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RWANDA: PROGRESS OR POWDER KEG?

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Since the 1994 genocide that claimed the lives of three-quarters of Rwanda's minority Tutsi population and shattered the country's economy and infrastructure, President Paul Kagame and the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)—the predominantly Tutsi force responsible for vanquishing the *génocidaires*—have restored order and presided over a period of impressive modernization and economic development. Since 2003, Rwanda's annual economic-growth rate has been a robust 7 to 8 percent, and the country has made major progress in the areas of health and education. Among African countries, Rwanda has been a top achiever of the UN's Millennium Development Goals, and it has moved up the ranks to number 46 on the World Bank's Doing Business index.

But there is bad news as well. This progress has come at a steep price. The RPF has established its hegemony by eliminating political opposition and autonomous civil society, violating human rights, killing scores of its own citizens, and keeping tight control over the flow of information. The regime's increasingly authoritarian rule threatens all the achievements brought by its deft governance. How did the situation in Rwanda reach this point, and why has the international community largely remained silent?

Tiny, poor, and landlocked, Rwanda is nestled between Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Tanzania in the Great Lakes region of Africa. The country known as the "land of a thousand hills" is slightly smaller than the U.S. state of Maryland and home to twice as many people—roughly 12.3 million, making it the most densely populated country on the continent. Rwanda's population is divided

among three main ethnic groups: Hutu (90 percent), Tutsi (10 percent), and Twa (less than 1 percent). For centuries, the country was ruled by a Tutsi monarchy. It became a German colony in 1899 and later a mandate and then trust territory of Belgium prior to gaining independence in 1962.

Ethnic tensions escalated during the decade before independence, culminating in a bloody uprising of Hutus against Tutsi dominance that lasted from 1959 to 1961. The violence continued after independence, as Tutsi forces invaded Rwanda in 1963, and the Hutu—now in power—responded by massacring between ten and fifteen thousand Tutsi. By 1975, Rwanda had become a one-party state, led by President Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu who had come to power in 1973 in a bloodless coup.

In July 1990, amid the return to multiparty politics sweeping sub-Saharan Africa, Habyarimana, who was then in his third term in office, announced his intention to move Rwanda toward a multiparty system. In October 1990, however, the RPF (then made up mostly of Tutsi refugees in Uganda) invaded Rwanda, sparking a civil war. Beginning in July 1992, the RPF and the Rwandan government entered into negotiations in Arusha, Tanzania, eventually reaching an agreement that called for the establishment of a transitional power-sharing government by September 1993. That deadline was never met, and by February 1994 the country was roiling with street violence as the transitional period dragged on. Two months later, on 6 April 1994, the jet carrying Habyarimana and Burundian president Cyprien Ntaryamira back from Tanzania was shot down over Kigali, killing all aboard and triggering the hundred-day genocide against the Tutsi.

The genocide—an extreme manifestation of the instability that often accompanies political transitions—stemmed from the lethal mix of three factors: 1) the transition toward multiparty democracy; 2) a bipolar ethnic structure, which is difficult to manage anywhere (witness Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Greeks and Turks in Cyprus, Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, to give just three examples) but is even harder in poor countries such as Rwanda; and 3) the fact that the RPF was essentially a Tutsi movement, which made it easy for the genocidal regime to portray all Tutsi as RPF allies or accomplices—and therefore as “enemies”—when hostilities resumed.

Despite Rwanda’s repeated bouts of ethnic conflict and the civil war that had raged on and off from 1990 to 1993, the outside world had paid little attention to this before the genocide. But after the killing of up to a million people (mostly Tutsis, but also Hutus killed for political or criminal reasons, or massacred by the RPF), the international community finally took notice. Today, however, there are two radically opposing views of Rwanda—one that hails its visionary leadership, economic progress, market-oriented policies, empowerment of women, and

reforms in education, health, and agriculture, and another that condemns its autocratic rule, human-rights abuses, persecution of the Hutu majority, and growing inequality and rural poverty. The first view is held by most international aid agencies, and has been voiced by public figures such as Bono, Rick Warren, Bill Clinton, and Tony Blair. The second, more critical view is held by most scholars,¹ who fear that the resulting repression and injustice could lead to political instability and renewed conflict. This essay belongs to the second school.

