiveness and reconciliation. Because of the metaphysical structure of the world by which time and done deeds are irreversible, and because willful human actions that cause harm are imputable, Volf contends that we cannot simply neutralize or wish away wrongs and so the need for forgiveness. We need forgiveness because we cherish relationships. Volf speaks of forgiveness in the sense of a triangle with God as the foundation without whom it is impossible. See Volf, Free of Charge, 128-129.
within this framework. The first is one of exclusion. This is accompanied by a hatred that prevents us from appreciating that the enemy’s position and action could possibly be just. The second is the will to embrace. This second epistemic stance allows us to see ourselves and the other (the enemy) with the eyes of the other. It therefore offers us a genuine possibility of seeing what might indeed be a just course of action on the part of the enemy. Ultimately, seeing things from the perspective of the other enables us in our pursuit of justice. For Volf the struggle for justice must go beyond the desire to ensure that each party gets what it deserves. It must include the desire to bring about the healing of human relationships. The latter must be the larger horizon within which the search for justice must be pursued. Volf therefore contends that the relationship between justice and reconciliation should have this goal. The “goal is not so much the integration of citizens into a political unity as the creation of a community in which each recognizes and is recognized by all and in which all mutually give themselves to each other in love.”

Because the creation of a community and mutual self-giving is the goal of both justice and reconciliation, and because the healing of human relations is their larger horizon, Volf takes seriously the healing of memories. In his *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, Volf proposes the Passion as a theological lens through which conflicting parties can remember rightly, truthfully and therapeutically. What does it mean to remember through the lens of the Passion and what are the implications for healing and reconciliation? Before responding to this question, Volf engages a number of categories in explaining the meaning and significance of Jesus’ death on the Cross. For example, he engages the categories of solidarity and substitution.

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On the one hand, those who suffer can find consolation in the suffering of the crucified One who stands in solidarity with them. On the other, because Christ died for the godless, the victimizer has been forgiven and his or her wrongdoing has been atoned for.

Speaking about substitution, Volf points out two misleading interpretations that must be avoided. First, we must avoid thinking of Christ on the Cross as a third party that is punished for the sins of transgressors. Rather, because Christ is divine, he is one with God, with whom the ‘debt’ is owed. “It is therefore God who through Christ’s death shoulders the burden of our transgression against God and frees us from just retribution.”310 Yet because Christ in his humanity is one with us, it is we who die in Christ and so are freed from guilt. Second, it is wrong to think that Christ’s suffering on the Cross somehow encourages people to passively accept abuse. “Substitution is a gift initiated and willingly given to wrongdoers by the One who is wronged, not a burden of service placed on an outsider. And it is a gift that, far from signaling the passive acceptance of abuse, most radically calls into question such abuse.”311

311 Ibid., 117. Volf’s argument which dissociates the meaning of the Cross from passive acceptance of violence or abuse is consonant with his advocacy for nonviolence in the search for peace and reconciliation. This concurs with the position of both Girard and Schwager whose approach to the atonement presents a nonviolent God and who reject violence and vengeance as a means of restoring the social order. Ultimately, in all three, I see a position that can be a response to feminist theologians who reject the traditional interpretation of the Cross on the grounds that it is violent and therefore promotes the use of violence against the vulnerable, especially women and children. For example, in her examination of human suffering against the background of the atonement, Rosemary R. Reuther refers to what she calls a double bind message of the Cross. On the one hand, human beings are believed to be responsible for their suffering, even suffering resulting from natural disasters, since in God’s original plan of creation, there was neither physical nor moral imperfections. On the other, people are told to endure suffering graciously after the example of Christ. By doing so they will not only develop a Christlike spirituality and ensure their own salvation, they will also bring about the conversion of their oppressors. Reuther argues further that the Cross has become a symbol for justifying domestic violence against women who are then advised to endure it without complaint. See Rosemary R. Reuther, Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 99-100. Like Reuther, Elizabeth Johnson and Mary Grey reject the traditional atonement theories for the same reasons and opt for life-giving images. For example, Grey speaks of redemption in terms of community and inter-personal relationships and sees the woman described in Revelation chapter 12 as the figure of redemption. Others like Brown J. Carlson and Rebecca Parker
If the death of Christ is interpreted in terms of solidarity with those who suffer wrongdoing and as substitution for wrongdoers, how should the wronged remember wrongdoing?

Volf proposes three ways of remembering for the one who has been wronged. First, one must remember the wrong suffered not as a righteous person but as one who has been embraced by God, one’s unrighteousness notwithstanding. Second, any wrongdoing done against one has already been, in a significant sense, atoned for. Third, because the memory of the Passion is an eschatological memory that anticipates a final reconciliation, the wronged must remember the wrongdoer against the background of that future hope of final reconciliation where both victim and perpetrator “will be seated together at the eternal table of friendship, with Christ as our host.”

This hope is based even accuse God the Father of ‘divine child abuse’ because according to them Jesus suffered on the Cross at the behest of the Father for the souls of humanity. It was the Father who required the death of the Son, and the Son in obedience obliged. Brown and Parker believe that women in North America and elsewhere in the world have been acculturated to accept abuse and oppression. They assert that a primary factor that has shaped this acculturation is the Christian tradition which presents Christ’s suffering on the Cross as redemptive. For Brown and Parker, this kind of theology is responsible not only for the oppression of women but also for the denial of their full humanity and rights in the Church and in society. For these commentaries, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 52. Mary Grey, Feminism Redemption and the Christian Tradition (Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990), 5. Brown J. Carlson and Rebecca Parker, “For God so Loved the World,” in Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique, eds. Brown J. Carlson and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 2-3. See also Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering and the Search for What Saves Us (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2001). Brock and Parker claim that the focus on Jesus’ obedience to the Father and his suffering on the Cross not only promotes violence but also encourages people to suffer silently. Even though I agree with the position of feminist theologians that it is unethical to use the Cross as a symbol of oppression and abuse of any group of people including women, I wonder whether people who do so are not misappropriating the true meaning of the Cross and therefore fall short of the true salvific meaning of the Cross which is integral or holistic. This integral understanding rejects any form of dehumanization. An aberration cannot be taken for the reality. Second, to claim that only the resurrection of Jesus is redemptive and not his death is to fail to note that Jesus’ death, is both a consequence of and a rejection of sin, oppression and abuse and that the resurrection is its climax. To separate the two is to opt for a half truth which is a distortion of an important Christian mystery. Third, it seems to me that the feminist notion of redemption lacks an eschatological dimension or at least that this dimension is not stressed sufficiently.

Volf, The End of Memory, 124.
on the belief that humanity as a whole is united with Christ in his death and resurrection and that when Christ died all died with him (2 Cor 5:14).

How can remembering Christ’s Passion help the process of the healing of relationships and reconciliation? Volf points out three ways by which this can happen. First, the Passion of Christ requires us to recognize that God’s grace extends to all irrespective of their worthiness or lack thereof. Because Christ died for all, including perpetrators, it means that perpetrators too are beneficiaries of divine emancipation. Divine emancipation frees them from the guilt of their evil deeds and the power of their evil desires. Second, in the memory of the Passion, victims are honoured while grace is extended to perpetrators. However, the need to extend grace to all and the call to take seriously the valid claims of justice are not mutually exclusive. By shouldering the suffering of the wronged on the Cross, God in Christ truly identifies wrongdoing and justly condemns it. To the victims, Christ offers his own saving presence as well as the grace not to allow their identity and life to be defined by the wrong suffered and to do in a human way what God does in a divine way by loving the wrongdoer and by working against wrongdoing. Third, the memory of the Passion helps the wronged and the wrongdoer reconcile. Inner healing and judgement against the wrongdoer are necessary for the victim. However, because victims suffer greatly from the evil deeds of their victimizers, they can experience total liberation and healing from the wounds of wrongdoing “only if the perpetrators genuinely repent and the two parties are reconciled to each other.”

313 Ibid., 119. In an interview with Collin Hansen, Volf gives a summary of why remembering rightly is important for resolving not only large scale and violent conflicts but also low-grade day-to-day conflicts that do not make headlines. It is alright to remember what happened to us, so that we can ensure that it does not happen to us again or to another group of people. In this respect, remembering is a ‘shield’, but too
Conclusion

In making my concluding remarks I would like to highlight briefly the main ideas of the chapter and most especially their relevance to the overall focus of this thesis. As a hermeneutical and a theological framework, Volf’s exploration of the problem of conflicts, both low-grade conflicts and large scale violent conflicts within the broader framework of identity and otherness is not only convincing but significant. How identity is construed or constructed, especially in relation to the other, truly determines to a large extent the nature of relations at the inter-personal, cultural, ethnic or even national level. How identity should be constructed and how reconciliation should be pursued was the main inspiration behind Volf’s seminal work, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (1996). If the question of identity is significantly related to conflict, then it must be an important category in the process that leads to reconciliation.

Volf’s exploration of the Abrahamic revolution and its Christian re-appropriation as a theological engagement with the question of identity and otherness is significant as it affirms or points out certain truths. First, it affirms the human need for relationship. Second, it stresses the fundamental nature of Christian identity attained at baptism. Third, it points out how distancing ourselves from our cultures can help us refrain from a destructive use of our differences and particularities. Similarly, Volf’s Trinitarian theology points to the social vision and practice that should guide human relations,

often this shield gets transformed into a sword. Volf believes that Christianity has a unique contribution to make in ensuring that people remember rightly and in offering hope of redemption for both victim and perpetrator. The Exodus, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the Eucharist, the ritual celebration of the Paschal Mystery, become the lens through which right and redemptive remembering can be done. See Miroslav Volf, “Redeeming: Miroslav Volf tells how to stop the ‘shield of memory’ from turning into a sword.” Interview by Collin Hansen, *Christianity Today*, May (2007) 50-51.
especially during moments of conflict. Our identity is not simply the negation of the other but constitutes what is distinct from us and what binds us to the other.

Volf’s metaphor of embrace is a powerful metaphor that rests both on his Trinitarian theology and theology of the Cross. Because no one is excluded from the sphere of divine embrace, no one should be excluded from the human will to embrace. Even though the will to embrace and the embrace itself are different in some respects, I find the metaphor a helpful way to arrive at forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. It is important to note that Volf arrived at the idea of embrace after first engaging the ideas of oppression and liberation. Volf realized that, although important in their own right, the categories of oppression and liberation lacked the capacity to attain the ultimate goal, that is, the establishment of a community of former enemies made possible through forgiveness and the healing of relationships. I believe that the will to embrace and the act of embrace itself are a further step beyond the categories of oppression and liberation. Embrace as redemption is a significant alternative to the evil of exclusion.

As part of the appropriation in the final chapter, I will demonstrate how the problem of identity and otherness has been part of the larger picture of the Hutu-Tutsi and Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflicts. Secondly, I shall examine how the will to exclude and the practice of exclusion itself played out in both conflicts. On the positive side, I will suggest how the fundamental Christian identity as a category that transcends and subsumes other identities and Volf’s practice of embrace could be resources for the Church in dealing with conflicts, especially ethnic conflicts.
Chapter 5

Toward a Theology of Nonviolence for an African Context

Introduction

In chapter one, I examined the phenomena of conflict and violence in Africa where I offered a review of the historical and cultural context and how this context relates to contemporary conflicts. In that review, I delineated conflict theories that I consider relevant to Africa. These include the following: ethnic identity theory, competition theory and colonial legacy theory. I argued that: negative ethnicity, the shape that politics in post-independence Africa has generally assumed, the competition for economic resources, including mineral and natural resources, and the struggling economic performance of most African states since independence, are all factors significantly related to the phenomenon of ethnic conflict. I built upon this context in chapter two by examining two contemporary ethnic conflicts: the Hutu-Tutsi in Rwanda and the Konkomba-Nanumba in Ghana. I demonstrated how the three theories of conflict explored in chapter one played out in both conflicts. The first two chapters therefore established the context of our study.

I explored and established a hermeneutical and theological framework in chapters three and four respectively for understanding and responding to our context. For example, I explored Girard’s hermeneutic of desire. Girard’s hermeneutic of desire crystallizes the reality of rivalrous inter-ethnic relations in Africa, especially for
economic and political resources, and yet his alternative proposal of a positive mimesis with Jesus as the model forms part of the Christian response to rivalry, violence and conflict. Similarly, a misappropriation of theology, exemplified in the Hamitic hypothesis by which people were oppressed and exploited, a distorted theology which contributed to the ethnic conflict in Rwanda, finds its contrast in an authentic theology of the Cross that opposes any form of violence and dehumanization.

The purpose of our final chapter is to bring the previous insights to bear on ethnic conflicts but especially on the two examples of ethnic conflict. In this work of appropriation and application I am guided by the following questions. What value do Girard, Schwager and Volf have for the African context under consideration? How do the implications of their theology shed light on ethnic conflicts in Africa? What do these thinkers contribute to the healing of ethnic rivalries and conflicts especially in the area of reconciliation? First, I will explain the two ethnic conflicts within the framework of Girard’s hermeneutic of desire. Second, I will revisit the Hamitic hypothesis and argue that from the Girardian point of view, it created the conditions for scapegoating. Third, with regard to how the implications of their theology can contribute to the healing of ethnic conflicts in Africa, I would explore the importance of Christian identity and how this has the potential to create unity and community. I will propose a theology of nonviolence as the foundation for the practice of forgiveness, justice and reconciliation. Because the transformation of individuals and society is very much linked to the creation of a peaceful society, I will also discuss the relevance of social transformation. The conclusion will be a recapitulation of the main ideas that I have examined in this chapter.
5.1 Girard’s Hermeneutic of Desire and Ethnic Conflicts

In engaging Girard’s hermeneutic of desire I will focus on the two examples of ethnic conflict discussed in chapter two: the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict and the Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict. How does Girard’s hermeneutic of desire, especially its notion of appropriative mimesis, play out in the two ethnic conflicts? How do we understand the conditions under which a more powerful ethnic group ‘scapegoats’ a less powerful ethnic group, as the case might have been in both conflicts, if not more tragically in Rwanda? I will demonstrate how Girard’s notion of appropriative mimesis can help explain the competition for material resources, especially the competition for political power in both conflicts.

As part of my exploration of Girard’s hermeneutic of desire in chapter three, I explained how appropriative mimesis could transition into conflictual mimesis. I also explained how appropriative mimesis could result in a situation characterized by violence, destruction and victimization, especially between groups that are relatively equal in terms of social status. This is particularly likely when appropriative mimesis is expressed or reflected in professional and political ambitions. I can say that appropriative mimesis through political ambition played a role in both the Hutu-Tutsi and Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflicts.

