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Ethnicity and the Politics of History in Rwanda

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Hundreds of thousands of people have died in the Great Lakes region of Africa over the past four years. Most of them were innocent civilians massacred by armies or militias or decimated by disease or starvation as they fled from danger. These horrors can be traced to intense struggles over power carried out by leaders—struggles involving the politicization of ethnicity and a perverse dynamic of violence and fear. The conflicts have been based in part on intellectual foundations, on mental maps of history.

It is these competing visions of the past—the politics of history—that I explore here. Such inquiry is of more than academic interest in contemporary Rwanda. The debate about the nature of the country's history is central to the process of political reconstruction; the postgenocide government in Kigali has not only to deal with the trauma of a whole people and society, but it also has to consider how its policies will be interpreted within the context of various conceptions of Rwanda's past.

A key element in politicizing ethnic cleavages in the recent history of Rwanda has been the development and propagation of a corporate view of ethnicity.[1] The generalization of blame was dramatically evident in the genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994, when hardliners in the Hutu-dominated government labeled all Tutsi in the country as enemies of the state. The genocide was calculated to exterminate them; the hateful vitriol used against the Tutsi in the press and on radio broadcasts illustrated this thought process.[2] A corporate perception of ethnicity was also evident in the recent massacres of Hutu refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) in 1996 and 1997. During and after the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, hundreds of thousands of people (mostly Hutu) fled to neighboring countries—primarily Tanzania and Zaire[3]—but some also fled to Burundi and Uganda. For the Tutsi-led government of Rwanda that assumed power in July 1994 after the genocide, the refugee camps in Zaire came to be a particularly irritating problem. Fearing reprisals, most of the refugees refused to return home; meanwhile these camps were being used as bases for guerrilla attacks from Zaire against western Rwanda. Among the refugees in the crowded camps along Zaire's eastern border with

Rwanda and Burundi were persons who were certainly guilty of genocide, including former soldiers and officers of the Rwandan armed forces (the Rwandan army of the pre-1994 government) and members of militias such as the *Interahamwe*. They posed a serious threat then, and they still do today. But such individuals constituted perhaps 30,000 to 50,000 people in the camps—5 percent of the total refugee populations. To be sure, others in the camps were indirectly implicated in the genocide, but many were not. Moreover, the majority of refugees in the camps were women and children who were neither major perpetrators of the genocide nor a military threat. In the Goma area, for example, 80 percent of the people in the camps were women and children.

Beginning in October 1996, the camps in Zaire were attacked by troops of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), the army of Rwanda's postgenocide government, with help from soldiers of Laurent Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo/Zaire (ADFL). After the camps were destroyed, many of the Rwandan refugees returned to Rwanda. The remaining refugees who also survived attacks against the camps, probably several hundred thousand people, fled west into the mountains and forests of eastern Zaire. During the war in Congo (which was fought not so much against Mobutu's army as against Rwandan refugees), soldiers from the RPA and the ADFL pursued the refugees for months, attacking their small encampments and massacring men, women, and children at will.[4]

An example will illustrate how Hutu were collectively held responsible for the genocide and tracked down, even on foreign soil. In March 1997, more than 100,000 of these refugees found themselves blocked at Ubundu, on the banks of the Congo River. To Immaculée Mukarugwizwa, a widowed former schoolteacher, their prospects seemed grim:

> We are hungry and we are sick but above all we have lost all morale. Our elders are shrivelled and dying and our children already look old. Are all of us guilty of genocide, even these little children? We have been chased through the bush like animals. And in three days, Kabila's men will be upon us again, leaving 100,000 of us with a choice of death under their bombs or in the jaws of crocodiles.[5]

A corporate view of ethnicity, which targeted all Tutsi during the genocide, was also used in this case to label all Hutu refugees as *génocidaires* (persons who helped perpetrate genocide), and this view seemed to be part of a political program of vengeance directed against Hutu. In deploring the tendency to globalize blame for the genocide in Rwanda to all Hutu, the former schoolteacher Mukarugwizwa's plea highlights a more general perception of ethnicity; such a perception of ethnicity brought with it tragic consequences in the past—and those continue into the present.

In these situations, explaining how and why the uses and abuses of power led to violence in the past could serve as an important lesson to lead-

ers who wish to build a different society in the future. Yet, not surprisingly, in such a polarized atmosphere, historical reconstruction is itself highly contested. Here, with an intensity that surpasses the normal clichés, there is no single history; rather there are competing "histories."

Contested Histories

Vigorous debates have resonated before now over Rwanda's history. There were, for example, divergent interpretations of the Rwandan Revolution of 1959 as well as different views regarding the importance of ethnicity in Rwanda's precolonial (and colonial) past. Consider the following two interpretations of the Rwandan Revolution:

One view holds that the changes from 1959 to 1962 in Rwanda were engineered by Belgian colonial authorities and the Catholic Church. Although previously these powerful external actors had supported the monarchy and its political structures dominated by Tutsi chiefs, in the 1950s they switched support to the Hutu majority.[6] From this perspective, manipulation by external forces was the main reason for political violence in Rwanda during the terminal colonial period, as well as the cause of the collapse of royal power, the reversal of power relations, and the subsequent exodus of many Tutsi into exile.