Elections as a Means of Consolidation

From its first days in power, the RPF unilaterally imposed its will on the country while formally adhering to the power-sharing formula inscribed in the 1993 Arusha peace accords between the RPF and the Habyarimana government. The RPF, having defeated the government forces and put an end to the genocide (with little external support other than from Uganda), had free rein to ignore constitutional limitations and exercise power as it pleased. It did so willingly, knowing that it would stand no chance in an open political contest. By August 1995, the transitional national-unity government ceased to exist. The Hutu prime minister, Faustin Twagiramungu of the Democratic Republican Movement (MDR), resigned and left the country along with other cabinet members (including a Hutu RPF minister) in protest of the closing of political space, gross human-rights violations, and partisan appointments in the administration and judiciary.

This was just the tip of the iceberg. Many politicians, civil servants, judges, and military officers who had stayed on or returned after the RPF's victory were threatened or became disillusioned, and they fled the country in growing numbers beginning in early 1995. At first, it was mainly Hutu who were leaving. But disillusioned Tutsi soon followed, particularly genocide survivors who increasingly felt like second-class citizens marginalized by the RPF. At the same time, the RPF was pushing a "Tutsification" of the country. While officially rejecting ethnic discrimination and even the notion of ethnicity, the RPF reserved access to power, wealth, and knowledge to Tutsi elites. By the end of the 1990s, about two-thirds of the major state jobs were filled by Tutsi RPF members; the military and intelligence services were almost exclusively in their hands.

As the political transition was drawing to a close, the RPF set out to neutralize opposition parties. It began by infiltrating and dividing the MDR in the late 1990s; the party was subsequently banned in May 2003, just before the first national elections. When former president Pasteur Bizimungu (1994–2000), a Hutu RPF leader and the first postgenocide president (his vice-president, RPF military chief Paul Kagame, became president when Bizimungu resigned), attempted to set up a new party in

2001, he was arrested and later sentenced to fifteen years in jail. Other parties were simply denied registration.

Rwandans went to the polls in huge numbers in May 2003 to vote on a new constitution. An EU observer mission criticized the process, ex-

The EU observer mission came to the paradoxical conclusion that after the elections, “political pluralism [was] more limited than during the transition period.”

pressing concern over “control mechanisms . . . that result in restrictions on the freedom of expression, on the freedom of association and on the activities of political parties,” as well as over the “disappearance” of opponents and restrictions on civil society.² Nevertheless, presidential and parliamentary elections took place as scheduled in August and September 2003, respectively.

Kagame won the presidency with 95 percent of the vote after a campaign marred by arrests, “disappearances,” and intimidation. In a sign of the monolithic political landscape, all the parties holding seats in the transitional parliament supported Kagame’s bid. Another EU observer mission found evidence of vote fraud and irregularities, including ballot-box stuffing and nontransparent counting procedures.³ In the parliamentary elections the following month, the RPF again emerged victorious, with its coalition winning 74 percent of the vote for the 53 directly elected seats, followed by the Social Democratic Party (PSD) with 12 percent, and the Liberal Party (PL) with 11 percent. In the end, all the parties represented in parliament either joined the RPF list or had supported Kagame in the presidential election, making every directly elected MP part of a single political platform. The EU observer mission therefore came to the paradoxical conclusion that after the elections “political pluralism [was] more limited than during the transition period.”⁴ The 2003 elections had returned Rwanda to de facto single-party rule. External reactions to the fraudulent polls were muted, reinforcing the RPF’s belief that international concern would be short-lived and it could embark on a routine cycle of cosmetic elections.

During the 2008 parliamentary elections, the RPF’s machine worked too well. When an EU observer mission sampled almost a quarter of the votes, the tally showed the RPF winning 98 percent. Realizing that this result would look too “Stalinist,” according to two EU observers the RPF lowered it and “offered” some seats to the PSD and the PL—of course, neither party was really in opposition anyway. The official result for the 2008 election thus became 79 percent for the RPF, 13 percent for the PSD, and 8 percent for the PL.