With regard to the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict, I base my contention on the evidence that reveals the struggle for political power between these two ethnic groups. It should be recalled that Tutsi consciousness in both pre-colonial and colonial Rwanda was associated with power and Hutu consciousness in the same period with powerlessness.
That is, during both pre-colonial and colonial Rwanda, the Tutsi had power and not the Hutu. However, in independent Rwanda, the Hutu had power and not the Tutsi. This dual-consciousness found expression and support in both traditional Rwandan myths and in the Hamitic hypothesis discussed in chapter two. The expansion and concentration of political power in the hands of mostly Tutsi Chiefs during the colonial era not only increased the resentment of the Hutu against what they considered an oppressive feudal system but also increased their desire to gain political power like the Tutsi. The desire for political power was one of the principal reasons for the 1959 social revolution and for the formation of social movements and political parties by the Hutu elite. I agree with Mamdani who, in discussing the identity and origins of both Hutu and Tutsi, prefers to see them as historicized political identities rather than market based identities. To speak of the identity of both Hutu and Tutsi as historicized political identities confirms two related points. First, it confirms the belief that historical struggles for political power were significantly related to Rwanda’s 1994 genocide. Second, it supports the argument that whatever differences there might have been in terms of origins and identity, these differences were perceived as acute only within a political framework that tended towards polarization.

I admit that there would be difficulties if I tried to apply Girard’s hermeneutic of desire wholesale to the two conflicts under consideration. For example, I am not sure if the desire of the Hutu elite and their struggle for political power can be sufficiently explained by Girard’s principle that desire is aroused by the desire of the other. Was the desire of the Hutu elite for political power and their struggle for it merely aroused by the

314 Mamdani, When Victims Become Killers, 59.
desire of the Tutsi for power, or were there other reasons? I believe that there were other, more important, reasons. Because the Hutu elite believed that political monopoly by the Tutsi in the stratified pre-colonial traditional Rwandan society had been made worse by Belgian colonial policies, and that political monopoly brought economic, social and cultural monopolies, their desire and struggle for political power can be interpreted somewhat differently. It is my contention that their desire was not merely aroused by the desire of the Tutsi for power but, more importantly, because they wanted to evolve a political structure that enabled them to participate fully and fairly in public affairs. To the extent that the Tutsi hold on political power meant exclusion for the Hutu, the latter’s political actions were motivated more by the desire for political inclusion than by merely desiring what the Tutsi desired. Also, against the background of the ethnic ideologies on both sides, and the hatred that preceded the genocide, it is unlikely that either group believed that the humanity of the other was superior and therefore to be desired. Rather, each ethnic group considered the other as an obstacle, as a scandal or stumbling block in Girard’s terms, to the attainment of political power and so each believed it needed to eliminate the other. Each group would have appeared to the other both as mediator and rival. Similarly, and for the same reasons, it would be difficult to think of a situation where Konkomba as a people would desire the humanity of Nanumba or vice versa because of the belief that the other’s humanity is superior.

The desire to eliminate the other in the midst of the competition for political power between Tutsi and Hutu, especially in regards to the 1959 social revolution, confirms other elements associated with Girard’s hermeneutic of desire. Recall that the first violent clash between the two political groups occurred in November 1959. This
happened when a Hutu sub-chief was attacked by UNAR activists, that is activists of the *Union National Rwandias*, a Tutsi political party. UNAR was a rival party to *Parti du Mouvement de l’Emancipation Hutu* (PARMEHUTU). In retaliation the Hutu attacked a prominent Tutsi chief, a member of UNAR, which led to more bloody ethnic violence. These ethnic clashes led to the massacre of scores of Tutsi and their flight as refugees into neighbouring countries such as Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo.\(^{315}\) Here, we see not only Girard’s idea of negative reciprocity at work, but his assertion that violence only leads to more violence confirmed. This is because some of these refugees returned as combatants in 1990 and as members of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), during the genocide itself in 1994.

With regard to the Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict of 1994, I argued that if Konkomba demands for paramountcy and a traditional council were viewed as contentious and perhaps the most significant cause of the conflict, it must be because these demands had been placed within a political framework and given divergent and perhaps irreconcilable interpretations by the different groups involved. For the Konkomba this meant their independence in traditional politics and their inclusion and influence in national politics. However, for the majority tribes it signalled a limitation of their own power and the upsetting of the established political structure.

\(^{315}\) Kamukama, *Rwanda Conflict*, 31-32. One can say that before the genocide Rwanda had been marked by a history of violence where the Tutsi ethnic group suffered many casualties. The level of brutalities during the genocide is in some sense explicable in the light of this history. Yet, at the height of the crisis where Rwanda descended into chaos, the loss of distinctions and social order would be the reasons for the severity of the brutalities and the way in which they were carried out. From the Girardian point of view, during such moments peoples’ judgment is not only impaired, they also fail to differentiate between good and evil, right and wrong, rationality and irrationality. See Golsan, *René Girard and Myth*, 31.
That the same reality was interpreted differently has been supported by the analysis of Talton as I pointed out in chapter two. In his examination of the origins of violent ethnic conflicts between the historically non-centralized Konkomba ethnic group and its neighbours, Talton argued that the source of violent conflicts revolved around conflicting notions of authority and political legitimacy going back to colonial rule in Ghana.\textsuperscript{316} Talton also pointed out how under the leadership of Western educated Konkomba, the Konkomba ethnic group had begun to evolve a political identity of its own in the 1950s. Talton contended that in order to gain social and political equality with their neighbours, the Konkomba needed to evolve a political identity comparable to that of the centralized ethnic groups. This I believe was the principal reason behind the demands of the Konkomba. From a political point of view, the Konkomba understood their demand as an expression of their desire and resolve to protect their interests as citizens of an independent nation.\textsuperscript{317}

Again, from the Giradian point of view it is possible to relate some of Girard’s ideas to what was then going forward. That the Konkomba wanted to evolve a political identity comparable to that of their neighbours’ means that mimesis and modelling were evident. The Konkomba in this case would be the subject and their neighbours the mediator. Because the mediator interprets the desire of the subject as rivalrous and treacherous, it rejects being imitated. Technically speaking, while Girard’s idea of mimetic double bind\textsuperscript{318} cannot strictly be applied here, there is a sense in which it might

\textsuperscript{317} These interests of the Konkomba would be resisted by their neighbours who interpret such moves as a limitation of their power and status. See for example, Mahama, Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Ghana, 14.
\textsuperscript{318} Generally speaking, ‘double bind’ in Girard refers to the situation where a model desires to be imitated and yet at the same time does not want to be imitated either because he believes the imitation is a threat to
be operative, even if only implicitly. It is present implicitly if we understand that a Konkomba political identity and structure is interpreted by their neighbours as a threat to their own authority and status. The latter would have said, from the Girardian point of view, ‘do not imitate us’ even if they did not intend or directly initiate the process of mimesis. In fact, the process of mimesis is often unconscious.

Similarly, while it is true that according to Girard the loss of distinctions or differences is the reason for mimetic rivalry and generalized conflict, this does not exclude altogether the position that differences lead to violence. This is particularly true when differences in terms of physical features, defects, status or any form of vulnerability is highlighted by the persecuting community. It should be recalled that the physical defect of Oedipus, a stranger who had risen too quickly to a high social status, marked him out as a scapegoat. During both conflicts, the Tutsi were spoken of as foreigners or strangers who had used cunning and deceit to gain power in Rwanda, while in Ghana, the Konkomba were spoken of as settlers who had come from neighbouring Togo. Even if the claim that the Konkomba are originally from Togo has any historical merit, they had long been recognized as Ghanaian citizens. In fact, to have migrated from some other place does not by itself exclude one from citizenship. In any event, prior to or during moments of conflict, differences are often highlighted in order to have members of one ethnic group, often the dominant group, polarized against another ethnic group.

\[\text{his interests or because he considers the status of his subject to be inferior to his own. For example, with respect to how mimesis is viewed as a threat, Girard believes that the concept of mimetic double bind is operative in Freud’s idea of the Oedipus complex where the father wants to be imitated by the son and not to be imitated at the same time. The father is apprehensive that the son’s desire for the mother is a threat to what he considers his prerogative and how this could lead to rivalry and conflict. The relationship between the son and the father then becomes ambivalent. See Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 178-179. See also Golsan, René Girard and Myth, 23.}\]
Speaking still about differences and how this could be a source of conflict especially in Africa, cultural differences are of particular significance. In chapter one when I discussed the question of theory in relation to conflict, I raised the question of whether universal theories developed by Western scholars should be used to explain conflicts in Africa or whether they should be rejected on the basis that they fail to take into account what is distinctively African. Along with Gurr and Esman, I took the position that universal conflict theories may be engaged as a conceptual and prescriptive framework for understanding conflicts in Africa but with a modification that recognizes what is distinctively African. That is, such a conceptual and prescriptive framework must incorporate into itself variables and concepts that speak to those conditions that may be described as particularly African. I pointed out four such variables, including culture. I had asked the question regarding the extent to which culture in Africa is related to conflict. I believe that in contemporary Africa, especially in traditional rural settings, culture remains an important element of the resources that are critical to group formation, to inter-ethnic tensions and to the processes and outcomes of conflict. In my view, culture understood in terms of who has authority in traditional matters was a significant factor in the 1994 Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict. Specifically, the desire to satisfy a cultural need was one of the reasons why the Konkomba demanded for their own chiefs. Disputes, including marital disputes, would be arbitrated by Konkomba chiefs, leaders whom the Konkomba believe would understand better the traditions and customs related to their traditional marriage system.

With respect to the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict there is a sense in which culture played a negative role. Today, in Africa and especially in rural Africa, there still exists a
profound respect for authority partly because of the belief in the ancestors. Because of the belief that the ancestors continue to play an important role in the lives of the living as custodians of morality and social wellbeing, those who wield traditional authority are respected and listened to. It is therefore not uncommon for people to transpose this allegiance to authority in the traditional African setting to other authority figures like politicians. While it is true to say that a history of ethnic rivalry and hatred, systematically propagated through myths, racial ideologies and the educational system has been responsible for the nature and level of brutalities that were witnessed during the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict, one cannot dismiss entirely the claim that this African cultural element of respect for authority played a role in the genocide. Ordinary Hutu might have heard the call to go out and kill the enemy as the voice of authority that has to be obeyed. While this African value of obedience to authority is not negative in itself and so should be maintained, an uncritical obedience to authority is not helpful as was the case in Rwanda. The need to be critical of our cultural values is therefore important.

Apart from applying Girard’s hermeneutic of desire to the two conflicts, Girard’s concept of scapegoating or victimization is applicable to both conflicts especially the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict. How for example do we understand the conditions for a more influential and dominant ethnic group to ‘scapegoat’ a less dominant and less powerful ethnic group such as in the tragic case of the Rwandan genocide? To answer this question

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As a corrective to a wrong understanding of authority and its use, see for example Bernard Lonergan, ‘Dialectic of Authority,’ in A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985): 5-12. With respect to the meaning and values mediated to us in our culture, Lonergan warns that these could be unauthentic if their development has been characterized by lack of attention, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility. It is authenticity that gives legitimacy to power and by extension aura and prestige to authority. Therefore, in conscience, subjects of unauthentic authorities should not obey the claims and directives of these authorities unless of course they themselves have become unauthentic and now suffer from decline which is the fruit of unauthenticity.
I will revisit the Hamitic hypothesis as a misappropriation of theology and demonstrate how it contributed to the genocide in Rwanda.

5.2 The Misappropriation of Theology in Ethnic Conflicts

In chapter two I explored the Hamitic hypothesis in connection with the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict. Here, I revisit the same hypothesis and I argue that it is not only a misappropriation of theology, but one that has been used to dehumanize, exclude and scapegoat other groups. Similarly, I argue that the labelling of the Konkomba and other ethnic groups as acephalous groups by European anthropologists, ethnologists and British colonial authorities, led to a political subordination, and from the Giradian point of view, created the conditions for the scapegoating of the Konkomba.

In their analysis of the Hamitic hypothesis, both Mamdani and Taylor pointed out how the one hypothesis was given different interpretations at different historical moments according to the preconceived ideas and interests of the interpreters.\(^3\)20\(^0\) Unfortunately, such an unscientific theory, as Taylor pointed out, eventually became part of received wisdom.\(^3\)21\(^1\) At one point, it was one of the reasons for the racial policies that underpinned the apartheid regime in South Africa. At another time it served as an important reason for initiating and justifying the transatlantic slave trade. No one needs to be told about the unimaginable harm Africa, especially black Africa, has suffered because of the transatlantic slave trade, the effects of which are still being felt today. No one needs to be reminded of the dark days of Apartheid especially for black South Africans and for others

\(^{320}\) See Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, 80-87

\(^{321}\) Taylor, *Sacrifice of Terror*, 60. According to Taylor, despite the flimsy scientific basis of the Hamitic hypothesis, subsequent explorers, historians, missionaries and anthropologists took it more-or-less as dogma which they modified only slightly.
like them who suffered discrimination and marginalization on racial grounds. In any event, because the hypothesis itself resulted from a combination of three strands—biology, anthropology and theology— it reveals how theology can be misappropriated and result in the dehumanization, oppression, exploitation and suppression of people. I make reference to the transatlantic slave trade before proceeding to indicate the role the Hamitic hypothesis played in the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict. There are two reasons for this. First, long before the Rwandan genocide, the Hamitic hypothesis provided theological justification for the slave trade which was a form of violence. Second, the slave trade is one more concrete example of domination and exploitation supported by a racial theory. In fact, my reference to it connects well with Volf’s argument that the exclusion of domination and exploitation is often preceded or justified by projecting the inferior humanity of the exploited by those who dominate and exploit.

In his *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Elochukwu Uzukwu speaks about the indignity of the transatlantic slave trade. Uzukwu argues that even though Arab slave raiding and slave trading existed in Africa before the modern period, the type that Europeans carried out on the coasts of Africa “has no comparison in the history of humankind.” Uzukwu maintains that while it is

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322 Ibid., 58.
323 Volf believes that, because of the unspeakable evils that humanity has witnessed in human history, it is necessary both to examine ethnic, cultural and racial conflicts within the broader framework of identity and difference and to place the problem of identity and otherness at the centre of theological discourse. The transatlantic slave trade is one of the evils that Volf mentions. See Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 17, 59-60.
324 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 75. According to Volf, apart from projecting the so-called inferior humanity of the exploited, those who engage in exclusion as domination subjugate their victims so that they can exploit them in order to increase their wealth or their ego.
325 Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, New York: Obis Books, 1996), 21. When Uzukwu contends that the transatlantic slave trade has no comparison in human history, I believe he is emphasizing the deep and lasting effect of this trade than just numbers. Both Hitler and Stalin regimes for example, enslaved millions of Europeans and carted
impossible to determine the precise number of victims of this trade, it could be anywhere between seven to fifteen million. Half of them may have perished in dungeons. Because the most useful members of society were taken and because the transatlantic trade lasted for four centuries, it should not be difficult for anyone with a critical and objective mind to appreciate the drain it was on both the human and material resources of the African continent. Uzukwu wonders how anyone could ever reconcile the violation of the rights and dignity of black Africans carried out by people who despised other human beings and whose engagement in an obscene trade was motivated by their unlimited appetite for profit.\textsuperscript{326} Uzukwu asks this I believe, not just because of the evil effects of the slave trade but also because the trade was given a theological justification. The theological justification was at two levels. First, Africans, believed to be the descendants of Ham, were condemned to servitude by God. Second, it was believed that slaves transported from the coasts of Africa to the West would be baptized and their souls “won for Christ.”\textsuperscript{327} This way, their salvation would be assured. This is corroborated by Stan Chu Ilo who points out that in 1873 the Congregation in charge of Indulgences published a prayer for the conversion of the children of Ham in central Africa with the approval of Pope Pius IX. Here is part of the prayer: “Let us pray for the most miserable Ethiopian peoples in Central Africa, who form a tenth of humanity, so that God Almighty may take them away from their homes. We note that the institution of slavery is ancient, medieval, modern and even contemporary. Today, unfortunately, slavery still exists in different parts of the world in various forms.\textsuperscript{326} Ibid., 22

\textsuperscript{327} Ibid., 21. Uzukwu speaks about how Pope Nicholas V in 1454 had given to the king of Portugal a monopoly in trade and exploration with respect to the west coast of Africa as an example of how the Church at the beginning was complicit in the slave trade. Even though much later the Church played an active role in the abolition of the slave trade great harm had already been done.
away from their hearts the curse of Ham and give them the blessing of Jesus Christ, our Lord and God.”