A contrasting view claims that while some Belgians and leaders in the Catholic Church supported change, it was Hutu leaders and the rural majority in Rwanda who effected the revolution, by reacting to the double colonialism of rule by Tutsi and Belgian authorities.[7] In this view, a Hutu counterelite demanded an end to the privileging of Tutsi in employment, education, access to political power, and economic advancement and thereby an end to discrimination against Hutu. Rather than emphasizing external actors, this view of the Rwandan Revolution highlights rural impoverishment, grievances over exactions by chiefs, and insecurity of land tenure as central factors in the conflicts that accompanied decolonization and the victory of Hutu candidates in the elections of 1960 and 1961.

There are also contrasting views of the history of relations between the three main ethnic groups in Rwanda. One view holds that in the precolonial past, Tutsi lived in symbiosis and harmony with Hutu and Twa. European colonialism created cleavages and divisions between Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa and also put an end to the social mobility that had been possible in the past.[8] Therefore, some who use this line of reasoning assert, in order to overcome the divisions that have led to violence, the ethnic categories should simply be abolished and the terminology of ethnic groups forbidden.

A different version of these relationships asserts that Hutu were conquered in the distant past by clever and wily Tutsi, who imposed an oppressive, exploitative rule on Hutu and made them the servants of Tutsi.[9]

Colonial rule under Germany and then Belgium exacerbated and intensified (but did not cause) divisions that were already there. From this perspective, abolishing the terms "Hutu," "Tutsi," and "Twa" is portrayed as a ploy promoted by a historically dominant minority trying to maintain power. Given the history of discrimination in Rwandan society, some proponents of this view have argued, it is only by retaining the categories that one can measure progress in redressing inequalities from the past.

As will be evident, the first versions in both debates noted above tend to be advanced by those wishing to rationalize rule by Tutsi; the second versions are more characteristic of powerholders in the Hutu-dominated governments that ruled Rwanda from 1961 until 1994. But there is a noteworthy convergence as well: at various times, hardliners in both groups have accepted the myth introduced early in the colonial period by Europeans about ethnic pasts. Tutsi were from different racial stock; they came to Rwanda from the northeast; and they were superior to Hutu in both intelligence and political abilities.[10]

None of these positions, however, provides an adequate explanation of either the Rwandan Revolution or the historical dynamics of ethnic relations in Rwanda; rather, they reflect political positions more than valid historical reconstruction. Each tends to use a monocausal and static explanation for complex interacting processes that have varied over time; in fact, synergy, not singularity, is the bedrock of Rwandan history.

Colonial State Building, Ethnic Polarization, and the 1959 Revolution

The arguments over historical visions advanced today are remarkably similar to debates at the time of decolonization forty years ago. It is, therefore, worthwhile to review some aspects of Rwanda's recent history that have tended to be ignored in these debates—then and now.[11]

By the end of the nineteenth century, Rwanda was already a centralized, hierarchical kingdom with important class distinctions. In many parts of what is today Rwanda, however, local populations had not been fully incorporated into the Rwandan state, and the distinctions of Hutu and Tutsi were not significant. Clan, lineage, and family ties were more important for political interaction. Even within the Rwandan kingdom, relationships between Tutsi and Hutu varied. In some areas, significant numbers of Tutsi and Hutu lived similar lifestyles, keeping cattle and cultivating their fields—many Hutu (but not all) in precolonial Rwanda owned cattle, and many Tutsi (but not all) practiced agriculture.

Colonial rule did, of course, have important effects on Rwandan politics and society. Although German and later Belgian colonial rulers did not create state domination and Hutu/Tutsi inequality—for these already exist-

ed—colonialism did significantly alter the reach of the state, the forms of domination, and the nature of political competition.[12] Particularly onerous demands of the colonial state and its chiefs fell most heavily—and in some cases exclusively—on rural cultivators classified as Hutu. This situation accentuated ethnic distinctions and gave them a cultural meaning different from earlier periods.

Moreover, Rwanda's European colonial rulers were intent upon preserving what they saw as "traditional" structures of power, in which Tutsi aristocrats ruled over Hutu peasants. This model, based on colonialist interpretations of monarchical structures in the center of the country, was not accurate even for central Rwanda, much less for regions on the periphery. Nevertheless, the Belgian administration in Rwanda, even more than in most colonial systems, sought to structure social order, to rationalize and standardize heterogeneous social relations, and to reinforce the powers of the "natural rulers." In the 1930s, they issued identity cards that indicated a person's ethnic category. These cards then became a tool of the state used to determine an individual's life chances. Again such measures did not create ethnicity; instead they served to mold its social salience.

Thus, in colonial Rwanda, Hutu came to be classified as second-class citizens. This was starkly illustrated in the allocation of new colonial social and economic resources. For example, Hutu had dramatically fewer opportunities to attend school and achieve postprimary education than Tutsi, and they came to be excluded almost entirely from high-level administrative positions. Twa were discriminated against even more intensely, and few had opportunities to attend school.

Colonial rule, then, provided the resources, imposed the structures, and asserted the pressures that helped shape the state-building process in a particular way. A major effect of this process was the propagation of a corporate vision of ethnic groups. Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa came to be viewed as internally homogeneous groups, and their members came to be treated in distinctive ways by the state. This made groups that had previously shown more internal flexibility appear more like biological groups.