In 2010, when several genuine opposition parties tried to register so that they could participate in the presidential election that August, they met with swift and radical repression. The leaders of these parties

were arrested and handed long prison sentences. The vice-president of the Democratic Green Party was found beheaded. In April, the government banned two of the three remaining independent newspapers, *Umuseso* and *Umuvugizi*. Later that month, the editor of *Umuvugizi* fled to Uganda after receiving repeated death threats; he was followed into exile a month later by two *Umuseso* editors. *Umuvugizi* acting editor Jean-Léonard Rugambage was murdered in Kigali on 24 June 2010, the same day that *Umuvugizi*'s website (which was blocked inside Rwanda) published a story about regime "hit squads" targeting dissidents living in exile in South Africa. In early July, two reporters from a third paper, *Umurabyo*, were arrested and charged with various crimes, including defamation and inciting public disorder. These journalists ultimately received prison sentences of seventeen and seven years, respectively.

Once the opposition candidates were effectively prevented from running, the National Electoral Commission registered four presidential contenders, Kagame and three others from parties belonging to the RPF-led coalition. None of them represented real competition for Kagame. Despite the protests of international human-rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International and even some signs of concern from Washington, the election went ahead on 9 August 2010. The result was predictable: Kagame won 93 percent of the vote, while his "opponents" each won a miniscule share. Although voting technically was not compulsory, turnout reached an astronomic 98 percent: Rwandans know well what is expected of them and the risks involved in "uncivic" behavior. In each of the country's five provinces, Kagame won between 92.5 and 94 percent of the vote, a spread of less than 1.5 percent.

This result was unsurprising given the fraud organized at both the local and the national levels. In a number of villages, local leaders went from door to door to collect voter cards. They marked the ballot paper, stamped the cards, and informed the electors that they had voted and did not need to go to the polling station. At the national level, a Commonwealth observer team noted the lack of transparency in the vote-tabulation process: "It was not possible to ascertain quite where, how and when the tabulation was to be completed," both between the voting stations and the districts, and the districts and the national level.⁵ According to one Dutch reporter's well-placed source, the outcome was so skewed that the Electoral Commission "adapted" the results downward, just as it had done in 2008.⁶ This probably explains the countrywide uniformity of the results.

Whether or not Kagame will seek reelection in 2017 remains an open question, though Article 101 of the constitution prohibits him from doing so. While the president has at times indicated that he is not interested in a third term, doubts persist about his genuine intentions, particularly after his stating in early 2013 that all Rwandans had the right to express

themselves on this issue.⁷ At the RPF's national congress in February 2013, some members asked Kagame to stay in office.⁸ As one op-ed writer for the regime's daily, the *New Times* (Kigali), put it, "You will not blame the ordinary folk who thinks that a future without Kagame is a future of uncertainties."⁹ A legal scholar echoed this sentiment in a July *New Times* op-ed, claiming that there was "no practical reason" preventing citizens from amending term limits like "any other provision of the constitution once considered detrimental."¹⁰ Kagame has not yet said what he will do. During a 2013 interview with the president, a reporter with the *Observer* mentioned that then justice minister Tharcisse Karugarama had stated that Kagame should "step down in 2017 in order to maintain the primacy of the rule of law." Kagame responded with irritation: "Why don't you tell him to step down himself? All those years he's been there, he's not the only one who can be the justice minister," adding that "in the end we should come to a view that serves us all."¹¹ Karugarama was sacked in less than a week.

Rwanda is a clear case of hegemonic authoritarianism, where regular, seemingly multiparty elections serve only to consolidate a dictatorship. Given the government's repression of opposition parties and voices, Rwanda does not even meet the requirements of electoral authoritarian regimes: Its elections are insufficiently pluralistic, competitive, and open.¹² Yet despite knowing that each of Rwanda's elections has been deeply flawed, the international community has never seriously addressed the issue, thus giving the regime the (justified) impression that it could proceed unhindered.

Despite the RPF's tight rein, there is anecdotal evidence that debates are going on within the party. Kagame's small inner circle—rather than the cabinet or parliament—is where decisions are made, so outside observers are generally unaware of any discord within the party. There have, however, been several visible splits. By the late 1990s, a number of RPF members had left the country and become vocal opponents of the regime. This trend escalated after 2000 and took a radical turn in 2010.

General Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, former army chief of staff and later ambassador to India, fell out with his former ally Kagame. Kayumba fled to South Africa in February 2010 and began openly and virulently attacking the president and claiming that Rwanda was descending into total dictatorship. In June, Kayumba was gravely injured in an attempt against his life in Johannesburg. Some days later, the assassins attempted to finish him off in his hospital bed. After more assassination attempts against him, South Africa expelled several Rwandan diplomats in March 2014.