Like Uzukwu, Bénézet Bujo presents a similar analysis and argues that it would be unforgivable or even criminal to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America without taking note of the slave trade and the negative consequences that it has had on Black Africa. The said anniversary was celebrated in 1992. Bujo praises the apology of Pope John Paul II. During his visit to Africa in 1992, John Paul II stood symbolically on the island of Goree in Senegal, from where slaves were transported to the West. Standing on this island, the Pope asked Africans in the name of Christianity and humanity for forgiveness. The Pope lamented that such an evil trade had been carried out in the name of a civilization that called itself Christian and attributed the evil of the slave trade to sin rooted in the human heart.

Centuries later, the same hypothesis played a significant role in the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict. This is how it happened. The biological and the anthropological strands of the hypothesis must have led to the formulation of the Great Chain theory referenced by Taylor which asserts that civilization attained its highest level among Europeans. This

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328 Stan Chu Ilo, *The Face of Africa: Looking Beyond the Shadows* (Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2006), 51-52 and 59. According to Ilo, Christian mentality of this kind helped legitimize slavery. With regard to numbers, Ilo contends that at the end of the slave trade, well over 20 million African slaves had been transported over the Atlantic while about 2 million had died on the way to the New World.

329 Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. John O'Donohue, (Maryknoll, New York: Obis Books, 1992), 8. In fact, the Pope calls the slave trade a crime and compares it to the concentration camps in which Jews suffered at the hands of the Nazi regime. Yet, as Bujo points out, history has focused less on one crime than on the other. Like others, I wonder whether Africa does not deserve financial compensation at least as reparation for the harm it has suffered. A financial compensation would be part of the forgiveness that the Pope asked of Africans since restitution, a necessary component of restorative justice is part of the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. Here in Canada, Holocaust Education Week is remembered every year, and survivors of the Holocaust are offered the opportunity to speak in churches about the evil of the Holocaust. I believe this helps people to appreciate the dangers of the ‘politics of purity’, to use Volf’s terminology, so that humanity does not repeat the same mistake. So I ask why there is not a transatlantic slave trade education week. There are no longer survivors of the transatlantic slave trade, but there are well-informed descendants of those who directly suffered from the trade.
theory maintains in the concrete that because Europeans are of a higher civilization, they necessarily possess higher moral and intellectual capacities compared to Native Americans, Asians and sub-Saharan Africans. Since the Great Chain theory could not explain the highly developed art work and state systems found in sub-Saharan Africa, to which Rwanda belongs, a theory about superior races evolved. Accordingly it was believed that superior races conquer and civilize inferior races. It was then argued that even though all Africans, from the biological, anthropological and theological point of view, were inferior and condemned by God to servitude, the Tutsi of Rwanda, their blackness notwithstanding, were of a foreign origin and therefore of a superior civilization, who not only conquered the Hutu but brought civilization to them. The latter argument was based on the fact that the Tutsi had a well-organized monarchical system.

If the Tutsi had a well-organized monarchical system and if it is valid to claim that pre-colonial Rwanda was already stratified with the Tutsi on top as I alluded to in chapter two, should a European racial theory be blamed for having contributed in a significant way to the genocide in Rwanda? If there were already myths, whether in their conventional or metaphorical sense, which testified to Tutsi supremacy, should not the Hamitic hypothesis be exonerated? I argue that while the Hamitic hypothesis may not be blamed for every ill related to a stratified Rwanda, it certainly played a significant role. It constituted a conceptual framework that influenced the thinking and actions of the Christian missionaries and colonial authorities who helped shape Rwanda in the religious, social, economic and political realms. Belgian colonial authorities in particular, influenced by this conceptual framework, racialized an existing stratification that was perhaps less pronounced. This is particularly true if those who maintain that there was
intermarriage and linguistic and cultural homogeneity, and who refuse to limit the identities of Tutsi and Hutu to the socio-economic realm, are correct.

Unfortunately, just as colonial authorities and Christian missionaries racialized a conceptual framework, local politicians translated the same framework into political programmes that perpetuated past injustices. It is enough to recall here the ‘demographic’ democracy of both Grégoire Kayibanda (1961-1973) and Juvénal Habyarimana (1973-1994) in independent Rwanda. The latter, for example, did not merely endorse the ethnic identity cards introduced by Belgian colonial authorities but introduced greater administrative control over the Tutsi. Therefore I agree with Taylor that, like any racial scheme anywhere in the world, the Hamitic hypothesis caused great harm to Rwandan society by ranking groups of people in terms of civilization, intelligence and beauty. “It … elevated some and doomed others, dooming the latter to the perennial resentment of their presumed inferiority.”

To the extent that the Hamitic hypothesis helped associate a lack of power with the Hutu in colonial Rwanda, one can say that, from the Giradian point of view, it exposed an entire ethnic group to the experience of vulnerability and therefore to scapegoating. Paradoxically, a recasting of the same Hamitic hypothesis by the Hutu elite in the course of Rwandan history, especially in independent Rwanda, made the Tutsi vulnerable and subject to the same type of victimization. A similar claim can be made in the case of the Konkomba and other so-called acephalous societies. To be labelled acephalous is to be associated with lack of political power. The decision by British colonial authorities that the Konkomba were politically subordinate to their neighbours simply because they were organized

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along clan lines was an instance of ethnocracy since they associated power with other ethnic groups and powerlessness with others like the Konkomba. Again in the Giradian sense, people without power can be easily scapegoated.

Just as Girard’s hermeneutic of desire and the Hamitic hypothesis- a misappropriation of theology shed light on the two ethnic conflicts, there are other insights from Girard, Schwager and Volf that can contribute to the amelioration of ethnic rivalry and conflict in the African context. What is the social significance of the theologies of Girard, Schwager and Volf for the African context under consideration? What value does Volf’s Abrahamic revolution and its Christian re-appropriation have for the African context? How can Volf’s Trinitarian theology contribute to the amelioration of inter-ethnic relations in Africa?

5.3 Implications of Volf’s theology for the African Context

One of the fundamental questions that Volf raised in the exploration of his Abrahamic revolution and its Christian re-appropriation centred on how the Christian should relate to culture and ultimately to the other. Consequently, Volf emphasized the primacy of Christian identity. Volf, after the example of St. Paul, argued that in the Christian dispensation, faith in Christ has replaced biological descent. Christian identity must transcend other identities and in fact give direction and meaning to these other identities.

The emphasis on the primacy of Christian identity cannot be overemphasized, especially in the African context where ethnocentrism has been a great threat to both the Church and to the wider society. In her essay “Human Identity and the Gospel of Reconciliation: Agenda For Mission Studies and Praxis in the 21st Century: An African
Reflection”, Philomena N. Mwaura, examines ethnocentrism from a missiological perspective, and how ethnocentrism has been a challenge to Christian identity in Africa, especially against the background of a century of evangelization and tremendous growth in the Christian Church. Mwaura explores the scriptural foundations of Christian identity in the New Testament and locates it in baptism (1John 3:1-3), the sacrament through which Christians have become the adopted sons and daughters of God. Because divine sonship and daughtership is ontological in nature, Mwaura argues that Christian identity is the same for all, regardless of ethnicity, race, age and geographical location. This means that “all Christians acquire an inalienable identity of equality that transcends all other cultural or national identities. It also neutralizes all other identity traits in their discriminatory tendencies based on race, class, sex, etc. It subsumes and transforms them into the new identity of God’s children…”

Like Volf, Mwaura believes that Christians, including African Christians, should be aware of the primacy of their identity as Christians, an identity that is rooted in Christ. They must then inculcate this identity deeply into their very psyche, so that they can reject the temptation of allowing other identities based on ethnicity, race, or class to compromise or even neutralize it.

This is particularly cogent given what happened, for example, during the genocide in Rwanda where ethnic tensions and loyalties found their way into the Church, resulting in complicity and loss of credibility on the part of the Church in Rwanda. In my discussion of the Rwandan genocide in chapter two, I pointed out how some Rwandans risked their lives to save fellow Rwandans because of their conviction of their common identity as Christians or because of their shared humanity. Yet, for many others, ethnic

identity replaced this fundamental identity. Mwaura argues that the crisis in Rwanda was manifestly ethnic and that the complicity of the Church in Rwanda reveals how ethnic animosity is a cancer that must be dealt with both within the Church and the state. She cautions against limiting the problem of ethnicity to a few individuals like politicians who, through the organization of the political and economic destinies of their respective countries, sometimes cause inter-ethnic wars, corruption and other evils. Understandably, because Christians killed one another and because people who sought sanctuary in churches were massacred, it has been said that every Christian denomination in Rwanda bears some responsibility in this regard.332

The Rwandan genocide therefore offers some challenges and lessons to be learned with regard to how things might be done differently in order to avoid violent conflicts. Both foreign Christian missionaries and local clergy must consciously avoid creating a situation where a supremacist ideology might develop in favour of any particular ethnic group. This can help prevent the creation of inter-ethnic relations that are characterized by envy, hatred and resentment. This will also forestall unnecessary rivalry for recognition and attention that we sometimes witness in our Churches. Ultimately this calls for a greater emphasis on the primacy of our common Christian identity and the equality that it promotes among Christians. Having interiorized this sense of equality, Christians who belong to a dominant ethnic group must be courageous agents of change.

332 Ibid., 24 For a more extensive exploration into how the Churches in Rwanda were implicated in the genocide see Timothy Longman, Christianity and the Genocide in Rwanda (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10. Longman goes beyond the situation where individual Christians betrayed their faith by killing their fellow Christians during the genocide and argues that something in the nature of the Christian Church in Rwanda was responsible for the genocide. He does an analysis of the historical role that Christianity played in Rwanda and argues that the Churches actively shaped the ethnic and political realities of the Rwandan society that made genocide possible. This is because by their actions, the Churches defined and politicized ethnicity, legitimized authoritarian regimes and encouraged public obedience to political authorities.
to their non-Christian tribe’s men and women. That is, they must educate them to realize and to accept that the domination and the exclusion of any group of people is an evil. This can be a challenge if historically the other group had been subjugated by the dominant group. However, if Christians are willing to do this as part of their obligation resulting from their baptism, the social implications of Christian identity will go beyond the Church with a potential for healing previously hostile inter-ethnic relations.

Another important insight that Volf draws from his analysis is that each culture can retain its cultural specificity and yet be open to others in a way that is not condescending or triumphalist. This is an important emphasis for African Christians with regard to how they should relate to culture and by extension to the other. On the merit of a universalism that at once transcends every culture and respects all cultures in their differences, it can be argued that African Christians of whatever ethnicity must consciously resist the temptation to impose their culture as the norm on other Christians even if they happen to be the numerical majority. They must also consciously resist the temptation to be blindfolded by the claims of their cultural group. Here is where Volf’s call to evolve a catholic, evangelical and ecumenical personality is relevant and applicable. If African Christians and even those who do not share the Christian faith become truly catholic personalities with an openness to the other, with a mutual positive interchange and influence, the creation of a so-called superior culture and the resentment that this usually creates could be lessened or even eliminated altogether. There has to be the desire and the determination on the part of African Christians to live out in a practical way Volf’s idea of a catholic cultural identity which admits the reality of cultural hybridity and rejects the politics of purity. Apart from being catholic personalities called
to live out a catholic cultural identity, African Christians must also learn to be evangelical and ecumenical in spirit and in practice. Not only must they refuse to mimic the evil aspects that may lie in their own culture, they must have the courage to point them out and work for their transformation. For example, it is important that each cultural group critically examines the stereotypes that it has built up about other ethnic groups and how these stereotypes have negatively influenced inter-ethnic relations. This is because conflicts in Africa are not simply resource-based. There is often a relational dimension of a historical pattern. It is important that Christians and non-Christians from each ethnic group be open to listening to constructive criticisms from other ethnic groups. This is necessary because of the natural tendency to accept uncritically the mores of our own culture.

The need to be critical of our own culture, to keep a right balance between belonging to and distancing ourselves from our culture, has the potential to minimize, if not eliminate altogether, the three evils that are often employed prior to a violent conflict or during the conflict itself. These evils are symbolic exclusion, bias and placing blame for heinous, often imaginary, crimes on the other as a justification for expulsion or lynching. These insights delineated by Volf, Bernard Lonergan and Girard, respectively, serve the same purpose—the direction of anger and violence against a common enemy. Symbolic exclusion, bias and the process of scapegoating all lack objectivity and serve only the interests of those engaged in them. It is not difficult to see how all three elements were present in the Hutu-Tutsi and Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflicts.

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333 Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence*, 60-61. A negative propaganda against the Tutsi was certainly a significant contributory factor to the scope and brutality of the massacres when the genocide erupted. Ilibagiza, a survivor of the genocide, describes how just before the genocide, she would wake up nearly
In her essay, “The Overwhelming Minority: Inter-Ethnic Conflict in Ghana’s Northern Region”, Julia Jönsson explores a series of episodes of large scale inter-ethnic violence that culminated in the 1994 Konkomba-Nanumba conflict. Jönsson argues that this series of episodes demonstrates how traditional and modern politics have interacted in Ghana and given rise to categories and dynamics that fuel conflict. One such category that fuels conflict, and which Jönsson discovered through interviews with members of the affected ethnic groups, is the category of stereotypes. She points out that before the conflict itself, old ethnic stereotypes and insults which depicted members of the minority group as ‘slaves’ and ‘people with tails’, that is, as sub-human, were reported as rife before the outbreak of the conflicts, and that these stereotypes and insults were associated with threats of impending war.334

I believe that insights from Volf’s Trinitarian theology are equally significant, not only as a solution to the above mentioned evils, but especially as an alternative to the will to exclude and the practice of exclusion itself, a practice that invariably leads to violent conflicts. Many insights stand out from Volf’s Trinitarian theology and speak to the question of identity and difference. First, the identity of the three divine Persons is neither exclusive nor self-enclosed. Second, the identity of each divine Person is defined in relation to the other divine Persons. Third, there is a unity within which plurality is

preserved. Fourth, the relations within the Trinity reveal that persons do not get transmuted into pure relations.