The ideology constructed to rationalize this process portrayed the groups corporately—as racially, culturally, and historically different—and the three characteristics were often seen as virtually synonymous. Such an intellectual framework was premised on (and in turn advanced) the view that the Tutsi were superior both in intelligence and in political acumen, as reiterated in virtually all colonial documentation on Rwandan social organization. But this ideology was constructed not just by Europeans; it emerged as a joint undertaking between Tutsi powerholders and the colonial authority. The point is made forcefully in a recent analysis by Alison Des Forges. As she explains, the creation of a myth that glorified and exaggerated the role of Tutsi in founding Rwandan state structures and exerting control over Hutu was a "collaborative enterprise," involving European administrators,

missionaries, and scholars as well as Rwandan chiefs, poets, and historians at the royal court.[13]

Thus, the vision that colonialism disrupted a perfectly harmonious system does not concur with the record: precolonial Rwanda was a state with serious social inequalities, and some powerful political actors used their power arbitrarily and abusively. There were Hutu who were dispossessed of their cattle by Tutsi, for example. But there were also Tutsi who were despoiled of their cattle. Positions of great power and prestige were held mostly by Tutsi, but there are also examples of influential Hutu sought as allies by the royal court. And while assassination of individuals was part of the political process (though perhaps exaggerated in the drama of court poetry), mass murders of people on the grounds of ethnic category did not occur in precolonial Rwanda.

These precolonial state structures were reshaped by the changes wrought during colonial rule and the emergence of a "dual colonialism" that benefited both European and Rwandan powerholders. In the long run, these transformations helped to create the conditions for widespread rural discontent at the end of the colonial period. In the 1950s, as the prospect of independence from Belgium loomed on the horizon, a Hutu counterelite began to pressure for democratization. Calling for an end to the monopoly of political life by a few powerholders, a group of activists issued a "Hutu Manifesto" in 1957. Though its demands were moderate—equality of opportunity and improved access to education, employment, and social services for all Rwandans regardless of ethnic background or social rank—the Hutu Manifesto used racialist terminology, mirroring the ideologies of the time.[14]

Such calls for change provoked a backlash among prominent members of the Rwandan power structure; their intransigent attitudes served to polarize further the political factions. In May 1958, a group of conservatives at the royal court responded to the Hutu Manifesto in arrogant, dismissive language. In a public statement, these notables wrote that there was no basis for brotherhood and cooperation between Hutu and Tutsi, since many years ago Tutsi had subjugated Hutu by force. Their racialist language foreshadowed the language that would be used more than three decades later by Hutu extremists.[15]

This intemperate response by court conservatives contributed to fears and anxieties that were already escalating. For in response to multiple pressures for change, the High Council of the Country was preparing to carry out a program of redistributing land—even though the High Council had not even one Hutu among its members. Then, in an open letter to the king and the High Council, a group describing themselves as "fifteen elderly Tutsi, grand clients of the court" warned that if the land distribution were to proceed, "there will be revolts in the whole country and you are going to provoke the death of those who have land and those who do not, such that

those who have the possibility to do so will be obliged to emigrate towards the British territories."[16] *Mutatis mutandis*, such concerns proved prescient of later events, both in the 1960s and in the 1990s.

Within this highly charged political landscape, people in power feared losing their privileged position and being mistreated by former subjects. Hutu activists experienced harassment, and some feared they would be targeted for liquidation.[17] Late in 1959, recently recognized political parties began to organize publicly; tensions grew as Rwandans awaited a report by the Belgian government about the program for elections in preparation for decolonization.

On 1 November, a Hutu subchief (one of only ten in the country) was assaulted by a gang of Tutsi youths. Rumors spread that he had been killed, and this almost instantaneously sparked rural uprisings in several parts of the country: gangs of Hutu roamed the countryside, chasing out Tutsi inhabitants and burning houses. Tutsi generally felt threatened. But in these early conflicts, much of the violence was aimed against those who held administrative posts (such as chiefs or subchiefs) and members of the Tutsi aristocracy, rather than directed indiscriminately at all Tutsi. That came later, when political action caught up with the rhetoric of corporate views of ethnicity.

The Belgian administration declared a state of emergency and brought in troops from the then Belgian Congo in attempts to keep order, separate the warring parties, and protect leaders who were threatened. Political violence had escalated dramatically; many observers of the time note that the royal armies of the past had been remobilized and Hutu leaders and officials in the Belgian administration feared that the royal court was preparing to eliminate its Hutu opponents.[18]

In these circumstances the pervasive political discourse increasingly projected corporate views of ethnicity. But it is noteworthy that political action diverged significantly from this verbal contestation. In the conflicts associated with the Rwandan Revolution of 1959–1961, rural dwellers often distinguished powerful and wealthy Tutsi from Tutsi commoners. The primary targets of attack were those who were in a position of power.

Similarly, in the political conflicts of the 1950s and electoral battles of 1960 and 1961, moderates on both sides emphasized the importance of addressing the needs of all disadvantaged groups in Rwanda—the poor and powerless were not just Hutu but Tutsi and Twa as well. In fact, the leaders of two of the most moderate parties, Association pour la Promotion Sociale de la Masse (APROSOMA) and Rassemblement Démocratique Ruandais (RADER)—the first primarily Hutu, the latter primarily Tutsi—tried to downplay ethnicity and make an appeal to the "common people"—whether Hutu or Tutsi. Moderates were also present during the early 1990s; but then, intense cleavages that echoed earlier political divisions led several of the new political parties to split between the "moderate" and "power"

factions. This was to be a critical factor in the subsequent political realignment preceding the genocide.