In August 2010, Kayumba along with Patrick Karegeya (former head of external intelligence), Theogene Rudasingwa (former RPF secretary-general, ambassador to the United States, and chief of staff to the president), and Gerald Gahima (former prosecutor-general)—all of them RPF

Tutsi in exile—published a report entitled *Rwanda Briefing*. It accused the regime of having put in place a totalitarian dictatorship based on terror, grave human-rights violations, corruption, and nepotism, and of having committed numerous political assassinations and—quite remarkably coming from four Tutsi—of marginalizing the Hutu population. Given the high positions that these “renegades” once held, the regime was alarmed. They had been privy to many regime secrets and could potentially reveal embarrassing files, possibly even relating to war crimes and the downing of President Habyarimana’s plane.

In December 2010, the men founded a new political movement, the Rwanda National Congress (RNC). They denounced the regime and proclaimed their vision for a “new Rwanda.” Not only did they set out to forge alliances with other opposition movements abroad and even inside Rwanda, they also seemed to establish contacts with armed groups opposed to Kagame, particularly in the DRC and Uganda. Around the same time, the four were indicted and tried in Kigali *in absentia*. Kayumba and Rudasingwa were sentenced to 24 years in prison, and Karegeya and Gahima each received twenty years.

In August 2014, a South African court convicted four suspects for the 2010 attempted assassination of Kayumba. The judge stated that the crime was politically motivated and that the plot came “from a certain group of people from Rwanda.”¹³ Patrick Karegeya was less fortunate than Kayumba: He was found strangled to death in a Johannesburg hotel room on New Year’s Day 2014. Several Rwandan senior officials came close to admitting that the murder was perpetrated by a government hit squad.¹⁴ In other countries too—Belgium, Kenya, Sweden, Uganda, and the United Kingdom—opponents of the Kagame regime have been harassed and in some cases assassinated. In May 2011, for example, Scotland Yard issued a formal “Threats to Life Warning Notice” to two British men of Rwandan origin, notifying them that “reliable intelligence states that the Rwandan Government poses an immediate threat to your life.” In the 1990s, the regime opponents killed were Hutu; today, most are Tutsi.

Human Rights and Impunity

The Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), the RPF’s military wing, killed massive numbers of civilians inside Rwanda during and after the genocide, in Zaire (renamed the DRC in 1997) in late 1996 and early 1997, and during an insurgency in northwestern Rwanda in 1997 and 1998.¹⁵ In 1994, while Hutu extremists were committing genocide against the Tutsi live on television, the RPA was engaged in large-scale killings that were hidden from the public eye. The UN’s refugee agency; René Degni-Ségui, the special rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights; and international aid agencies found that tens of thousands of

civilians had been massacred. Documents show that the UN and the United States knew of these crimes and warned the RPF that it too risked being accused of committing genocide. As a result, the killing abated in October 1994 but continued on a smaller scale, as did “disappearances.” In April 1995, the RPA massacred thousands in the Kibeho camp for internally displaced people in the southwest of the country—an event that spelled the end for the national-unity government. While the government claimed that fewer than four-hundred people perished in the massacre, Australian peacekeepers found that at least four thousand had died. The international community expressed some concern, but did not press the issue. Regime hard-liners concluded that they could get away with this kind of behavior.

A year and a half later, across the border in what was then Zaire, the RPA again slaughtered Hutus—this time on a massively larger scale. With the RPF’s victory in the civil war came the flight of nearly two-million people to neighboring countries. In Zaire, remnants of the defeated government army and the *interahamwe* (the militia guilty of genocide) mingled with civilians living in refugee camps close to the Rwandan border. These armed elements conducted cross-border raids and prepared to invade Rwanda. In the absence of any international response to this imminent security threat, the RPA cleared the camps in the fall of 1996. It then launched a massive extermination campaign against civilian refugees trekking westward across war-torn Zaire. RPA “search and destroy” units massacred more than a hundred-thousand civilians, including women and children.

The most comprehensive report on the matter, commissioned by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and published in 2010, concluded that the vast majority of the 617 listed incidents that took place between 1993 and 2003 could be classified as war crimes and crimes against humanity. On the issue of genocide, it noted that “several incidents listed in this report, if investigated and judicially proven, point to circumstances and facts from which a court could infer the intention to destroy the Hutu ethnic group in the DRC in part.”¹⁶

During the RPA’s military operation in Zaire, more than half a million refugees were repatriated to Rwanda. As a result of this partly voluntary, partly forced effort as well as mounting resentment caused by Rwanda’s occupation of eastern DRC, the RPA faced a rapidly expanding rebel movement within Rwanda from early 1997, particularly in the northwest. During brutal counterinsurgency operations, the RPA killed tens of thousands of people, mostly unarmed civilians. Many other people “disappeared” during this time.