In the concrete, this has implications for how African Christians construct their identity, and this in turn has a direct impact on how they relate to the other and to differences. If the identity of the three divine Persons is neither exclusive nor self-enclosed, then Christians and perhaps even non-Christians must realize that the construction or the formation of identity should not entail the negation of the other. Rather, they must realize and accept that identity is the result of the construction of the “I” that is both distinct from the other and yet the internalization of a network of relationships with the other without which the “I” as a social construct would be nonexistent.

Reflecting on the idea that persons never get transmuted into pure relations but always remain as persons apart from the relationship, one important implication stands out. With specific reference to inter-ethnic relations in Africa, every ethnic group must be permitted to retain its identity without being forced to dissolve into the identity of another ethnic group, no matter how powerful the latter might be. Because the mutual self-giving in the Trinity is characterized by perfect love, the relationship between them or the movement of one divine Person towards the other is non-threatening. Interpenetration does not entail the destruction of the other. There is no need to destroy the other in order to be or remain who we are. This has implications for inter-ethnic relations.

One important implication is that instead of leading to rivalry and conflict, inter-ethnic differences could lead to greater complementarity or interdependence. Recall that
in chapter one when I examined the competition theory with specific reference to interpersonal and intergroup relations, I discussed among other things the link between ethnic competition and conflict. One of the categories that I delineated was complementarity and how this relates to competition and conflict. Drawing upon the work of Bélanger and Pinard, I mentioned that one of the conditions that is required before ethnic competition can lead to conflict is that the relationship between the competitors must be as uncomplimentary as possible. From this perspective, I argued that the higher the level of interdependence, the greater the possibility that the relationship between the ethnic groups will be viewed as mutually beneficial. On the other hand, if the level of interdependence is low, the possibility of inter-ethnic tensions and conflict is higher. I can say that the insights delineated from Volf’s Trinitarian theology can promote interdependence and so have the potential to reduce, if not eliminate altogether, inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts.

From the above analysis and application, it can be contended that these insights drawn from Volf’s theology form part of a body of resources that are relevant to the African context. By drawing on them, African Christians can construct authentic identities that are important for healthy inter-personal and inter-ethnic relations. Healthy relations have the potential to improve rivalrous and conflictual inter-ethnic relations. Apart from these insights, our theological and hermeneutical framework established in chapters three and four reveals an important element shared by Girard, Schwager and Volf – their support for nonviolence and by implication the need for a theology of nonviolence. A theology of nonviolence is not only necessary for the African context; it
also provides the appropriate theological context from which we can speak to the issues of forgiveness, justice and reconciliation.

5. 4. A Theology of Nonviolence

Without recalling in detail the arguments that both Girard and Schwager advanced in support of a non-violent God it is necessary to remind ourselves of some of the salient points. Girard argued that the essential difference between myth and biblical text is the rejection of violent mythic expulsions by the latter. Girard has consistently demonstrated the innocence of the victim and the guilt of the persecuting community contrary to what was upheld in ancient mythologies. He has also demonstrated how a culture built on violence is self-destructive as it returns to even greater violence, thereby simultaneously exposing the futility of the scapegoat mechanism as way of responding to violence. More importantly, Girard’s analysis revealed the gradual and progressive desacralization of violence that reached its climax in the Paschal Mystery. Rather than the use of violence to resolve conflicts, Girard proposes the witness of Jesus that embraces forgiveness and reconciliation and rejects vengeance. This is what Girard refers to as positive mimesis as an alternative to negative mimesis which not only enslaves mimetic doubles to one another but often leads to the escalation of violence because of the element of negative reciprocity.

Jesus’ non-violent submission to his violent death, his willingness to absorb and to transform the violence of his adversaries into an instrument of salvation for the world is one of the main points delineated by Schwager when he treats the death of Jesus within the categories of identification and transformation. Also, the resurrection stands out as an ineffable example of the character of God, a God who is both non-violent and non-
vindictive. God’s Son is raised for the sake of humanity, a humanity that had expelled God through crucifixion. Similarly, the Pentecost event is one more act of divine magnanimity because it is the Spirit of the crucified but risen Jesus that is given and received interiorly by the post-Easter Christian community for the purposes of transformation and mission.

In consonance with Girard and Schwager, Volf has pointed out that the Cross is the outcome of God’s decision to deal with human enmity without violence. Volf’s treatment of the Cross within the broader framework of God’s dealing with humanity where he engages the themes of solidarity, divine self-donation and communion, all speak to the character of God as a non-violent God.

A nonviolent God is the reason for proposing a theology of nonviolence for the African context. However, to speak of a non-violent God and by extension a theology of nonviolence might sound like a utopia in a world characterized by violence. An objection could be raised that a theology of nonviolence actually gives the powerful and the dominant a licence to continue to inflict violence on the weak and the vulnerable with greater impunity and without having to face justice. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify what we are proposing. Are we proposing a non-violent engagement that encourages passivity or are we proposing an active resistance to violence that is nonetheless nonviolent?

See for example, Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, 118. Alison recast the Christian understanding of God and of sin through the mystery of the Resurrection. He then argues that by raising Jesus, God demonstrates that God not only transcends death but is also not conditioned by death. God raises God’s Son as forgiveness. This forgiveness stretches beyond our particular sinful thoughts and actions and enters into the very realm of who we are- human beings conditioned by death. Because God’s forgiveness through the risen Christ, goes beyond individual sinful acts and touches our nature as people conditioned by death, we must now realize that we were wrong in believing that our being oriented towards death was essential to our nature. In any event, this wrong conception that death is congenital does not matter anymore because we can receive the truth, that is, life from Jesus the forgiving victim.
In his *The Nonviolent God*, J. Denny Weaver posits a situation that is both hypothetical and yet true to life. If you had a criminal with a gun right before you threatening to kill for example, your daughter, mother or wife, what would you do? According to Weaver, this question is often asked with the assumption that there are only two possible answers: “Either do nothing and allow the loved one to be killed, or kill the intruder and save the loved one.” Among other concrete historical examples, Weaver cites the case of the 1987 Estonian Singing Revolution by which Estonia eventually gained its independence in 1991 from the Soviet Union without the use of violence and bloodshed. While there is no certainty that a non-violent response to violence will always be successful in terms of achieving its goal, or that no injuries will be involved, the same can be said about engaging violence with perhaps potential for greater violence. The truth is that when violence is engaged in combating violence, to use once again Girard’s terminology, we end up mimicking the enemy and, in a very real sense, become what we hate – the enemy or the so-called evil person. This is the case in countries where capital punishment is still part of the criminal justice system. When a state executes murderers in order to demonstrate that killing is wrong, it has by that very act become a killer itself.

In this regard, what should be the Christian response to systemic violence? What lessons can be drawn from the teaching of Jesus?

5.4.1 The Christian Response to Systemic Violence

Jesus in his teachings and actions remains the paradigm for proposing an active but nonviolent resistance to systemic violence. Weaver’s analysis of Jesus’ teachings on

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337 Ibid., 198.
338 Ibid, 188.
turning the other cheek, giving up one’s cloak as well as one’s outer garment, and going an extra mile, can help clarify how Christians should respond to systemic violence and why an active nonviolent approach is appropriate. It is appropriate because it points not only to non-retaliation but especially to how Christians should actively resist systemic violence non-violently. For example, turning the other cheek (Mt 5:39), not only forestalled a cycle of reprisal but constituted a positive act of assertiveness on the part of the one who was struck and who refuses to be humiliated by the supposed superior. In fact, the latter at the end loses the power to dehumanize the so-called inferior.  

Jesus’ injunction to give away one’s inner garment together with one’s coat (Mt 5:40) has its context in the formal court of adjudication. It was legal for a creditor to take the coat of a debtor as a promise of payment (Ex 22:25-27; Deut 24:10-13, 17). However, since the coat was likely to be the only clothing that the poor person had, the creditor had to return it every evening so that he could sleep in it. Because the setting is the court, the injunction visualizes a situation where the poor debtor gives away even his inner garment in public thereby exposing his nakedness. It is important to note that in the Jewish society, the shame of nakedness lay more with those looking at it and those who cause it and less with the naked person. Against this background, Weaver argues that when the poor person is forced to strip himself of his coat, in stripping himself also of the inner garment in the public court, the tables are turned on the wealthy creditor. Weaver contends that such an action “would put the poor person in charge of the moment while exposing the exploitative system and shaming the wealthy and powerful person who

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takes the last object of value from a very poor person.”\textsuperscript{340} Similarly, a civilian, obliged by a Roman soldier to carry a burden for a mile, which was permitted by law, could put the soldier in an awkward and embarrassing situation if he decided to go a second mile, since this was prohibited by law. In such a situation, the soldier might have to plead with the civilian to put down the burden lest the soldier be disciplined by his superior. Weaver’s analysis reveals that Jesus’ instructions are not to be understood as advocating passive non-resistance. On the contrary, Jesus “was teaching nonviolent ways for oppressed people to take the initiative, to affirm their humanity, to expose and neutralize exploitative circumstances.”\textsuperscript{341}

Examples of successful nonviolent active responses to systemic violence in history such as in India under Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States of America offer credibility to Weaver’s argument for a nonviolent response to systemic violence. With respect to the Civil Rights movement under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr, it can be argued that King’s nonviolent approach was very much influenced by his theology. Trained in the evangelical Christian tradition, King believed very much in the sacredness of human life and was greatly influenced by Jesus’ ethic of love. As a moral theorist and practitioner, his nonviolent ethic was not merely inspired by what was politically expedient or by the exigencies of particular situations but by his

\textsuperscript{340} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{341} Ibid., 39. In his advocacy for an active but nonviolent response to violence, Weaver, engaging what he calls a narrative Christus Victor theory of the atonement, interprets the death of Jesus not in terms of a divine plan that has been arranged to satisfy a divine law or God’s honour but as a result of the refusal of sinful humanity to accept God’s reign. He interprets the death of Jesus as a consequence of Jesus’ commitment to his mission and in fact as its fulfilment. Jesus was ready and willing to die if the unfolding of his mission required it. Like Schwager, Weaver believes Jesus’ self-giving in the form of bread and wine and his self-giving to a violent death both shed light on each other and reveal an important theological truth beyond an ethical example. Weaver argues that since the very person of Jesus is the embodiment of the reign of God, Jesus’ self-giving in the form of bread and wine was a gift of the reign of God in a nonviolent way. This action, Weaver believes, reveals not only Jesus’ nonviolence but also his love for his enemies. See 43-44.
belief that the universe hinges on moral laws. Decisions and actions must be taken in accordance with what is moral. For King, a morally good act is “that which is in accord with the eternal and abiding principles of the Christian faith.”

Like Gandhi, King understood his non violent resistance to violence as a weapon of the strong. It is as an act of inner strength, of discipline, bravery, and self-restraint. It is an act of determination by a group of people, who because they want to preserve their image, refuse to be aggressive and violent when confronted with violence. Like Gandhi, King believed that a nonviolent ethic as a method has the power to shame and transform the aggressor. The purpose is to awaken the opponent’s conscience to the evil caused by his or her deeds and to lead him or her to repentance.

By holding together in a healthy balance ethical appeals and moral persuasions on the one hand and constructive coercive power in the form of boycotts and noncooperation on the other, King was able to unearth latent tensions. He then worked creatively through these tensions in view of reconciliation, healing and the creation of a community of love.

In Giradian terminology this is the unmasking of both the causes of violence and violence itself. However, the unmasking of violence is not sufficient in itself, a position already upheld by Volf. Like King, Volf has argued that nonviolent resistance must be

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343 Ibid., 140. Other principles informed King’s ethic of non-violence. They include the following: reconciliation as the goal of non-violence as already mentioned, seeing the opponent as a symbol of greater evil, redemptive suffering based on the belief that there is social and economic power in non-cooperation and moral power in voluntary suffering for others, agape which rejects both physical violence and hatred of the opponent and finally the principle that the universe is an ally of justice. This last principle expresses the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice. See 143-158.
344 Ibid., 142.
accompanied by a struggle for truth and justice. It is the struggle for truth and justice that can transform nonviolence from an unproductive negativity to a creative possibility…\(^{345}\)

It is true that King has been criticized by his opponents who argue that his nonviolent ethic left black Americans helpless in the face of white brutalities and that it made them subservient under a white supremacist ideology. For example, Malcolm X was totally opposed to nonviolent resistance. Malcolm like others perceived a kind of hypocrisy on the part of the white majority who urged restraint and nonviolence on the part of African Americans whenever they carried out a demonstration which inevitably exposed the inequalities or the injustice supported by the status quo. While urging restraint and nonviolence, “the white people controlled the political and social system that enforced the systemic violence of segregation…”\(^{346}\)

By discussing a historical example of nonviolent resistance to violence I wanted to point out the advantage of nonviolence over the use of violence, a reality supported by Girard, Schwager and Volf. In this regard, I am of the view that even though people like Malcolm and others like him, had the weight of moral authority on their side, yet that should not justify the use of violence, especially when King’s nonviolent activism was not the passive type. Rather, it was an activism that called for a struggle against systemic violence in a nonviolent manner. Perhaps it is the approach can be best articulated: “Resist violence, but resist it non-violently.”

\(^{345}\) Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 293. King’s nonviolent struggle did not remain unproductive. Rather it has been fruitful. For example, even if black and white communities have remained separate and unequal, some positive changes have taken place. Both blacks and whites have learned to live together and to accept each other. This has made both groups more conscious about race and racism which in turn has increased the dialogue between blacks and whites on individual bases. It is possible today for blacks and whites to get to know each other within the settings of social equality. They can relate with each as equals in the professional and work contexts. See William D. Watley, “Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)”, 146.

\(^{346}\) Weaver, *The Nonviolent God*, 197.
Linking this to our context, I would propose an active nonviolent approach to systemic violence. For example, in the case of perceived unfairness and economic exploitation, an active nonviolent approach should be an alternative to direct violent confrontation in inter-ethnic relations. In this regard, dialogue between ethnic groups with the support of traditional authorities, and especially the support of the state, would be helpful and appropriate.

We turn now to how ethnic conflicts might be resolved through reconciliation and healing. Here, I will examine the relationship between forgiveness and justice in Volf, in the Second African Synod and from the South African experience. I will integrate the perspectives from the Second African Synod and from the South African experience with that of Volf.

5.5 Resolving Ethnic Conflicts through Reconciliation and Healing

5.5.1 Forgiveness and Justice in Volf

It should be recalled that Volf, in exploring how Christianity could contribute to a more peaceful environment, discussed the relationship between forgiveness, reconciliation and justice. In that discussion he argued and took a position that “forgiveness is an element in the process of reconciliation, a process in which the search for justice is an integral and yet subordinate element.”\(^{347}\) The implication is clear. It is not possible to have reconciliation and peace outside of justice, yet justice understood as strict justice, where all claims must be met before forgiveness and reconciliation are present, is not tenable.