All the same, in the late 1950s as in the early 1990s, an ethnic appeal still resonated strongly in certain areas of the country and among certain social strata. One important reason for this was that almost all of the high political positions in the national government were monopolized by one group; most of those who were powerful and wealthy in the 1950s were Tutsi. Then, as in 1962 under a postindependence, Hutu-dominated government, only a small proportion of the group said to be in control benefited directly from positions of power. Nonetheless, one principal strategy for mobilizing a political following was to consolidate the mental image of a corporate view of ethnicity. The political extremists sought to tag all members of the opposing social category with the responsibility of the actions of a few. Thus, in 1996 when all Hutu became portrayed as *génocidaires*, so too in 1959 all Tutsi came to be portrayed as *monarchistes;* and in 1994, all Tutsi were labeled as agents of an "evil" Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

Contests Over Power and the Dynamics of Fear

As I have argued elsewhere,[19] the Rwandan Revolution of 1959 occurred in large part because of widespread rural grievances. This strong disaffection from the regime was articulated by a Hutu counterelite (at times supported by Tutsi moderates linked with the RADER party), who were pushed into more radical action by the intransigence of the monarchists. Powerful external institutions (the Belgian administration, the Catholic Church, and at certain points the United Nations) were also involved, to be sure. Although their support helped the revolution succeed, the events in Rwanda were not engineered from outside; this was an "assisted revolution,"[20] not an "imposed revolution." The difference is significant, for the concept of an assisted revolution reflects certain realities of the years immediately following independence in 1962. Many rural people had a stake in this new political order, and they shared a strong commitment not to return to the "old order" in later years.

To interpret the events of the 1990s in Rwanda, one must take account of the rural population's disaffection (and in some areas outright anger among many Hutu) toward the behavior of many Tutsi authorities under colonial rule, as well as the intense struggles over land that accompanied the decolonization process. Moreover, one tragic result of the conflicts during 1959 and after (continuing through 1964) was the exodus of large numbers of Rwandans, mostly Tutsi, who took refuge in neighboring countries. It was these exiles, and their children, who organized the Rwandan Patriotic Front in Uganda in the late 1980s. In October 1990, the RPF led a

military attack against Rwanda; they sought to win the right for Rwandans in exile to return and, the RPF asserted, they wanted to push for democratization of the authoritarian Rwandan government.

At the time of the RPF attacks, official rhetoric claimed that the Habyarimana government represented all rural segments in the country, and that this government was a continuation of the ideals of the 1959 Revolution. In reality, the government was dominated by a wealthy, powerful clique (the "Akazu"). By the end of the 1980s, widespread popular disaffection had weakened the regime, particularly in the southern and central areas of the country; intense struggles (mainly among Hutu) based on class and regional differences threatened the continued hegemony of those in power.[21] To be sure, Tutsi were discriminated against in education and access to government jobs; but before October 1990, systematic harassment of Tutsi was not characteristic of the Habyarimana regime. At that time, Tutsi did not face exclusion from private sector employment or local-level positions in the teaching, agriculture, or medical fields.

In the wake of the attacks of 1990, Habyarimana accused the RPF of seeking to overthrow the Hutu government and reestablish monarchical rule and Tutsi hegemony—in other words, he accused them of seeking to reverse the results of the 1959 Revolution. The RPF vigorously denied that this was their goal. Nonetheless, the invasion resuscitated conflicts and fears from the recent past. Even if many rural Rwandans of any social category chafed under the authoritarian rule of Habyarimana and his clique, they were not necessarily eager to embrace rule by the RPF. In intellectual terms, then, the ethnic polarization that occurred in Rwanda during the 1990s, culminating in the genocide of 1994, was in many respects a continuation of the evolving tensions of late colonial rule.[22] Therefore, in efforts to seek pathways to a more peaceful future for Rwanda, it is necessary to understand the complexity of these contested histories of ethnic relationships and their connections to the Revolution of 1959.

But it is also necessary to move beyond such dichotomized debates. Exploring parallels between the violent conflicts of the early 1990s and the events of decolonization in Rwanda would appear to be particularly fruitful. Three such parallels will be discussed briefly below. One concerns the marginalization of moderates in the recent history of Rwanda. A second parallel is seen in the dynamic of fear associated with political competition in these struggles. A third (and related) focus highlights the political patterns that accompany major crises of governance in Rwanda's recent politics.

Marginalization of Moderates

A major characteristic of the 1950s conflicts, as in the 1990s, was the destruction of the political middle ground. In both crises, there were

courageous voices of moderation that called for inclusiveness, the restructuring of power relations, and the necessity to attend to the needs of all Rwandans, regardless of ethnic background. But in both cases, hardliners on both sides who made an ethnic appeal gained the upper hand in the debates, effectively marginalizing the more moderate voices in the 1950s and physically destroying such individuals in the 1990s.

Such polarization was already evident following the elections of 1960 and 1961 in Rwanda. The elections had brought to power a republican government dominated by Hutu, with inclusion of a small number of Tutsi in the parliament and cabinet. But in 1964, Tutsi guerrillas invaded the country, attempting to overthrow the fragile government of Grégoire Kayibanda. The invasion collapsed; in its wake the Tutsi members of the government were executed, and the Hutu authorities allowed (or encouraged) massacres of several thousand rural Tutsi residents. These victims were targeted not because they had done anything wrong; rather, they were punished as scapegoats because their ethnic "brothers" (note again the corporate view of ethnicity) had attacked the country.[23]

A similar dynamic was evident in 1990, in the wake of the RPF attack on Rwanda. Within four days of the October invasion, the Habyarimana government had arrested more than 9,000 people, mostly Tutsi, but also Hutu seen as critics of the government. After several months, most of these people were freed, thanks to the efforts of a nascent human rights movement within Rwanda and the pressures of Western donors. But some died, and many suffered serious aftereffects from the ill treatment and poor conditions of incarceration. This was the beginning of a series of minipogroms against Tutsi in different parts of the country carried out by the Habyarimana government—what later would be seen as rehearsals for the conflagration of 1994. Here one can see a recurrent pattern: the tendency for a regime threatened by external attack to target an internal scapegoat and to rationalize its behavior by propagating a corporate view of ethnicity.