Members of the RPA and RPF who committed grave crimes in Rwanda in 1994, in the DRC in 1996–97, and again in Rwanda in 1997–98 have enjoyed total impunity. Not a single suspect from these forces has been prosecuted, let alone convicted. RPA crimes perpetrated during

1994 fall squarely within the mandate of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), established specifically to prosecute “persons responsible for genocide and other serious violations of International Humanitarian Law committed in . . . Rwanda and . . . neighbouring States, between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 1994.” A special unit in the tribunal’s Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) worked on dozens of files involving RPF suspects. When Chief Prosecutor Carla Del Ponte announced in early 2002 that she hoped to issue the first indictments before the end of the year, relations between the ICTR and the Rwandan government went from bad to worse. Rwanda sabotaged the OTP’s operations and ultimately decided that Del Ponte had to go. Under pressure from the United States and the United Kingdom, the UN Security Council removed her from office in 2003. Her successor, Gambian judge Hassan Jallow, abandoned the investigations of RPF and RPA suspects. As a case cannot be tried if the OTP does not prosecute, the ICTR became a pathetic example of victors’ justice.

Rwanda’s domestic courts, in particular the neotraditional *gacaca* system, also ignored RPF and RPA crimes. From the outset, it was made clear that the *gacaca* courts were to deal only with genocide cases; military courts would try crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by the RPA—but that never happened. Courts in other countries have held trials on the basis of the principle of universal jurisdiction for international crimes. Some countries have prosecuted and convicted genocide suspects, but not a single RPA suspect. How have the RPF and its forces managed to skirt justice despite their crimes being widely known?

Information and Communications Management

Since coming to power, the RPF regime has projected an image of morality, vision, and success. It has astutely maintained and exploited its “genocide credit” in order tacitly to justify Tutsi dominance; to maintain broad Tutsi support; to keep alive the fear of Hutu revenge; and to keep the international community at bay. By claiming (rightly) that the world abandoned Rwanda in 1994 and let the genocide happen, while the RPF stopped the genocide and defended its victims, the RPF seized a nearly unassailable moral high ground. A U.S. diplomat admitted to the *Washington Post* that “the Americans were terribly manipulated by this government and now we are almost held hostage by it.”¹⁷

This reluctance to speak out extends to international donor agencies—quite a remarkable fact given Rwanda’s profound aid dependence. Aid agencies self-censor, “sanitizing” unpleasant information or framing it more positively before sharing it with Rwandan officials. Sometimes these groups alter or simply do not release reports that might upset the government. According to one aid worker, “You toe the party [Rwandan government] line here. If you don’t, you’re out.”¹⁸

Kagame once stated, “We used communication and information warfare better than anyone.” He confirmed that “the aim was to let [NGOs and the press] continue their work, but deny them what would be dangerous for us.”¹⁹ In the words of one author, Kagame’s information strategy was “built around denial,” and the RPF’s routine was “simple but effective: ban outsiders from the battle zone; delay and frustrate their movements; deny any ‘rumor’ of military excesses; withhold information; apply moral argument to shame the international community.”²⁰

The regime’s efforts to establish a monopoly on truth extend beyond current affairs to the country’s long history. For example, the official history now claims that precolonial Rwanda was a unified, harmonious, and peaceful society, and that ethnicity was artificially introduced by the Belgian administration and Catholic Church as part of a divide-and-rule policy. According to this account, the RPF stopped a genocide rooted in the divisive politics of colonialism and restored peace and harmony. This utopian narrative, however, contrasts with the real historical record, as outlined by prominent scholars such as Jan Vansina, who have shown that precolonial Rwanda was far from a harmonious Garden of Eden.²¹