\(^{347}\) Volf, “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, & Justice: A Christian Contribution to a More Peaceful Social Environment,” 47
Volf advanced three reasons against those who insist on ‘justice’ before forgiveness and reconciliation. These include the following: (1) The relative nature of all accounts of justice,\textsuperscript{348} (2) the undesirable nature of strict justice and (3) the inability of strict justice to bring about healing between conflicting parties. As an alternative to the idea of justice first, Volf proposed the will to embrace and the practice of embrace as the framework of seeking justice which he believes is part of the process of seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. Volf’s understanding of forgiveness helps clarify the link between justice on the one hand and forgiveness and reconciliation on the other.

First, Volf is not proposing forgiveness outside of justice. To offer forgiveness entails blame. The one who forgives first condemns the evil that has been committed and accuses the person responsible, and the one who receives forgiveness accepts that he has indeed carried out the evil deed. This in effect means that forgiveness takes place against the backdrop of tacit justice.

Second, forgiveness presupposes that justice, that is, full justice or justice in its strict sense, has not been done. If justice in the strict sense of the word is met then there

\textsuperscript{348} The relative nature of all accounts of justice can be clarified by what Volf refers to as the ‘predicament of partiality’. The predicament of partiality refers to the inability of parties that are locked in conflict to agree on the moral significance of their actions. This difficulty can lead one party to interpret the actions of the other that has even settled for less as an act of injustice, an attempt to hide the truth or even as a form of revenge. Because of the predicament of partiality and the problem that it poses towards justice, Volf is convinced that forgiveness and the will to embrace must be the necessary step towards justice and reconciliation. Volf argues further that the ‘principle of irreversibility’ is one more reason why forgiveness is necessary. Deeds that have been done in the past, including wrongdoing, cannot be undone. If human deeds and their consequences could be undone, there would be no need for revenge, but this is not possible. Therefore, the desire for revenge will always arise in the hearts of victims, and forgiveness should be an alternative to revenge. In this regard, forgiveness has a social import. It is able to break the power of a past that has been remembered. It transcends the affirmed claims of justice and so brings to a halt the spiral of vengeance. See Volf, \textit{Exclusion and Embrace}, 121.
would be no need for forgiveness. This means forgiveness is necessary because strict justice is not done and cannot be done.\textsuperscript{349}

Third, to forgive is to affirm both the claims of justice and their transcendent character. After affirming the claims of justice through the act of forgiveness, the offended party chooses not to let these claims be counted against the offender. Not to hold the claims of justice against the offender is an affirmation that a wrong deed has certainly been done. The wrongdoing is named and is by implication the moral responsibility of the perpetrator.

Fourth, because forgiveness entails the foregoing of the claims of justice, it is, like any expression of grace, laden with self-denial and risk. Forgiveness is an act of magnanimity. Yet one is not certain whether this act of magnanimity will yield the desired results in terms of personal inner peace and the restoration of relationships in the community. This uncertainty notwithstanding, forgiveness also contains within itself a great promise. It offers wrongdoers the opportunity to admit their guilt and to repent. This way it brings transformation and healing not only to wrongdoers but also to those they have wronged. Volf states: “To accuse wrongdoers by offering forgiveness is to invite them to self-knowledge and release. Such an invitation has the potential of leading the wrongdoer to admit guilt and to repent, and thereby healing not only wrongdoers but also those who have been wronged by them.”\textsuperscript{350}

Fifth, it is important to note this difference. As a first step towards the attainment of full forgiveness, repentance is not asked of the wrongdoer, nor is he required to rectify

\textsuperscript{350} Ibid., 46.
the wrong he has committed. To put it differently, repentance, that is, the recognition of the evil that has been committed and the willingness to mend one’s ways, is not a precondition for forgiveness; rather it is its result. Yet as a result of forgiveness, if repentance is absent, one cannot receive forgiveness as forgiveness because one has refused to see oneself as guilty. In effect, it means that an unrepentant wrongdoer must in the end remain an unforgiven wrongdoer despite the fact that the first step in the process of forgiveness is unconditional.

Finally, the perpetrator who repents as a result of the forgiveness offered him or her must add a third element – restitution. In a real sense the genuineness of repentance on the part of the wrongdoer is tested by his or her readiness to restore something of what he or she has taken away by his or her wrongdoing.

I fully agree with Volf in the way he understands the relationship between forgiveness and justice in view of reconciliation. Let us turn now to how the Second Special Assembly for Africa treated the theme of forgiveness and justice.

5.5.2 The Second African Synod and Reconciliation

At the Second African Synod (2009), the Bishops of Africa reflected on a number of issues affecting contemporary Africa, including the phenomenon of violent conflicts. They took seriously the question of the Church’s mission in this regard. Significantly, it was a Synod dedicated to reflecting on how the Church in Africa, as salt of the earth and light of the world (Mt 13: 14), should be of service to reconciliation, justice and peace.

The Synod Fathers see reconciliation and justice as two essential steps towards the attainment of peace. To obtain human peace without justice is illusory and ephemeral.
Yet human justice must be the fruit of reconciliation and sought under the light of the “truth of love” (Eph 4:15). While charity is an important Christian virtue, the Synod Fathers recognize that a charity that does not respect justice and truth is a false charity and does not help the process of reconciliation. It is for this reason that they speak about the need for reconciliation as the only way to attain lasting peace during conflicts. The Synod Fathers believe that for reconciliation to be effective, it must be accompanied by an act that is both courageous and honest: “the pursuit of those responsible for these conflicts, those who commissioned crimes and those who were involved in trafficking of all kinds, and the determination of their responsibility. Victims have a right to truth and justice.”351 This responsibility falls primarily on government authorities and traditional chiefs but also on ordinary citizens. It is revealing that the Synod Fathers speak of authentic reconciliation within the context of forgiveness. They affirm the importance of forgiveness against the background of past conflicts on the continent. They believe that it is by granting forgiveness and receiving it that traumatized memories of individuals and whole communities are healed and harmony restored. Because the Synod Fathers speak of justice as a fruit of reconciliation, and because they speak of the pursuit of justice as a necessary component of authentic reconciliation only within the context of giving and receiving forgiveness, it is clear that the pursuit of justice is taken seriously but only within the context of the willingness to forgive. The conflicting parties must first be ready to give and receive forgiveness.

The Synod Fathers understand the relationship between forgiveness, reconciliation and justice much in the same way that Volf understands it. Like Volf, they take seriously the issue of justice and demand the pursuit of those who are responsible for the eruption of violent conflicts and by implication their moral responsibility. What is implied is that in trying to resolve conflicts, the dehumanizing effects of the conflict and the people responsible for it must be named. Still, all this must take place within the context of forgiveness if reconciliation and healing are to be effected. Like Volf, the Synod Fathers believe that perpetrators of violent conflicts and their followers must first repent and ask for forgiveness. Indeed, the reconciliation and forgiveness process will want to take into account the history of ethnic conflicts and the dialectic and shifting dynamics of power, which may include a history of reciprocal scapegoating between groups.

Moreover, it is important to recall here Girard’s idea of the unconscious that characterizes mimetic rivalry and the scapegoat mechanism, and how Schwager, as a follower of Girard, employs it in discussing the death of Jesus on the Cross. On the Cross Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of his persecutors in these words: “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34). Jesus is by no means approving the actions of his persecutors. However, he recognizes that when his persecutors decided to condemn and crucify him, they were not fully conscious of what they were doing. They were in fact acting under a power beyond themselves. In their actions, they were victims of a power that truly kills-sin. In this context, Schwager argues that even though Jesus’ opponents were active agents of his crucifixion, and were responsible for their actions,
they are not fully conscious of the process they are participating in.\textsuperscript{352} For Girard, the
death and resurrection of Jesus exposes this scapegoating dynamic and is likewise the
eschatological beginning of the end of violence. Connecting these thoughts of Schwager
and Girard reinforces the necessity of giving and receiving forgiveness in view of
reconciliation between groups that have suffered from ethnic conflicts. This is
particularly true if we understand that perpetrators in a very real sense are caught up in a
very powerful dynamic of violence. This of course is not to suggest that they should not
be held accountable for their actions. The process of reconciliation would bring about a
full consciousness of the dynamics of rivalry, exclusion, scapegoating and violence in
such a way that the communities involved could grow, heal and learn from their mistakes.

Similarly, because perpetrators can be victims of a power beyond themselves the
call of the Synod Fathers for the purification of hearts is relevant. People must first
experience a purification of the heart and be reconciled with God (2Cor 5: 20b) before
they can build a just and peaceful society. The experience of reconciliation, therefore,
brings about communion at both vertical and horizontal levels – communion with God
and communion within the human family.

Let us now turn to the South African experience. There are two reasons for this.
The first is to further enhance our integration of insights drawn from our main thinkers on
how reconciliation and healing constitute an important step in resolving ethnic conflicts.
The second is to suggest that the South African experience, despite its uniqueness and
limitations, has been relatively successful and therefore can be a model for resolving
violent conflicts including ethnic conflicts in Africa. The focus is on how post-apartheid

\textsuperscript{352} Schwager, \textit{Jesus in the Drama of Salvation}, 171.
South Africa worked towards reconciliation and national unity by advocating the practice of forgiveness and restorative justice.

5.5.3 The South African Experience

Desmond Tutu, chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of post-apartheid South Africa speaks about restorative justice. Tutu contends that restorative justice was characteristic of traditional African jurisprudence. He explains that the essence of restorative justice is not punishment or retribution. Rather, it is geared towards “the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offense.”

Restorative justice is based on the belief that the humanity of the human person is important and that people who have committed even the worst of atrocities are still children of God with a potential for becoming better people in the future. Society should not give up on such people or believe that they are beyond redemption. Because the goal of restorative justice concerns the wholeness of relationship, Tutu urges Africans to return to this value of their jurisprudence. In fact, he believes it is a value that Africa can offer to a world that is fragmented and polarized. Because restorative justice is the goal of African jurisprudence, Tutu’s position and by extension that of the South African People connects well with the thoughts of Volf and the Fathers of the Second African Synod discussed above.

Tutu raises the issue of restorative justice as part of a response to those who criticized the granting of amnesty to people who had violated human rights in the name of, or on behalf of, political organizations during the apartheid rule. Many South Africans and even people from other countries had raised questions regarding the moral requirements of justice, especially in the case of people who were not only architects of the apartheid system but had actively carried out its policies to the detriment of black South Africans. Apartheid, they argued, was a system that had uprooted and separated families and relocated people to areas against their will. It was a system of segregation and marginalization that produced an economically poor, poorly educated black population. This meant that generations to come would be victims of such a system. Apart from these enormous consequences, those who believed that the granting of amnesty was a travesty of justice pointed to the fact that applicants had both criminal and civil liabilities dropped as a condition before agreeing to appear before the TRC. That is, victims could not seek reparations from perpetrators through the civil courts. While this might look like a travesty of justice, one may argue that in this particular context it was not since the focus of the Commission was to seek reconciliation and national unity within a framework of understanding that transcended the conflicts of the past.

In fact, a closer examination reveals that the establishment of the TRC and the granting of amnesty as a way of leading post-apartheid South Africa to reconciliation and national unity was an appropriate approach. The South African Parliament through the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act had established a set of guidelines.\textsuperscript{354}

\textsuperscript{354} See Claire Moon, \textit{Narrating Political Reconciliation: South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission} (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2008), 38-39. The Commission was to promote national unity and reconciliation within the framework of an understanding that transcends the conflicts of
under which the TRC was to operate. One of the requirements was that applicants for
amnesty “had to make a full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to the offense for
which amnesty was being sought.”\textsuperscript{355} Truth could not be compromised, and victims could
challenge the veracity of narrations of perpetrators. Confessions by perpetrators were
made before television cameras. Since most of the perpetrators, such as the security
forces, were people very much respected in their communities, a public confession of
gruesome atrocities was very humiliating for them. That the perpetrators had to confess
the whole truth publicly meant that accountability was taken seriously since there was
admission of wrongdoing.\textsuperscript{356} To make a public confession of wrongdoing and to plead
guilty is to accept moral responsibility for one’s action, the very accountability that both
Volf and the Fathers of the Second African Synod stressed within the context of giving
and receiving forgiveness in view of reconciliation.

Moreover, as a symbolic act of recognition and contrition on the part of the state,
about twenty thousand identified victims were paid an urgent interim relief of R2000, that
is, U.S $330 per person. This was done in 1998 when the Commission handed over its
report to President Nelson Mandela. In addition, every individual identified victim was to
receive a reparation grant of R23000 (U.S $ 3830 a year, to be paid within a period of six

\textsuperscript{355} Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, 50.
\textsuperscript{356} Desmond Tutu, God is not a Christian and Other Provocations, ed., John Allen, (New York: Harper
Collins Publishers, 2011), 41. Tutu explains that the negotiators of the TRC did not intend it to be the
regular way of dealing with crime and justice. It was designed only for the delicate period of transition.
Tutu believes that the limitations of the TRC notwithstanding, it was the appropriate approach to ensure a peaceful transition from the repression of apartheid, to democracy, reconciliation and national unity.

Even though the granting of monetary reparation was more symbolic than anything else it served a good purpose. As Volf has advocated, the forgiven and contrite perpetrator must restore to the victim what his actions has caused the victim to lose. Here, the individuals who were guilty of gross human rights violations were representatives of a system. The South African apartheid rule had created a poor black community and a monetary reparation was symbolic in that regard. But more important was the fact that victims had their human and civil dignity restored to them through the telling of their painful experiences before a Commission that had the nation’s mandate and authority behind it.

That victims had their human and civil dignity restored to them through remembering of their past was healing. This connects well with Volf’s idea of remembering in a way that is redemptive. Victims of any form of violence have the right and the obligation to remember their past for two important reasons: First, remembering the past, even the unfortunate past is an essential part of their identity as a people. Second, to remember the past is not only necessary for ensuring justice but also for ensuring that the same evil does not repeat itself. However, because memory is morally

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357 Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, 62.
358 Ibid., 61-62. For example, Tutu mentions that because the recommendations for some sort of reparation for victims had to be presented to the President and eventually to Parliament for debate, a convoluted process at that, no approval for payment had been made three years after the TRC process got under way. In the meantime perpetrators were granted amnesty as soon as their applications were accepted. According to Tutu, this was a major weakness. It was the reason why some victims were getting agitated with the process and doubted that the TRC was really as ‘victim friendly’ as it had claimed. The limitations notwithstanding, Tutu believes that vendetta and violence would have erupted if South Africa did not set up a TRC.
ambiguous, care must be taken that it is done rightly and so lead to healing and reconciliation of both victim and perpetrator. There are a number of things that the victim group must do or not do as they remember. The victim group must avoid focusing only on the pain it has suffered lest they remain at the level of self-pity. In this regard, they must not allow the memory of their past to shape the horizon of their future possibilities. They must also avoid remembering with the intention of returning evil for evil. The victim group must also resist the temptation to allow the painful past of their history to feed into their collective psyche in such way that they begin to spin the words and the actions of the perpetrator as both groups seek reconciliation and healing. To do so is to fail to remember truthfully and rightly. Remembering rightly and truthfully is the first step to remembering in a redemptive manner for both victim and perpetrator.