Since July 1994, when the RPF ended the genocide and took control of the country, the new Rwandan government has been led by Tutsi in conjunction with the Rwandan Patriotic Army (the military wing of the RPF). Critics of this government assert that the pattern of scapegoating continues. But now, those threatening the regime are Hutu associated with the former Rwandan army (the FAR) and the *Interahamwe* militias. This time, the power of the Rwandan military has expanded; the scapegoats are not only those within the country but potentially all those living in areas where the FAR or *Interahamwe* are known or believed to be operating (including, apparently, refugees in Zaire). The rationale has been well rehearsed in recent Rwandan history: if it is impossible to capture the *Interahamwe,* it is acceptable to liquidate civilians assumed to be associated with them. While this approach may be effective in terrorizing the citizenry, it does little to

enhance the legitimacy of the current regime or give it strong roots in the rural population.

Dynamic of Fear

A second parallel between the 1950s and the early 1990s in Rwanda is the tendency for political struggle to be associated with a pervasive dynamic of fear and rural discontent.[24] In both cases, those in power feared losing their position of privilege, with attendant economic consequences and the political risks of being punished for past misdeeds. And those demanding change feared their dissent might bring personal harm. Meanwhile, ordinary citizens feared the consequences of political struggles they knew could have important implications for their tenuous hold on jobs or land they needed for family survival.

Political Patterns

A third parallel places these struggles in broader historical context. Before the mid-twentieth century, crises of governance in Rwanda often had violent consequences, but the violence was limited to a relatively small group of key participants in the competition, often members of the same ethnic group. The losers—usually highly placed political actors—often faced death or exile.[25] Political violence was more often intraethnic than interethnic.

Although this was not unique to Rwandan succession struggles, key aspects of such earlier crises of governance were a winner-take-all pattern for the victors and death or flight for the losers. But in light of recent tendencies to see all conflict in Rwanda as tribal warfare, it is important to note that these were not ethnic conflicts; rather, they were conflicts among competing Tutsi lineages for control of the state.[26] Patterns found in these earlier goverance crises—nonethnic, but involving winner-take-all outcomes and violent exclusion of the losers—reappeared in political conflicts of the terminal colonial period in Rwanda.

These later conflicts, however, occurred in a different context: colonial state building and policies of ethnic favoritism had broadened the stakes and deepened ethnic polarization. The struggle for power had widened, such that in the 1959 Revolution political contestation was perceived as (at least in part) an ethnic struggle. Changes in the state and the new corporate view of ethnicity contributed to implicating whole "ethnic" groups in political competition, and also making them targets of political violence. Whereas rival politicians at the court had in the past been the main protagonists in crises of governance, now ethnic groups came to be seen as collective actors in the political game.

In the early 1990s, Rwanda faced yet another crisis of governance, a

struggle over who would control the state. The political landscape was more complicated, and the results of this struggle were much more destructive than in the past. But earlier patterns were still discernible. Contenders for power tried to mobilize their constituencies using an appeal to solidarity based this time, as in 1959, on ethnic identity. Aware of past patterns, some of the protagonists feared that if they should lose this struggle, they and their families would face liquidation; the outcome left hundreds of thousands dead. And when the RPF-led government assumed power, they inherited a shattered polity and society.

Often in Rwanda's recent history, appeals to ethnicity have served as a pretext for political actors seeking to gain or obtain power. It is this type of power struggle that Rwandans must try to avoid in the future. Such was the conclusion of a group of Rwandan intellectuals who debated these issues recently. In their view, a central challenge in the postgenocide era is how to find ways to avoid the winner-take-all politics, liquidation of opponents, and (more recently) mobilization of ethnic factions that have proved so destructive in the past.[27]

Conclusion

Parallels between the politics of the early 1990s in Rwanda and earlier political processes of the late 1950s are striking. At the same time, dramatic differences between these episodes of conflict are sobering, most notably in the scale of violence and loss of life, and the extent of destruction of the country's social fabric and its material infrastructure. Understanding these complicated dynamics is an important challenge for those attempting to revisit Rwandan history and move beyond the debates noted at the beginning of this article.

In reassessing Rwandan history, a focus on changes made by Europeans is important but should not be allowed to deflect attention from those aspects in which Rwandans themselves were involved. Years ago, in an analysis of colonial state building in Rwanda, I argued that politics and policies of the state need to be seen as critical elements in shaping ethnic relations and ethnic consciousness.[28] From this perspective there is ample evidence that it is in the reach of those in power to manage and dampen ethnic tensions by the types of policies they pursue. Paradoxically, however, "managing" ethnic tensions requires transcending them and addressing other forms of social inequality as well.

A case in point is found in the efforts of the Habyarimana regime to dampen ethnic tensions over the period from 1973 to the mid-1980s. Ultimately, the regime's controversial policy of ethnic quotas for government jobs and educational opportunities undermined the effort. Attempts to

reduce ethnic tensions did not relieve class inequalities and other serious problems with the patrimonial state in Rwanda. Thus, when faced with a political crisis, those in power found it too easy to use the "ethnic card" to divert attention from unresolved contradictions in the country's political economy.