In short, if history does not suit the regime, the regime constructs a new history. In this vein, a 2008 conference on the genocide held in Kigali called for “a new methodology, a new literature, a new history” in light of “the failure of the human and social sciences that . . . led to genocide.” The regime has even succeeded in infiltrating international academic work. A 2008 book on postgenocide Rwanda featured a six-page preface written by Kagame, laying out the regime’s view on Rwanda’s past, present, and future, and rebutting a chapter by René Lemarchand in that very book—Lemarchand is said to be “mistaken,” “simplistic,” and “wrong.” According to Kagame, “The revisionists must receive justice for their crimes against historical truth and the affront of their fraudulent narratives.”²²

The RPF’s narrative is protected by the constitution and by legislation against “divisionism” and “genocide ideology.” These broad and ill-defined laws make it possible to criminalize criticism of the government and political dissent. In an illustration of the scope for political exploitation provided by these laws, a Rwandan Senate report lists the following as examples of “genocide ideology”: claims that the RPF is totalitarian and stifles freedoms; mentions of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the RPF; and assertions that the international community’s feelings of guilt cause it to be too lenient on the postgenocide regime.²³ All this and much more are punishable under the law.

Another “truth” the regime imposes is that of a unified and equal society—“There are no Hutu or Tutsi, we are all Rwandans now.” This denial of ethnicity is an essential element of the Tutsi elite’s hegemonic project: It veils Tutsi domination. In postgenocide Rwanda, collective identities have been redefined in a way rarely seen elsewhere, and ethnicity has

been legislated away. The law has reconfigured the country's ethnic map and entrenched the regime's policing of relations between individuals and groups. The regime has imposed de-ethnicization and reconciliation in a top-down, authoritarian fashion. All the available fieldwork, however, indicates that the regime's narrative reflects only the "public transcript," while the "hidden transcript"—that is, the daily truth experienced by oppressed Hutu and Tutsi—points to a very different narrative.²⁴

Engineering a New Society

The RPF has embarked on a formidable project of political, economic, social, and cultural engineering, aimed at radically changing Rwanda and its people. This has included bold experiments in transitional justice; land-tenure and agricultural reform; reeducation; the spiriting away of ethnic identity; knowledge construction; spatial reorganization (under the form of both villagization and the redrawing and renaming of territory); and pervasive government control. The modernization drive has been extremely fast, indeed too fast for most Rwandans: When the government wants something, it wants it immediately, and it sets close and clear deadlines.

As most Rwandans make their living in a subsistence economy, land and agricultural policies are good examples of the regime's modernizing policies. Rwanda's 2005 land law made a radical and sudden break with past practice. The law aimed to create a private land market (through a registration system for individual tenures) and to enlarge holdings (through a system of consolidation). In practice, it has widened class divisions and probably exacerbated ethnic divisions. With this law's implementation, the number of landless peasants has dramatically increased, as has the number of absentee landlords, including some with very large holdings. As Tutsi absentee landlords are seen to be grabbing the land of Hutu peasants, this policy could have dangerous implications for Tutsi-Hutu relations.²⁵

In 2006, the government mandated that farmers grow cash crops. Compulsory monocropping thus replaced the multicropping that had always shielded peasants from climate or market setbacks. Each region is supposed to plant the species best suited for that area and to employ new farming techniques. This authoritarian transformation included a mass rollout of commercial seeds, imported fertilizers, and pesticides. Production rose substantially as a result of the new policies, but agricultural diversity has plummeted and the price of staple foods on the local markets has sharply increased. The imported hybrid seeds that farmers are forced to use are expensive and cannot be saved and replanted. So farmers are now dependent on a complex supply chain for seeds that they used to produce themselves.

The regime explains its land and agricultural policies using techno-

cratic terms such as security of tenure, efficient exploitation, plot consolidation, optimal management, and productivity. Yet beneath these neutral concepts lies a risky policy with potentially devastating effects on peasants' lives. According to André Guichaoua, this modernization drive imposed on rural communities has resulted in regional famines and the increasing impoverishment of landless farmers.²⁶

Rwanda's efforts to engineer a total transformation are informed in part by a strong belief among RPF elites that they are right and that those who criticize them—even their friends—are wrong. Yet James C. Scott, an eminent scholar of such transformations, has found “a pernicious combination of four elements in . . . large-scale forms of social engineering that ended in disaster”: 1) the administrative ordering of nature and society; 2) a high modernist ideology that believes it is possible to rationally redesign human nature and social relations; 3) an authoritarian government that is “willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power to bring these high-modernist designs into being”; and 4) “a prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans.”²⁷ This combination describes postgenocide Rwanda to a tee.