As already mentioned, and with the limitations of the South African TRC notwithstanding, I believe that it can still be cited as a reasonably successful example of how forgiveness and justice are connected in the process of seeking reconciliation and healing. In fact, Tutu gives a series of examples during the TRC hearings where the power of truth to heal and reconcile people became a reality.

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359 With respect to the victim, for healing to take place, it is not enough to remember the past. There is the need for integration. That is, the victim group must be helped to integrate their suffering into a broader pattern of their life story. How they interpret their suffering is significantly related to their experience of healing. What they do with the memory of their past is important. For example, has their experience helped them to exercise greater empathy for those who suffer or stand up with them against similar experiences? Second, it is not only the perpetrators who must acknowledge their wrongdoing but the victims and the wrong inflicted on them must be acknowledged publicly if healing is to take place. This was what the South African TRC did. See Volf, The End of Memory, 27-30. I would like to add that in working for reconciliation and healing between ethnic groups that have suffered from violent ethnic conflicts, the need for acknowledgement as part of remembering in a redemptive way is a helpful approach. 360 Tutu, God is not a Christian, 44-46. For example, he recounts the story of a young man who had come to testify before the commission. He had been blinded by the police who had opened fire on a black township. After relating his story he was asked how he felt. The blind youth smiled and said, “You have given me back my eyes”. To have been offered the opportunity to relate his experience before a friendly and supportive forum must have been therapeutic even though he would never regain his sight. He felt
As chairman of the TRC, Tutu believes in the power of forgiveness. Asked by a
group of journalists after a meeting with representatives of Reform Judaism in Cincinnati,
Ohio, whether Jesus would have forgiven the Nazis if he were a Holocaust survivor, Tutu
answered in the affirmative, citing the paradigm that Jesus himself had left behind when
he prayed for his enemies during his crucifixion.\textsuperscript{361} The question the journalists put to
Tutu followed his 1989 pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Bethlehem where he had prayed at
Yad Vashem, a Holocaust museum, for God’s forgiveness upon the perpetrators of the
Holocaust. Apart from appealing to the paradigm of Jesus on the Cross, Tutu also
appealed to the Suffering Servant songs of Second Isaiah in the Jewish Scriptures.
Without glorifying suffering, he pointed out that good seems to require the capacity for
suffering. Tutu argued that he was not speaking insensitively when he urged forgiveness.
Rather, he was speaking from his experience as a black South African who had suffered
because of his black skin and identity. He then asked what would have happened to South
Africa if black South Africans had said they would never forgive white South Africans.\textsuperscript{362}
Obviously there would have been more desire for revenge and bloodshed.

There can be no future without peace, and peace is not possible without
reconciliation and there can be no reconciliation “before there is forgiveness.”\textsuperscript{363}

Even though there is merit in the claim that there can be no future without
forgiveness should forgiveness be freely entered into by the conflicting parties or should

\textsuperscript{361} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{362} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{363} Ibid., 35.
they be pressured to practice forgiveness? What type of conditions are necessary if forgiveness is to lead to reconciliation especially between a dominant group and a less powerful group as the case might be with some ethnic conflicts in Africa?

5.5.4 Some Conditions for the Practice of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Commenting on Tutu’s belief that forgiveness is the only way to restore dignity to a relationship that has been violated by conflict, Donna Hicks contends that forgiveness must be freely pursued by the conflicting parties. Hicks argues that even if all agree that forgiveness could be the mechanism that enables identity reconstruction, a move that has the potential to unlock entrenched self-understanding, there will still be a moral dilemma to address. The moral dilemma concerns the freedom or nonfreedom of the conflicting parties. Hicks argues that “engaging in a process of forgiveness is a personal choice and must remain in that realm, whether we are talking about forgiving someone for violating one’s dignity or forgiving oneself for robbing others of their dignity.” 364 That is, both victim and perpetrator must freely engage in the process of forgiveness towards reconciliation where a third party must have the courage to point out the wrongdoing of the perpetrator. Hick proposes some conditions which I find relevant for seeking reconciliation between ethnic groups that have suffered ethnic conflicts especially between a dominant and less dominant ethnic group. What are the necessary conditions that must be created to lead the parties in conflict to engage freely in the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation? What is required to reconstruct a relationship that was based on subjugation and domination to one that is respectful of human dignity?

First, a reconstruction of what happened with the intention of arriving at an agreeable interpretation of events must go beyond an intellectual account. That is, such a reconstruction must go beyond the cognitive level and deal with the ‘felt experiences’ of both parties. In the concrete, it means acknowledging the trauma and the humiliation that each group may have suffered during the conflict. This is not to suggest that the level of responsibility in relation to the eruption of the conflict is necessarily the same for both parties.

Second, the group with more power must come to terms with their misperceptions and biases that produced and maintained a relationship of domination and subjugation, the consequences of which are now evident in the conflict. They must confront the denial that their own humanity is incapable of inflicting such inhuman atrocities on the other. “They need to accept that, as a result of their domination, they caused immeasurable suffering and humiliation for the low power group.”365 The third party must help the group with more power come to terms with what they have done. This must be done gradually and not in an explosive manner, so that the psychological effect and the humiliation that results from the process is not too damaging. The third party must be able to point out, first before the high power group alone, and then before both parties, that the higher power group has indeed committed atrocities against the weaker.

Third, the low power group has an equally, if not more difficult task. As a way of reconstructing the relationship in view of reconciliation and peaceful co-existence, members of this group “must let go their ‘victim’ identity which would require them to relinquish the moral advantage that has been the source of their power for the duration of

365 Ibid., 144.
the conflict.”366 Ultimately, this means letting go the hostility and need for revenge that they harboured against the higher power group that caused them the enormous suffering.

Finally, it is important that the third party creates a safe environment for the low power group to articulate what happened and why no other group should have to go through what they have gone through. This must be acknowledged by the third party before the low power group alone and later during a face-to-face dialogue with the high power group. These conditions are relevant in resolving ethnic conflicts in Africa especially between dominant and less powerful groups where the relationship has been characterized by domination and subjugation.

What Hicks’ analysis makes explicit is that the task of reconstructing narratives or identities, and by extension relationships between conflicting parties in view of reconciliation, is a shared responsibility. However, Hicks believes that the discourse on reconciliation and forgiveness has been unduly placed on the shoulders of victims. Without denying that forgiveness as a category contains within itself the potential to break the barrier created by enclosed identities, Hicks is of the view that the scales should be shifted to the high power groups. That is, practitioners of reconciliation should evolve a process that helps high power groups confront denial.367 The process that is evolved must be able to help perpetrators take responsibility for their actions and still maintain their psychological integrity.

On the one hand I take the position that there is no future without forgiveness. On the other, I agree that this must be accompanied by responsibility, especially on the part

366 Ibid., 144.
367 Ibid., 148.
of high power groups. It does not seem that Tutu’s insistence on forgiveness meant a total
denial of accountability on the part of those who had violated human rights during the
apartheid regime, given the requirements of a full disclosure of crime and of a guilty plea
respectively on the part of perpetrators.

Indeed, both Tutu’s and Hicks’ contributions are relevant in addressing the
question of how forgiveness and justice relate in the process of reconciliation, one
speaking to a specific and a qualified context, and the other to a more general context,
even if it is possible to apply the latter also to specific contexts.

Reconciliation and healing through the giving and receiving of forgiveness as a
means of resolving ethnic conflicts must be complimented by the transformation of
society. What resources can the Christian tradition offer for the transformation of social
agents and society in view of a peaceful society?

5.6 Social Transformation

A careful review of Girard’s hermeneutic of desire, his anthropological interpretation of
the Cross and the light that it sheds on atonement theology reveal, among other things,
the goal of transformation. It is sufficient to recall Lonergan’s and Girard’s contribution
to soteriology as I discussed it in chapter three: both thinkers see human transformation
and the reversal of violence as the fruit of grace flowing from the Cross. Similarly, we
recall Schwager’s treatment of Jesus’ death within the categories of identification and
transformation as a theme that envisions the transformation of the individual and society.
By taking up the problem of identity and otherness as a theological task, and by applying
the theological fruits from his reflection to social questions, Volf has at the same time
sought to address the question of transformation. That is, by raising the question of how people might construct their identities so as to be able to relate with other people, Volf has focused on the character of social agents. Volf’s choice of focus is based on his conviction that magnanimous social agents are capable of envisioning and creating societies that are marked by justice, truthfulness and peace.\textsuperscript{368} Significantly, transformed social agents will help shape a cultural climate in which they themselves can thrive. Volf’s decision to focus on the character of social agents rather than on social arrangements does not mean that the Christian faith cannot be brought to bear on social arrangements or that the issue of social arrangements is not important. Rather, his decision is informed by the conviction that the question of social arrangements is primarily the task of Christian economists, political scientists and social philosophers who have the relevant expertise.\textsuperscript{369} Christian theologians have the responsibility to help, but their proper task should be to form the right social agents in society.

The assumption is that the Christian tradition has the relevant resources needed for the formation and transformation of social agents in view of transforming a world of violence to one of nonviolence. How can a magnanimous society be created in view of a peaceful society? To respond to this question I draw on the insights of Kevin J. Ahern, insights that complement those of Girard, Schwager and Volf because they deal with transformation of people and society. Even though the context is different, the four principles that Ahern discusses can be applied to the African context.

\textsuperscript{368}Volf, \textit{Exclusion and Embrace}, 21.

\textsuperscript{369}Ibid., 21.
In his essay, “Virtue, Vulnerability, and Social Transformation”, Ahern examines the dynamics that have been at work since the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001. He argues that this violent tragedy has had a profound effect on the collective psyche of the American people. Both media and politicians have systematically portrayed the tragedy of 9/11 as a sign of vulnerability that must be overcome. Against this background Ahern raises questions about vulnerability and explores Aquinas’s notion of magnanimity. He then suggests that such an approach has the potential to liberate the American people from the culture of fear together with its negative consequences. Ahern argues that the virtue of magnanimity has the potential to transform society. My intention is not to go into the details of Aquinas’ understanding of magnanimity, rather it is to highlight the insights that Ahern draws out and my own application of these insights.

Is the experience of vulnerability necessarily negative? Must the response to vulnerability be negative? Are there alternatives to denial, fear and the obsessive desire for control? Should vulnerability and dependency be rejected? Ahern’s exploration of Aquinas’ notion of magnanimity answers the above questions and provides an alternative response to vulnerability. In Aquinas’ framework as Ahern presents it, genuine security is located not in power or control of others but in the elimination of inordinate fear. In the same framework, vulnerability and dependency are not to be rejected but accepted as part of our creaturely nature. It is only when we are able to receive grace as a gift from God, that is, our vulnerability and dependency on God, that we can experience happiness even if in an imperfect way here on earth. Magnanimity, humility and vulnerability go together in Aquinas’ framework. On the one hand a magnanimous person works towards achieving great things such as the attainment of the common good in accordance with
right reason. On the other, humility refrains one from attaining those things that are not in accordance with right reason. Presumably, acting out of fear and an inordinate desire to control the other, resulting in unjust practices or the annihilation of the other, would be an example of acting against right reason and therefore against humility. Significantly, humility as a complementary dimension of magnanimity also reveals to us the knowledge that we are vulnerable and dependent creatures. Authentic self-knowledge in turn “helps us to overcome the sin that is rooted in an inordinate, all too often prideful vision of the self.”

Ahern contends that the virtues of magnanimity, humility and vulnerability can be applied to the American social context even if only analogically. It is here that he draws out some relevant insights or implications that I find helpful; they complement the insights of Girard, Schwager and Volf insofar as they speak to the issue of social transformation. First, Ahern speaks about the principle of empowered agency. Because a magnanimous person pursues the common good according to right reason and is concerned about the well-being of his or her neighbour, such a person as an empowered agent must empower others to become magnanimous agents as well. A nation that is magnanimous must empower other nations to become agents of magnanimity. Africa more than ever needs magnanimous leaders to bring about social magnanimity. Both church and state must endeavour more than ever in their efforts to create a magnanimous society on the African continent. There is the need to evolve the relevant social and

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religious programmes with this goal in view and to re-evaluate any such programmes if they already exist.

The second principle that arises from social magnanimity is that of solidarity or interdependence. We should not valorize the false principle of self-sufficiency. As creatures, we must realize our need for God and the other. Recognition of our dependency on God and on other people frees us from the evils of pride and ambition. Ethnic groups, no matter how dominant they might have been in their history should resist the danger of valorizing the false principle of self-sufficiency and the implications that are involved therein. Alternatively, the principle of solidarity can transform inter-ethnic relations that are characterized by rivalry, competition and conflict to relationships based on friendship, cooperation and mutual benefit.

To realize the transformative potential of solidarity between different ethnic groups that have suffered from violent conflicts and are working towards reconciliation, engaging them in common and mutually beneficial projects can be fruitful. This common engagement can be in the area of agriculture, an income generating project, building of schools and attending to the needs of children who have been traumatized by the conflict. The initiative can either come from the Government or from community groups. An engagement of this kind can help them overcome negative perceptions and hostility and in fact lead them to appreciate “each other’s similarity and humanness.”371 Here, one might add that the opportunity to appreciate each other’s humanness within the

371 Ervin Staub and Laurie Anne Pearlman, “Healing, Reconciliation, Forgiving after Genocide and Other Collective Violence,” in Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy and Conflict Transformation, eds. Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L. Petersen (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001), 224. The research of Staub and Pearlman relates specifically to the genocide in Rwanda where they personally conducted interviews and workshops for survivors from both Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups as part of the process towards forgiveness, healing and reconciliation.
framework of a common engagement has the potential to heal dramatic, egoistic and group bias, insights from Lonergan that I earlier on referred to. With respect to dramatic bias, the victims who have been wounded psychologically during the conflict will gradually learn to shed off their fear of the perpetrators. They may also learn to refrain from overacting emotionally to perceived threats that have a semblance with those they have suffered from in the past. Because the group is working on a project that transcends the interests of any particular group, egoistic bias which seeks only personal interests is overcome. More importantly, group bias which not only looks to the interests of the group, in this case a particular ethnic group, but also fuels “fear, aggressive competition, resentment and hatred” between different ethnic groups can be overcome.