One of the problems in focusing obsessively on ethnicity is that this may lead one to overlook questions of power and class. Surely such issues were important in the contestation of the 1950s, as in the 1990s, but how were they important? Perhaps in revisiting this history, Rwandans will wish to explore more fully the issues and inequalities that underlay these political conflicts—conflicts that were only partly "ethnic."

To do so, historians and others will have to engage with the competing visions of the past discussed in this essay. They may have to go beyond them rather than choose between them, but they cannot avoid them. To judge by past experience, the way in which the powerholders address these issues could have an important bearing on the lives of millions of people over the coming generation.

Notes

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1. See David Newbury, "The Invention of Rwanda: The Alchemy of Ethnicity," paper presented at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association, Orlando, Fla., November 1995.

2. Jean-Pierre Chrétien et al., eds., *Rwanda: Les médias du génocide* (Paris: Karthala, 1995).

3. In May 1997, when the rebellion led by Laurent Kabila successfully overthrew Zaire's president, Mobutu Sese Seko, the country was renamed Democratic Republic of Congo. Zaire is used here because that was still the name of the country during the period in which these events took place.

4. See Human Rights Watch/Africa and Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme, "Democratic Republic of the Congo: What Kabila Is Hiding: Civilian Killings and Impunity in Congo," 9, no. 5 (A) (October 1997); and Scott Campbell, "What Kabila Is Hiding," *Washington Post* (22 September 1997), p. A19. Additional information is found in *Dialogue: Revue d'Information et de Réflexion* (Brussels), special issue on "Les réfugiés rwandais: Le drame persiste," no. 198 (May–June 1997); Gérard Prunier, "Rwanda: The Social, Political and

Economic Situation in June 1997," Writenet-UK (http://www.unhcr.ch/unhcr/refworld/country/writenet/wrirwa07.htm), July 1997; John Pomfret, "Rwandans Led Revolt in Congo," *Washington Post* (9 July 1997), p. A1.

5. Howard French, "In a Zaire Forest, Hutu Refugees Near End of Line," *New York Times* (13 March 1997), pp. A1, A7.

6. The monarchist interpretation holds that the Belgians agreed to block the move to immediate independence out of unwillingness to let go of power. The Belgians, however, argue that their policy changed to accommodate the rise of new voices from below. One of the participants in these events, Guy Logiest, later explained that he decided to support Hutu counterelites during the revolution to promote democratization; he believed that rapid moves toward decolonization would preserve existing inegalitarian structures of power and would be harmful for the mass of the population. B. E. M. Guy Logiest, "A propos de 'Le Rwanda, son effort de développement,'" *Chronique de Politique Étrangère* (1972), cited in Filip Reyntjens, *Pouvoir et droit au Rwanda* (Tervuren, Belgium: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale), p. 272. See also Jean-Paul Harroy, *Rwanda: De la féodalité à la démocratie* (Brussels: Hayez, 1984); and Catharine Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression: Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda, 1860–1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 187ff. In a prescient use of current academic terminology, the Hutu Manifesto of 1957 noted that the vast majority of Rwandans had been relegated to "subaltern roles." This manifesto (described below) was part of a rising movement subversive to the internal structure of late colonial hierarchy. "Manifeste des Bahutu," in Fidèle Nkundabagenzi, ed., *Rwanda politique, 1958–1960* (Brussels: Centre de Recherche et d'Information Socio-Politiques, 1962), pp. 20–29.

7. For an early statement of the notion of dual colonialism, see "Manifeste des Bahutu."

8. For one such statement regarding harmonious relations between Rwanda's groups, see "Les chefs du Rwanda expriment leur loyalisme envers le Mwami," *Le Courrier d'Afrique* (1 October 1956), in Nkundabagenzi, *Rwanda politique*, p. 34. An influential academic version is found in Jacques Jérôme Maquet, *The Premise of Inequality in Ruanda* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

9. See selections from the Rwandan newspaper *Kangura*, reproduced in Chrétien, *Les médias du génocide*. For analogous accounts among Rundi refugees articulating extremist versions of Rundi history, see Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

10. Alison Des Forges, "The Ideology of Genocide," *ISSUE: A Journal of Opinion* 23, no. 2 (1995): 44–47. Des Forges traces the creation of a myth that glorified and exaggerated the role of Tutsi in founding Rwandan state structures and exerting control over Hutu. She notes that "even the majority of Hutu swallowed this distorted account of the past, so great was their respect for European-style education. Thus people of both groups learned to think of the Tutsi as winners and the Hutu as losers in every great contest of the Rwandan past" (p. 45).

11. From the end of the nineteenth century, the Rwandan kingdom came under the colonial control of first Germany (until 1916) and then Belgium. Following the Revolution of 1959–1961, the monarchy was abolished and a republican government took power at independence in 1962. Rwanda's president, Grégoire Kayibanda, was overthrown by Maj. Gen. Juvenal Habyarimana in 1973. From 1990, the Habyarimana regime faced a series of challenges: war, economic crisis, an internal democratization movement, increasing political instability, and escalating ethnic violence; the plane crash that killed Habyarimana on 6 April 1994 initiat-

ed the genocide in which over half a million people died. For an analysis of the genocide, see Catharine Newbury and David Newbury, "A Catholic Mass in Kigali: Contested Views of the Genocide in Rwanda," *Canadian Journal of African Studies,* forthcoming 1998.