A Price Worth Paying?

Donors do worry that, by supporting the regime, they are supporting policies and behavior that could lead Rwanda to disaster again. Yet they also implicitly accept that authoritarianism is a price worth paying for socioeconomic progress. Aid agencies consider their money to be well spent in Rwanda and continue to engage in the wishful thinking that the regime will someday move in the “right” direction. (Ethiopia, which shares many political characteristics with Rwanda, is another country where donors are engaging in this kind of trade-off.)

The United Kingdom, one of Rwanda's main donors, is a good example. In its December 2003 Country Assistance Plan for Rwanda, the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID) stated: “We believe that the government as a whole remains committed to progressively opening up space for legitimate political debate and freedom of expression.” In fact, there turned out to be a closing of space in subsequent years, but DFID refrained from assessing Rwanda's political “progress.” Eight years later, DFID's Operational Plan 2011–2015 did note “constraints on rights and freedoms” in Rwanda and a growing “concern that power is too highly centralized, with unpredictable consequences for long term political stability, economic development and human rights.” Again the agency refrained from proposing ways to deal with these concerns.

In fact, donors have disagreed among themselves on both facts and their interpretation, implying likely errors somewhere. In the case of Rwanda, such errors are potentially very costly—not so much for donors, whose only risk is losing money, but rather for the Rwandan people,

whose lives are at stake. Some donors have invested large sums of money and a great deal of political support in Rwanda, and they will continue to support the “model” to avoid its collapse and the loss of their investment. As elsewhere, donors and recipients need each other: Donors need success stories, recipients need money, and neither wants to rock the boat.

It should serve as a warning that, despite a number of differences, there are striking continuities between Rwanda’s pregenocide and post-genocide regimes. First, statehood in Rwanda, unlike many other African states, is strong and well-internalized by its citizens. Rwanda is not a colonial creation, and its ancient state tradition plays an undeniable role in maintaining an efficient pyramid-like governing structure. Second, the regimes both before and after the genocide have believed strongly in managing, monitoring, controlling, and mobilizing the population. The current regime, however, goes much further, and the dislocation caused by its invasive policies could prove irreversible by the time their destructive effects become clear. Third, Rwanda was a “donor darling” before 1994, just as it is today. Habyarimana’s Rwanda was seen as a “laboratory of development.” The current regime’s development plan, “Rwanda Vision 2020,” echoes the five-year development plans in vogue under the Second Republic (1973–90). Fourth, and possibly most important, is the pervasiveness of “structural violence,” which has given rise to widespread resentment, frustration, marginalization, fear, and even hatred among many Rwandans, both ordinary people and elites, Hutu and Tutsi. These are ingredients for a highly combustible situation that could explode into renewed fighting.²⁸

Some have argued that a degree of authoritarianism is necessary in Rwanda, because the country is still politically fragile and because socio-economic progress can reduce political demands and tensions. A recent strand in research challenges “naïve liberalism” and argues that “developmental regimes” in Africa are possible, so long as they are not required to provide transparent, accountable, and democratic governance.²⁹ But, in the case of Rwanda at least, what about the risk of violent government repression or heavy-handed, top-down policies that serve only part of the population? Steven Radelet has argued convincingly in these pages that “the rise of more democratic and accountable governments” is one of the key factors that has provided the basis for the sustainability and expansion of Africa’s initial development successes.³⁰ He finds no contradiction between democracy and development. Quite the contrary, his data suggest a strong positive relationship between democratic governance and economic performance in seventeen emerging African countries (Rwanda is one of four exceptions). Moreover, other African countries have deep ethnic divisions but, rather than trying to erase them, they are seeking to manage them via democratic institutions and respect for human rights.

So the argument that political repression is necessary for development is empirically unsustainable. The Kagame regime’s policies are reminis-

cent of colonial days, when politics was obscured by a focus on technocratic improvements in infrastructure, health, and education. Similarly, the RPF regime runs Rwanda like a corporation and seems to believe that its citizens are not political beings. In the long run, this is a risky strategy. Rwandans are resilient people, but if resentment, injustice and inequality are as widespread as consistent field data suggest, the metaphor that naturally comes to mind is that of a volcano waiting to erupt. If that happens, Rwanda could once again see mass bloodshed that spills across its borders.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf, eds., *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights After Mass Violence* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).