The third principle that emerges from social magnanimity is the notion of positive freedom. Freedom is defined not merely as freedom from but as freedom for. Because the magnanimous person stretches his or her mind towards the attainment of great things such as the common good, freedom for him or her means doing good things not only for himself or herself but for others as well. Consequently, he or she must develop a positive philosophy of life. That is, he or she must avoid defining the other in negative terms which then determine how he or she relates to the other. An ethnic group must avoid defining the other group by way of negative categories which then become a guide to

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372 Dadosky, ‘Naming the Demon’: The ‘Structure’ of Evil in Lonergan and Girard”, 360. Overcoming bias in its different forms actually forms part of the healing of mimetic rivalry and violence which is one of the important issues that Dadosky addresses in his essay. Dadosky draws upon insights from Girard, Lonergan and Aquinas. The transformation of bias within the framework of a common engagement, in my view, is one way of putting into practice Volf’s theological category of embrace which is an alternative to the practice of exclusion. For how to deal with the various types of bias, see for example, Terry J. Tekippe, *Bernard Lonergan’s Insight: A Comprehensive Commentary* (Lahham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2003), 108.
how it relates to the other. It must also be willing and interested in working for the good of people from other ethnic groups.

The fourth and the final principle that is linked to magnanimity is that of justice. A magnanimous person does not conceal the truth or work against justice. In the Thomistic framework, as Ahern points out, there is a link between the culture of fear and control on the one hand and the practice of injustice on the other. Ahern argues that this link has shown itself since 9/11. He contends that since 9/11 many people who have been suspected of terrorism have been detained without due process of justice and transparency. Similarly, in the African context the employment of the control mechanism, a practice that is often informed by fear of losing hegemony, has led to rivalrous power struggles or to intensification of already existing power struggles, sometimes leading to violent conflicts. This can be reversed by inner transformation that enables people to want to share scarce resources. A transformed and magnanimous society would ensure that no group is denied their due. Giving each group their due socially, economically, politically and respecting their dignity as persons can help promote cordial inter-ethnic relations and peaceful co-existence.

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been one of analysis and appropriation. Through analysis I highlighted the implications of the thought and theology of Girard, Schwager and Volf with two main objectives in mind. First, to shed light on the phenomenon of ethnic conflicts in Africa and alternatives to such conflicts. The second objective was to highlight the implications of the theology of these thinkers and how it resonates with the healing of ethnic rivalry and conflicts especially in the area of forgiveness and reconciliation. In brief, I sought to highlight what these thinkers can contribute to the African context under consideration, that is, how their insights can help interpret and respond to our context.

I referenced Girard’s hermeneutic of desire to explain the struggle for power between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups and how this eventually led to the genocide. I observed that the highlighting of differences usually aimed at getting a group, very often a dominant group, to polarize against another, was present in both conflicts. I employed the rivalry that is often found between subject and mediator in explaining the dynamics involved in both conflicts.

I revisited and explored in detail the Hamitic hypothesis as an example of the misappropriation of theology, delineating such negative effects as its contribution to the genocide in Rwanda. As an alternative to this misappropriation I drew upon insights from Girard, Schwager, Volf and other thinkers to explore a theology of nonviolence as the basis of forgiveness, justice and reconciliation. In proposing reconciliation and healing as an important means of resolving ethnic conflicts in Africa, I sought to integrate
perspectives from the Second African Synod and the South African experience with insights from Volf, Girard and Schwager. However, reconciliation and healing through forgiveness must be complemented by working to transform social agents in view of a magnanimous and a peaceful society. I drew upon Ahern’s engagement with Aquinas’s take on magnanimity not only as an example of what the Christian tradition can offer in this regard but as way of complementing Girard, Schwager and Volf’s common interest in social transformation. Ultimately, my intention was to apply the insights from Aquinas’s take on magnanimity to the African context with respect to inter-ethnic relations in a positive and fruitful way.
General Conclusion

The question that this thesis addresses is whether there are relevant insights that can be drawn from some contemporary interpretations of the atonement which can be used to interpret and respond to the phenomenon of violent ethnic conflicts in Africa. Answering in the affirmative it explored the theology and thoughts of Girard, Schwager and Volf with the view to drawing out these relevant insights. At the end of the thesis we can state with some measure of confidence that these insights do in fact shed light on the phenomenon of inter-ethnic rivalry and conflict and provide at the same time resources for responding to such conflicts.

For instance, while Girard’s anthropology of desire is not strictly theological, it is nonetheless an important anthropological discovery that this thesis engaged in order to shed light not just on ethnic conflicts in general but especially on the Hutu-Tutsi and Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflicts. On the strength of the argument that appropriative mimesis can easily transition into conflictual mimesis, where the object of desire apparently disappears and competing rivals collide directly in violent antagonism, this thesis has demonstrated how this was relevant in the case of the two ethnic conflicts. Conflictual mimesis, reflected in political ambition, did take shape in the case of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict in the formation of rival political parties and movements just before the 1959 social revolution. Similarly, in the Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict, conflictual mimesis took shape through an interplay of traditional and modern politics as the Konkomba demanded to have their own paramount chiefs and traditional council. Girard’s appropriative mimesis helped explain the reality of ethnic competition for other resources such as land, education and employment.
Through our analysis of the Hamitic hypothesis, we addressed the category of power and powerlessness as a significant category that led to the scapegoating of entire ethnic groups with respect to the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict and the Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict. But scapegoating violence is often preceded by projecting accusations of heinous crimes upon the scapegoat. Combining this insight from Girard with Volf’s idea of symbolic exclusion and Lonergan’s idea of bias, especially group bias, this thesis was able to demonstrate how all these negative ideas were at work prior to or during the two ethnic conflicts with terrible consequences especially in the case of the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic conflict. The greater the level of polarization the more horrendous the massacres.

Volf’s treatment of ethnic and cultural conflicts within the broader framework of identity and otherness has been helpful in explaining conflicts including ethnic conflicts in Africa. The categories of identity and otherness are relevant for understanding interpersonal as well as in inter-ethnic relations. Exclusion in its different forms as discussed in this thesis was a significant factor in both conflicts.

More than how insights from our thinkers have shed light on our context in question is how they can help contribute to the healing and amelioration of ethnic rivalries and conflicts.

Inspired by the redemptive aspects of the Cross delineated by Girard, Schwager and Volf, this thesis was able to take an important position and has argued that God need not be implicated in violence since the violence of the Cross is human violence which was absorbed by Jesus and transformed into an instrument of salvation for the same humanity that expelled God through crucifixion. On the basis of this, the thesis has
argued that God is nonviolent and non-vindicative. This was particularly demonstrated in our engagement with Volf’s theological category of embrace, with Girard’s notion of positive mimesis and with the meaning that Schwager ascribes to Jesus’ self-giving to a violent death and in the form of bread and wine and how these two forms of giving shed light on each other. Inspired by the reflections of our thinkers, this thesis has demonstrated that restorative justice through which the humanity of both victim and perpetrator are restored and healed is the appropriate approach when seeking reconciliation between ethnic groups that have suffered from inter-rivalry and ethnic conflicts. This received further attention as we attempted to integrate perspectives from the Second African Synod and the South African experience with those of Girard, Schwager and Volf.

As part of the attempt to bring about reconciliation and healing through the giving and receiving of forgiveness between ethnic groups that have suffered from violent conflicts, this thesis, basing itself on the principle of interdependence or solidarity, discussed in both chapters one and five, has suggested that it is helpful to engage both parties in a common project. This has the potential not only to deepen the reconciliation process but also to overcome previous biases.

Volf’s Abrahamic revolution and its Christian re-appropriation were helpful in stressing the primacy of Christian identity and its relevance especially for the African context where ethnocentricism remains a threat within the Church and in the larger society. The thesis did not only highlight once again the importance of Christian identity but made an important suggestion. African Christians are to model and educate their fellow tribe’s men and women regarding the dignity and equality of all people including
people from ethnic groups that they previously considered inferior. For example, this could be done through the various Youth Associations which are usually political in orientation and ethnic in membership. Rather than use such associations to propagate hatred, rivalry and violence, they could be used to build bridges between different ethnic groups especially those that have had difficult relations in the past.

Apart from exploring a theology of nonviolence as the foundation for the practice of reconciliation and healing through the giving and receiving of forgiveness between ethnic groups that have suffered from violent conflict, this thesis, while maintaining the moral requirements of justice and accountability, has advocated dialogue between ethnic groups in the face of systemic violence. Here, traditional chiefs and state functionaries should be involved.

We conclude by stating that the significance of this thesis lies in its application of some contemporary interpretations of the Cross as found in Girard, Schwager and Volf in addressing the phenomenon of ethnic conflicts in Africa with the view to promote a peaceful alternative to rivalrous ethnic relations. By establishing the relevant hermeneutical and theological framework and applying the insights drawn from this framework to our context, this thesis has taken seriously not only the category of context but also that of social location. It has also demonstrated that there should never be a disconnection between salvation and ethics, between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Theological reflection must be brought to bear on social issues. In broad terms, it has shown why anthropological issues must enter into theological discourse.
If this thesis has succeeded in doing what it set out to do it is by no means exhaustive in its exploration and engagement. For example, it has not addressed the issue of inter-religious dialogue as an important means to overcoming conflicts especially religious conflicts in Africa. This could be explored in the future. But I hope to have laid some intellectual foundations for peaceful inter-ethnic relations in post-colonial Africa—a continent whose true riches have yet to be mined.
Appendix

Other causes of the 1994 Konkomba-Nanumba Ethnic Conflict

I. The Problem of Tribal Exploitation

In his analysis of how chieftaincy has been significantly related to both intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts in the northern region of Ghana, from 1980 to 2002, N.J.K. Brukum contends that the first Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict was less about chieftaincy and more about Konkomba discontent with certain Nanumba customs practiced by Nanumba chiefs. Konkomba were required to pay tribute in the form of foodstuffs and livestock to Nanumba chiefs and to work on their farms. The Konkomba resented these customs which they regarded as obsolete and exploitative.

However, what was very disturbing for the Konkomba was the fact that even their marital disputes, disputes which presumably revolved around very intimate and private matters, had to be settled before a Nanumba chief and for a fee. The Konkomba resented this not merely because of the fee or the private nature of such matters, but more

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374 Note that most of the inter-ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana have been between the so-called ‘majority’ tribes and the so-called ‘minority’ tribes. The classification is more about political organization and less about demography. The term ‘minority’ is synonymous with the term acephalous while the term ‘majority’ is synonymous with the term cephalous-terms used by some early European ethnologists and anthropologists to describe African tribal groups that they believed either lacked or had central authority. See Van der Linde and Naylor, Building Sustainable Peace, 15. The Konkomba have been labelled a ‘minority’ tribe even though they are the second largest group after the Dagomba. See N.J.K Brukum, “Chieftaincy and Ethnic Conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana 1980-2002,” 99.

375 Ibid., 107. This is corroborated by the findings of David Tait, a social anthropologist, who carried out field studies among the Konkomba. While Tait does not speak here about the kind of relationship that existed between the Konkomba and the Nanumba but rather about the relationship between the Konkomba and the Dagomba, he nonetheless highlights the presence of similar customs among the Dagomba. He also points out how the relationship between the Konkomba and the Dagomba was characterized by hostility and extortion. See David Tait, The Konkomba of Northern Ghana, ed. Jack Goody, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 9.
importantly because the Konkomba believed that marital disputes would be better arbitrated by their own chiefs, who understood better the customs related to Konkomba traditional marriage. It therefore came as no surprise when the Konkomba Youth Association demanded that Konkomba living outside their traditional home be allowed to choose their own chiefs to adjudicate their problems. This demand became contentious and heightened tensions that it needed only a spark for a conflict to erupt and this came when a Konkomba man and a Nanumba man quarrelled in a pito bar.

By speaking about the problem of tribal exploitation in relation to the 1981 Konkomba-Nanumba conflict, I intend to make two related points. The first is that the 1994 Konkomba-Nanumba conflict, described as the most devastating ethnic conflict in Ghana since independence, can be understood only in relation to the 1981 conflict since unresolved issues in the first conflict boiled over into the second. The second is that during the 1994 ethnic conflict, the Konkomba pointed to tribal exploitation as one of their grievances.

Ibrahim Mahama however holds a different opinion and refutes the Konkomba’s assertion about tribal exploitation. Mahama contends that what Konkomba call tribal exploitation should be seen as duties and services that must be rendered to Dagomba.

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376 It is important to note that the Konkomba Youth Association, which was formed in the 1970s, had a number of objectives, among which was the intention to abolish obsolete customs and to project the culture of the Konkomba people through education.

377 *Pito* is the locally brewed beer traditional to the three northern regions: Northern Region, Upper West Region and Upper East Region, even though it can be found in other parts of the country where people of northern extraction have settled. It is brewed from guinea corn, a cereal cultivated mostly in Northern Ghana.
chiefs as laid down by Dagomba custom. Mahama’s reference to these customs is supported by the findings of Martin Staniland.\textsuperscript{378}

Mahama argues that if, Dagomba commoners are required to fulfill the obligations of these laid down customs, then it is only logical that the Konkomba, whom the Dagomba regard as settlers, should “do the same or even more.”\textsuperscript{379} As the argument stands, it does seem fair to say that Mahama is less concerned about the fairness of these arrangements in themselves, even if dictated by custom, and more concerned about what category of people are required to perform such customary duties. To the extent that Dagombas, who are citizens, are required by customary law to render such duties, the same demands imposed on others, like the Konkomba, are justified. I see some of the theories that I delineated in chapter one at work in this particular situation. For example, the issue of tribal exploitation as the Konkomba see it is very much linked to the theory of deprivation and perceived unfairness. The former, it would be recalled often leads to anger, frustration, group mobilization and ultimately to violence.\textsuperscript{380}

Regarding the adjudication of Konkomba marital problems by chiefs of the ‘majority’ tribes like the Dagomba and the Nanumba, Mahama argues that long before the colonial era, chiefs of the majority tribes had the right to adjudicate in both civil and criminal matters even if their right with respect to the latter was later curtailed. The right

\textsuperscript{378} Martin Staniland, \textit{The Lions of Dagbon: Political Change in Northern Ghana} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 35. In discussing the dynamics of the traditional Dagomba state, Staniland points out that those who were subjects of Dagomba chiefs, apart from working on their farms had to pay tribute in the form of labour and foodstuff, a practice Dagomba themselves seem to have no difficulty with. It is important to add that the Konkomba interpreted the payment of tribute as an act that gives legitimacy to Dagomba traditional political authority over them.

\textsuperscript{379} Mahama, \textit{Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Ghana}, 30

\textsuperscript{380} A concrete example of group mobilization by the Konkomba as a response to their situation of exploitation was the setting up of their own yam market in Accra, in Ghana’s capital. This must have been motivated by both economic and political reasons. See for example, Van der Linde and Naylor, \textit{Building Sustainable Peace}, 17.
of the chiefs to adjudicate in civil matters was only taken away when Ghana became independent. Even there, this was replaced by the chiefs’ right to arbitrate in customary law and “as long as the subjects submit themselves to a customary arbitration the chief does so impartially whether the subjects before him belong to the minority or majority tribes.” Mahama’s use of the word ‘submit’ in relation to the chief’s subjects is of great importance here. Submission is an act of volition. That the Konkomba, through their Youth Association, had demanded that Konkomba living outside their traditional home be allowed to choose their own chiefs to arbitrate their disputes including marital disputes does suggest that Konkombas were no longer willing to submit themselves to the customary law exercised by chiefs of the majority tribes.