12. For a detailed analysis of alterations in the powers of chiefs and rural class relations in colonial Rwanda, see Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression.* See also Jean Rumiya, *Le Rwanda sous le régime du mandat belge, 1916–1931* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992).

13. Des Forges, "The Ideology of Genocide," p. 45.

14. "Manifeste des Bahutu," in Nkundabagenzi, *Rwanda politique,* pp. 20–29. The subtitle for this document is "Note on the Social Aspect of the Native Racial Problem in Rwanda," illustrating the language of division of the colonial period: racial categories.

15. "Voici le détail historique du règne des Banyiginya au Rwanda," statement by twelve grand clients of the royal court (*bagaragu b'ibwami bakuru*) (17 May 1958), in Nkundabagenzi, *Rwanda politique,* pp. 35–36.

16. Letter from fifteen elderly Tutsi, grand clients of the court to the king and the High Council of the country of Ruanda (18 May 1958), in Nkundabagenzi, *Rwanda politique,* pp. 36–37.

17. In July 1959, Mwami Mutara Rudahigwa (Rwanda's king who had reigned since 1931) died suddenly while visiting Bujumbura, Burundi. This unexpected event served to polarize the situation further. Various theories have been put forward that blame his death alternately on the Belgians, on Tutsi hardliners at the royal court, and on Hutu activists. None of these theories has been proven, and mystery continues to surround his death—just as we still do not have reliable proof as to who was responsible for shooting down the plane carrying Rwanda's former president Juvenal Habyarimana in April 1994. But in both cases, the drama of an unexpected death left plenty of leeway for several groups to cast blame. Politically, an unresolved tragedy may have been useful for several competing groups; they could interpret the causal factors in ways that justified their antagonism.

18. On these events, see Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression,* pp. 195–196; René Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi* (New York: Praeger, 1970), pp. 159–169; Donat Murego, *La révolution rwandaise, 1959–1962* (Louvain: Institut des Sciences Politiques et Sociales, 1975), pp. 915–922; Ian Linden with Jane Linden, *Church and Revolution in Rwanda* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), p. 267; and Reyntjens, *Pouvoir et droit au Rwanda,* pp. 260–264. The Belgian administration believed that Tutsi partisans would retaliate against Hutu on a massive scale. For example, the governor-general at the time asserts that the Union Nationale Rwandaise (UNAR), the monarchist political party, consciously provoked the Hutu uprising in November. He claims that the court strategists planned to kill "all the Hutu leaders—according to a carefully prepared list—and to carry out in selected regions—Astrida—enough massacres of the peasant population to eliminate the possibility of a Hutu reaction before independence . . . or after." Jean-Paul Harroy, *Rwanda: De la féodalité à la démocratie* (Brussels: Hayez, 1984), pp. 291, 305. The official number of deaths resulting from the November conflicts was fifty, of which thirty-seven were allegedly caused by Tutsi, thirteen by Hutu; in Jean R. Hubert, *La Toussaint rwandaise et sa répression* (Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1965), p. 40. However, Reyntjens indicates that there were "several hundred deaths, several thousand houses burned, about 10,000 refugees, and about 20 chiefs and some 150 sub-chiefs forced out of their posts"; in Reyntjens, *Pouvoir et droit au Rwanda,* p. 261. During 1960 and 1961, the numbers of victims grew, and many more people fled their land

and homes. But the scale of destruction was small compared to what occurred in later episodes of violence, particularly in 1964, but most dramatically in 1994.

19. Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression,* esp. chap. 9–10.

20. The term "assisted revolution" derives from Harroy, *Rwanda.* While it is obviously in the Belgian interest to retire to the background, in this case the data seem to support such a concept.

21. See Catharine Newbury, "Rwanda: Recent Debates over Governance and Rural Development," in Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton, *Governance and Politics in Africa* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), pp. 193–219; and Timothy Paul Longman, "Christianity and Crisis: Religion, Civil Society, and Democracy in Rwanda" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1995).

22. Catharine and David Newbury, "Identity, Genocide and Reconstruction in Rwanda," paper presented at the conference "Les racines de la violence dans la région des Grands Lacs," European Parliament, Brussels, 12 January 1995. Mahmood Mamdani makes a similar argument in "From Conquest to Consent as the Basis of State Formation: Reflections on Rwanda," *New Left Review,* no. 216 (March–April 1996): 3–36.

23. The scenario brings to mind analogous events in 1972 in Burundi. There, an external attack by Hutu exiles led to a massive repression in which anywhere from 100,000 to 200,000 people (mostly Hutu) were killed by the Tutsi-dominated army and militias composed of Tutsi youth. This was about ten times the number of deaths in Rwanda in 1964. See René Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnocide as Discourse and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Lemarchand, *Selective Genocide in Burundi* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1973); Filip Reyntjens, *L'Afrique des Grands Lacs en crise: Rwanda, Burundi, 1988–1994* (Paris: Karthala, 1994).

24. During the latter part of the 1980s and the early 1990s, economic conditions in Rwanda deteriorated, while class polarization intensified. Land accumulation for people with money incomes (often associated with the state or donor-funded development projects), corruption by highly placed officials, unfavorable prices for peasant production, and inadequate social services placed large numbers of rural dwellers in an increasingly vulnerable position. Meanwhile, the lack of opportunities for youth, in conditions where land, jobs, or even hope for the future were in short supply, sharpened rural and urban tensions.