2. Mission d'Observation Electorale de l'Union Européenne, "Rwanda: Référendum constitutionnel, 26 mai 2003, Rapport final," n.d., www.eods.eu/library/FR%20RWANDA%202003_fr.pdf.

3. Mission d'Observation Electorale de l'Union Européenne, "Rwanda: Election présidentielle, 25 août 2003 / Elections législatives, 29 et 30 septembre, 2 octobre 2003, Rapport final," n.d.

4. Mission d'Observation Electorale de l'Union Européenne, "Rwanda: Election présidentielle," 12.

5. Commonwealth Secretariat, "Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group: Rwanda Presidential Elections, 9 August 2010," n.d., 25.

6. Anneke Verbraeken, "Handen in en uit de stembus" (Hands in and out of the ballot boxes), *Vrij Nederland*, 21 August 2010.

7. Eugene Kwibuka, "Kagame Clarifies Transition Debate," *New Times* (Kigali), 27 February 2013.

8. Times Reporter, "The Task at Hand for RPF Cadres," *New Times*, 10 February 2013.

9. Arthur Asiimwe, "The Daunting Task Ahead for RPF Cadres," *New Times*, 14 February 2013.

10. Salim N. Mugabo, "When Citizens Demand Lifting of Presidential Term Limits," *New Times*, 1 July 2013.

11. Chris McGreal, "Is Kagame Africa's Lincoln or a Tyrant Exploiting Rwanda's Tragic History?" *Observer* (London), 19 May 2013.

12. Andreas Schedler, ed., *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2006), 3.

13. Ian Birrell, "Assassins Linked to Kagame Regime," *Independent* (London), 29 August 2014.

14. Gahiji Innocent, "Gen Kabarebe on Karegeya: 'When You Choose to Be a Dog, You Die Like a Dog,'" *News of Rwanda*, 11 January 2014; "President: Betray Rwanda, Face Consequences," Associated Press, Kigali, 12 January 2014.

15. More details and numerous sources can be found in Filip Reyntjens, *Political Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 98–123. For more on crimes committed in Zaire/DRC, see Reyntjens, *The Great African War: Congo and Regional Geopolitics, 1996–2006* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 80–101, 287–90.

16. UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1993–2003: Report of the Mapping Exercise Documenting the Most Serious Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Committed within the Territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo Between March 1993 and June 2003*, Geneva, August 2010, para. 31.

17. Lynne Duke, “U.S. Faces Surprise, Dilemma in Africa,” *Washington Post*, 14 July 1998.

18. Quoted in Marc Sommers, *Stuck: Rwandan Youth and the Struggle for Adulthood* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 20, 21, 50.

19. Nik Gowing, “New Challenges and Problems for Information Management in Complex Emergencies: Ominous Lessons from the Great Lakes and Eastern Zaire in Late 1996 and Early 1997,” paper presented at Dispatches from Disaster Zones conference, Oxford, 28 May 1998, 4, 15.

20. Johan Pottier, *Re-imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 55, 58.

21. Jan Vansina, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya Kingdom* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

22. Paul Kagame, “Preface,” in Phil Clark and Zachary D. Kaufman, eds., *After Genocide: Transitional Justice, Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Reconciliation in Rwanda and Beyond* (London: Hurst, 2008), xxi–xxvi.

23. République du Rwanda, Sénat, “Idéologie du génocide au Rwanda et stratégies de son éradication,” Kigali, 2006, 21.

24. The reference to hidden and public transcripts is borrowed from James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

25. Johan Pottier, “Land Reform for Peace? Rwanda’s 2005 Land Law in Context,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 6 (October 2006): 533.

26. André Guichaoua, “Von einem Totalitarismus zum nächsten—Politische Transition auf ruandische Art,” *Eins-Entwicklungspolitik Nord-Süd*, no. 5 (May 2007).

27. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1998, 4–5.

28. Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford, Conn.: Kumarian, 1998).

29. This is well summarized in the Developmental Regimes in Africa project, which builds on the findings of the Tracking Development project and the Africa Power and Politics Programme. A synthesis can be found in David Booth et al., *Developmental Regimes in Africa: Initiating and Sustaining Developmental Regimes in Africa: Synthesis Report* (London: ODI, 2015).

30. Steven Radelet, “Success Stories from ‘Emerging Africa,’” *Journal of Democracy* 21 (October 2010): 87–101.