Linked to the problem of tribal exploitation has been the question of negative stereotypes and how these stereotypes relate to inter-ethnic relations and violence. I will return to the problem of stereotypes in the final chapter but suffice it to say that once a people’s identity and culture together with their very humanity have been denigrated by another group, there is likely to be resentment and hatred leading to violent conflict.

381 Mahama, Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Ghana, 32.
382 See for example, Julie Kaye and Daniel Béland, “The politics of ethnicity and post-conflict reconstruction: the case of Northern Ghana” Journal of Contemporary African Studies, 27/2 (2009), 183-184. One can appreciate the formation of the Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA) and its objectives against the background of these customs which the Konkomba saw as exploitative. About the rise of youth associations and their importance as political entities in contemporary Ghanaian society, see Van der Linde and Naylor, Building Sustainable Peace, 19-20. Van der Linde and Naylor explain that these youth associations are often ethnic based where the leaders understand themselves as opinion leaders who conscientize and empower their ethnic groups. In effect, youth associations offer political leadership within the realm of the various chiefdoms. See also Carole Lentz, Ethnicity and the Making of History Northern Ghana (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 228-233. Even though Lentz’s exploration of youth associations is more around the western part of Northern Ghana, she makes similar observations. The term ‘youth’ is primarily a socio-political category, and only in its broadest sense does it depict a biological connotation in terms of gender and age. For an argument that these youth associations are essentially ethno-political, see the same author in her essay, “Youth Associations and Ethnicity in Northern Ghana” in Ethnicity, Conflicts and Consensus in Ghana, ed. Steve Tonah (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2007), 45-46.
Let us now turn to the issue of Konkomba’s demand for paramountcy as an important cause of the conflict under consideration. A brief examination of this issue might shed more light on the problem of horizontal inequalities as well as on ethnic competition for both economic and political resources.

II. The Demand for Paramountcy by the Konkomba and its Implications

On the 29th of June 1993, the Konkomba presented a petition to the National House of Chiefs in which they demanded paramountcy and their own traditional council. The Konkomba advanced a number of reasons for their request, but the ultimate reason speaks to their desire to obtain independence within the realm of traditional politics and to ensure their inclusion in national politics. They argued that it was the British colonial administration which had incorrectly described them as a stateless people and which had placed them under the so-called chiefly ethnic groups like the Dagomba, the Gonja and the Nanumba, after elevating their local authorities to paramountcies. The Konkomba expressed their conviction that the granting of paramountcy and their own traditional council would offer them the opportunity to live and practice their own culture and traditions, and that this in turn would serve the good of the country as a whole.\(^{384}\)

Traditionally, to have their own paramountcy meant by extension the creation of their own chiefs\(^{385}\) and their own juridical system which would ‘emancipate’ them from what they believed was an imposition of British colonial rule.

\(^{384}\) See the petition of the Konkomba dated 29th of June addressed to the National House of Chiefs. Quoted in Mahama, *Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Ghana*, 13. In the opinion of Mahama, it was this petition of the Konkombas which ignited the war flames in the Northern Region in 1994.

The Konkomba argued that their lack of power in both the traditional and modern sense of the word meant their exclusion from decision-making and that this has had negative consequences with respect to their social and economic well-being. The lack of political power not only reinforced the Konkomba people’s sense of marginalization, it placed their situation of unmet basic needs in sharper focus, needs that had do with their “social and economic security.” The desire for recognition and political influence by the Konkomba eventually found expression in their demand for paramountcy.

This demand would be resisted by the leadership of such centralized tribes as the Dagomba, the Nanumba and Gonja, who regarded such a request as an attempt to diminish their own power. This interplay of traditional and modern politics in which an ethnic group felt excluded was an important cause of the conflict. As we will see,

Northern Ghana but especially in the Northern Region, not because the Northern Region has the greatest number of conflicts related to chieftaincy, but because of the violent and destructive nature of such conflicts and how they constitute a threat to national stability. Speaking about the Dagomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict, Anamzoya contends that an important cause was the Konkomba’s request for a paramountcy of their own. A paramountcy would mean not only the independence of the Konkomba as a people, but that their own paramount chief could assume the role of enskinning, that is, creating other Konkomba sub-chiefs without the interference of the Dagomba and Nanumba ethnic groups. In fact, at the end of his essay, Anamzoya, among other things, proposes that it would be appropriate that every ethnic group in the Northern Region should have paramountcy and a traditional council of its own and should be represented at the Northern Regional House of Chiefs. The Northern Regional House of Chiefs in turn should be expanded so as to reflect not only the current heterogeneity of the region, but also the changing realities on the ground where ethnic groups like the Konkomba, hitherto considered a minority tribe and as settlers, are in fact the second largest group after the Dagomba and were among some of the first people to settle in Northern Ghana. Anamzoya makes these suggestions as a way of responding to the phenomenon of violent chieftaincy-related conflicts in the Northern Region and ultimately for the sake of maintaining and restoring peace.

387 Ibid., 201. Accordingly, the principles of social justice, equity and accountability articulated during the 31st December Revolution under Jerry John Rawlings had an impact on the imagination of Ghanaians especially people of non-centralized tribes who felt politically excluded.
388 See for example, Mahama, Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Ghana, 14. Mahama contends that the Konkomba did not think of the implications of their demands nor did occur to them that making such demands would reduce the status of the majority tribes who from time immemorial had enjoyed the status and rights that the Konkomba were now demanding.
Miroslav Volf’s theory of exclusion and how this leads to violent conflicts will help shed light on this.

III. The Question of Land Ownership

The demand for paramountcy, as political as it is, was also related to the issue of land ownership. The right to own land has been at the centre of tension and conflict between the so-called acephalous and cephalous ethnic groups in the Northern Region of Ghana. The ‘chiefly’ ethnic groups claim the right to land, a claim strongly contested by the people of non-centralized ethnic groups. The issue of land ownership between the Konkomba and the Nanumba, for example, did not start with the 1994 conflict but was there even before the 1981 conflict.

Already in 1978, the Issifu Alhassan Committee, officially known as the “Committee on Ownership of Land and Positions of Tenants in Northern and Upper Regions was established to investigate land tenure possibilities in the Northern and Upper Regions.”\(^\text{389}\) Apart from the fact that the composition of this committee was highly flawed,\(^\text{390}\) its recommendations leave much to be desired since it left the so-called acephalous groups in a disadvantaged position. The committee recommended that “all lands be vested in the hands of the four major ‘chiefly’ groups of the Northern Region (that is, Dagomba, Nanumba, Gonja and Mamprusi).”\(^\text{391}\) During Ghana’s Third Republic

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\(^{390}\) The composition was as follows: ‘Majority tribes in the Northern Region’-6; Upper Regions-4; South-4; the thirteen ‘minority’ groups in the Northern Region-0. Obviously, the concerns of the latter group had not been taken into consideration.

\(^{391}\) Ibid. 183.
(1979-1981) under Dr. Hilla Limann, this became part of Ghana’s constitution by which the country for the first time in its modern history officially recognized that land tenure is vested in whichever ethnic groups–and their authorities–happen to be historically dominant in any particular area. This certainly could not have been in the interest of non-centralized tribes like the Konkomba, who had always been regarded as a people without chiefs and as settlers, and therefore as not historically dominant. Ultimately, it would seem that the Konkomba were dissatisfied with the recommendations of the Alhassan Committee, and so it came as no surprise when the first large ethnic conflict in Ghana, that is, the 1981 Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict, broke out soon afterwards.

393 The question of land is also connected to the question of origins. See for example, Mahama, Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Ghana, 23-25 In his response to the Konkomba claim that they and other so-called minority tribes have been denied traditional independence by both British colonial officials and by the centralized tribes and for which reason they should be granted paramountcy and a traditional council of their own, the Ya-Na, that is, the King of the Dagomba traditional area, presents a brief historical background regarding the origins of the Konkomba people and comes to the conclusion that the Konkomba are originally from Togo. There is subtle connection here between the question of origins and land ownership. It is further contended that when the British colonial authorities wanted to secure a presence in Northern Region in the latter part of the nineteen century, they signed treaties with the four major tribes and their kings. Such an assertion has implications. Mahama makes the claim that the Konkomba had always been under Dagomba sovereignty with the Ya-Na as Head of State and Commander-in-chief of Dagbon. For a version that supports the thesis that the Konkomba were already in eastern Dagbon before they were invaded by the Dagomba and others, see Cliff S. Maasole, The Konkomba and their Neighbours in the Pre-European Period up to 1914: A Study in Inter-ethnic Relations in Northern Ghana (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 2006), 21-26. By engaging both traditional myths of origin and history, Maasole’s findings are inclined more towards supporting the thesis of Kokomba anteriority. See also Ladouceur, Chiefs and Politicians: The Politics of Regionalism in Northern Ghana, 28-29. Cf., Arthur Bogner, “Making Peace in Northern Ghana: The Role of Non-Government Organizations and Traditional Authorities,” in Contemporary Social Problems in Ghana, ed. Steve Tonah (Accra, Ghana: Yamens Press, 2009), 79-80. Bogner writes of the claims regarding the sovereignty that centralized tribes like the Dagomba, the Gonja and the Nanumba wielded over the Konkomba in pre-colonial times but raises concerns about the authenticity of such accounts which have been based on oral traditions handed down by the praise-singers of the chiefly tribes. Bogner contends that available written accounts and ethnographic field research carried out during the colonial period tend to support the assumption that the chiefless Konkomba ethnic group accepted the rule of the Dagomba chiefs because of the support that the latter had from British colonial officials. Bogner also points out that even though during the 1994 ethnic conflict the Konkomba were described as a people from Togo by chiefs of the ‘majority’ tribes, they, the Konkomba are nonetheless actually one of the oldest settlement groupings in what is now Northern Ghana. I have drawn attention to these sources so as to point to the debates about who is indigenous and who is a settler. Ultimately, my intention is to show that the question of paramountcy is connected either directly or indirectly with the question of land ownership and ethnic origins.
The question of land ownership which was an important factor in the 1981 conflict and which remained unresolved became an important factor in the eruption of the 1994 conflict.\textsuperscript{394} As we will see, Girard’s idea of appropriative mimesis can be employed to explain the desire and the competition for resources and land.

That the question of land ownership was a significant factor in the eruption of the 1994 Konkomba-Nanumba ethnic conflict reveals two important historical issues. First, it points to the debate about the origins of the ‘majority’ and the ‘minority’ tribes in the Northern Region of Ghana. Second, it points to the kind of relationships that existed between the ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ tribes both in pre-colonial and colonial times and to how British colonial administration exacerbated already hostile relationships through its policy of indirect rule.

IV. The Relationship between the Konkomba and their neighbours in pre-independence Ghana

In his \textit{Chiefs and Politicians: The Politics of Regionalism in Northern Ghana}, Paul André Ladouceur examines in broad terms north-south relations in pre-colonial Ghana, and how this in turn influenced the relationship between centralized states like the Dagomba and the Gonja and non-centralized states like the Konkomba.

In discussing north-south relations, Ladouceur focuses on the pattern of relations between the Asante kingdom in the south of Ghana and some northern kingdoms like the

\textsuperscript{394} Even though a strong case has been made for a correlation between the Konkomba’s demand for paramountcy and the issue of land ownership as shown by the available evidence some people think differently. For example, Mahama argues to the contrary. If Mahama is right, one must wrestle with the question why after the conflict, the Government of Ghana prevailed over the Ya Na, the King of Dagbon, to grant the Konkomba a paramount status, a reality the Konkomba had always considered as significantly related to political autonomy and land ownership. See Mahama, \textit{Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Ghana}, 34-40.
Gonja and Dagomba kingdoms. Initially, trade was the main reason for the relationship.

Even though trade brought prosperity to Gonja and Dagomba people in comparison to the other ethnic groups, it came at a cost: the domination and the incorporation of both Gonja and Dagomba kingdoms into the Asante kingdom, with far-reaching consequences for inter-ethnic relations in the Northern Region.

Shortly after a decisive defeat of the Gonja by the Dagomba in 1713, both Gonja and Dagomba were brought “under the influence of the rising power in the forest zone, Asante, and remained within the structure of Greater Asante until the late nineteenth century.”395 As conquered kingdoms under Asante, “both Dagomba and Gonja paid tribute, primarily in the form of slaves, to Asante on a regular basis over a period of about a century.”396 The need to pay tribute not only furthered the superior/subordinate relationship between Asante and the two northern kingdoms, it also deepened further the superior/subordinate relationship of the centralized states with the so-called non-centralized ethnic groups in the region. The Gonja and Dagomba occasionally raided other ethnic groups, including the Grunshi, the Tchokosi and Konkomba, for slaves, as

395 Ladouceur, *Chiefs and Politicians*, 32. It is important to note that before this decisive defeat of the Gonja by the Dagomba followed by Asante domination and incorporation of both Gonja and Dagomba into Asante, there has been rivalry and wars between the Gonja on the one hand and the Dagomba and Nanumba on the other. Gonja expansionism in the mid-seventeenth century had brought it into violent conflict and wars with the Nanumba and the Dagomba. During this time, the Gonja not only conquered the Dagomba, but for nearly a century enjoyed a position of superiority over the Dagomba which obliged the Dagomba to cede some of their territories west of the White Volta, including the salt deposits at Daboya, which eventually became a Gonja divisional capital. Also, it forced the Dagomba to move their capital from Yendi Dabari near the White Volta to present day Yendi in eastern Dagomba. See also Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon*, 4-5. Staniland recounts Gonja expansionism under Sumaila Jakpa which was partly motivated by a competitive desire to control trade routes. He also points out that Yendi, the new capital of the Dagomba, was originally a Konkomba town called Chare. This is significant as it supports the claim that the Konkomba were in eastern Dagomba before they were driven out by the Dagomba through wars. See also Benjamin Talton, *Politics of Social Change in Ghana: The Konkomba Struggle for Political Equality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 24-26. Talton argues that the relationship between Konkomba and Dagomba goes beyond the categories of the conquered and the conqueror. In some cases the Konkomba gave their land to the Dagomba and migrated either in search of better farm lands or simply to avoid conflict.

396 Ibid., 33. See also Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana*, 9.
tribute to be paid to the Asante kingdom. As can be surmised, Asante’s attitude towards the north and the pattern of relationship that it had established with the north, characterized by subjugation, hostility and exploitation, had a negative impact on the relationships between centralized ethnic groups like the Gonja and the Dagomba on the one hand and the Konkomba on the other even before colonial rule. A superior/subordinate relationship, made worse by slave raiding, could only increase resentment and hostilities in inter-ethnic relations with negative repercussions for the future.
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