In 1989, a steep drop in the world price of coffee reduced the incomes of rural smallholders as well as revenues of the state; in the same year, a serious famine (the first since 1943) ravaged parts of southern and western Rwanda. As one analyst observed, the combined effect of government predation, severe land pressures, and "growth without development" in Rwanda had led by the end of the 1980s to an "impoverishment of the peasants [that]. . . exceeded the limits of what was acceptable"; in Fernand Bézy, *Rwanda 1962–1989: Bilan socio-économique d'un régime* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut d'Etudes du Développement, 1990). Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, Rwanda devalued its currency and began implementing a structural adjustment program in November 1990. The cutback in government spending and increased prices of food and other necessities associated with this program had negative effects for most Rwandans, but these fell particularly heavily on the rural and urban poor.

Evidence on Rwanda's intensifying economic crisis and political disaffection associated with it during the years preceding the 1994 genocide is found in a number of sources. Among others, see Bézy, *Rwanda 1962–1989,* and Catharine Newbury, "Background to Genocide in Rwanda," *ISSUE: A Journal of Opinion* 23,

no. 2 (1995): 12–17; Newbury and Newbury, "A Catholic Mass in Kigali"; Newbury, "Rwanda: Recent Debates over Governance and Rural Development," esp. pp. 202–216; Longman, "Christianity and Crisis"; Danielle de Lame, "Le Sens des violences," paper presented at the conference "Les racines de la violence dans la région des Grands Lacs," European Parliament, Brussels, 12 January 1995; Jean-Claude Willame, *Aux sources de l'hécatombe rwandaise* (Brussels: Institut Africain-Cédaf; Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), chap. 5; Michael Chossudovsky, "Economic Genocide in Rwanda," *Economic and Political Weekly* (13 April 1996): 938–941; André Guichaoua, *Destins paysans et politiques agraires en Afrique centrale*, Vol. I (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1989); S. Marysse, T. de Herdt, and E. Ndayambaje, *Rwanda: Appauvrissement et ajustement structurel* (Brussels: Institut Africain-Cédaf, 1994).

25. During a workshop in 1996, a group of Rwandan intellectuals, social activists, and government officials identified such long-standing patterns of conflict as critical in fostering political violence. For a lucid summary of the proceedings of the workshop, see Charles Ntampaka, "Le colloque de Bamako," *Dialogue*, no. 197 (March–April 1997): 23–33.

26. The Coup of Rucunshu, occurring on the eve of colonial rule, is a case in point. Mibambwe Rutarindwa had been enthroned in 1895 on the death of his father, the renowned Kigeri Rwabugiri; in fact, Rwabugiri had named him coregnant before his death. Several months after taking power, Rutarindwa was attacked and killed along with his ritual supporters and protectors. The conspirators were led by Kanjogera, Mibambwe's adoptive queen mother, and two of her brothers, Kabare and Ruhinankiko, all members of the Abakagara lineage of the Abeega clan.

They placed a young boy on the throne, Kanjogera's biological son, and then proceeded to purge chiefs and other political authorities associated with the royal Abahindiro lineage of the Abanyiginya clan. Many of the paternal brothers, uncles, and cousins of the dead king who were not killed fled into exile or, at the least, were relieved of their positions of command.

De Lacger refers to these events as a "holocaust"; Louis de Lacger, *Le Ruanda*, 2d ed. (Kabgayi, Rwanda: Imprimérie de Kabgayi, 1959), p. 367. He continues (p. 369): "The Banyiginya [the clan identity of the kings] . . . remain today only a shadow of their former selves and owe to the arrival of the whites the fact that they were not exterminated entirely." See also E. Ruhashya, *Rucunshu* (Kigali: Imprimérie Nationale du Rwanda, 1984), an epic poem on what some Rwandans refer to as "the first genocide." For general accounts of the events at Rucunshu and the factions involved, see Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression*, pp. 57–59; de Lacger, *Ruanda*, pp. 358–359, 361–369; Marcel d'Hertefelt and André Coupez, *La royauté sacrée de l'ancien Rwanda: Texte, traduction et commentaire de son rituel* (Tervuren, Belgium: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 1964); Alison Des Forges, "Defeat Is the Only Bad News: Rwanda Under Musiinga, 1896–1931" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1972), pp. 21–22, 26; Alexis Kagame, *Un abrégé de l'histoire du Rwanda*, vol. 2 (Butare: Éditions Universitaires du Rwanda, 1975), pp. 117–126. For a thoughtful discussion of political violence in Rwanda in historical perspective, see Claudine Vidal, *Sociologie des passions* (Paris: Karthala, 1991).

27. Ntampaka, "Colloque de Bamako," p. 28.

28. Newbury, *Cohesion of Oppression*, esp. chap. 1, 10. The literature on the interplay of ethnicity with political context is extensive. For a thoughtful recent discussion of the contingent character of ethnicity in politics, see John Bowen, "The Myth of Global Ethnic Conflict," *The Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 4 (October 1996): 3–14. For Africa and beyond, see especially Crawford Young, "The Dialectics of Cultural Pluralism: Concept and Reality," in Crawford Young, ed., *The*

Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism: The Nation-state at Bay? (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), pp. 3–35; Crawford Young, "Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Class in Africa: A Retrospective," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 26, no. 3 (1986): 421–495; Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976); Leroy Vail, ed., *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London: James Curry, 1989).