11. Postcolonial Genocide

Scarcity, Ethnicity, and Mass Death in Rwanda

David Norman Smith

1

The scale and speed of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 took the world by surprise.1 Well over 500,000 people were killed in just fourteen weeks, capturing the horrified attention of a global audience which, until then, had known little or nothing about Rwanda. Soon, however, surprise yielded to journalistic “explanations” that reduced the complexity of this startling episode to misleading clichés. The problem, we were told, lies with the Rwandan people, whose atavistic hatreds cannot be contained. Primordial antagonisms, whether “tribal” or “ethnic,” are said to be the ultimate cause of mass murder.

The implication of this line of reasoning is that genocide, in a sense, is a murderous fact of life, an ineliminable danger as long as societies are ethnically divided. In the Rwandan case, this train of thought has led many people to think that the only hope for a lasting solution lies with forces above or outside the public: international lending agencies, once they learn the “policy lessons” of the genocide; the Rwandan state, duly reformed; and perhaps even a “return to colonialism,” if all else fails.

The fatal flaw in this perspective, however, is that it rests on a grave misreading of the causes of the genocide—and finds hope in the

1. For help with this chapter I am grateful to John Nagel, Kevin Anderson, Ken Lohrentz, Scott Kerrihard, Isidor Wallimann, and Michael Dobkowski.
Map 1. Rwanda and Its Neighbors.
very forces that spurred mass death in the first place. In what follows, I will contend that, far from being the singular source of the ills that gave rise to genocide, the Rwandan people are in fact the only force with a realistic chance of curing those ills. Rwanda’s problems—political, military, ethnic, demographic and environmental—require popular solutions which existing states and markets are all too likely to oppose.

On the eve of the 1990s, Rwanda seemed to be an “oasis” of order and progress in east central Africa, in striking contrast to neighboring Zaire, Uganda, and Burundi (Braeckman 1994, 86). The ruling party had been in power uninterruptedly since 1973, and the human rights situation, though “less than perfect,” “contrasted favorably” with most other African nations (Reyntjens 1994, 35). So much violence had wracked bordering nations (see map 1) that many schools, missions, and development agencies had sought a safe haven in Rwanda (Newbury 1992, 201).

Rwanda also seemed to be thriving economically. In 1990, though still relying on agriculture for nearly 40 percent of its total GDP, Rwanda had reduced its reliance on farming more since 1965 than any other sub-Saharan country save Lesotho. This shift from agriculture is doubly impressive when we consider that Rwanda also sustained a high level of agricultural productivity. Since 1965, for example, Rwanda had enjoyed more success than any other sub-Saharan nation in turning pasture land into cropland, and in the 1970s, when the ratio of food production to population growth fell for sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, Rwanda enjoyed a modest increase (Pottier 1993, 12). In the mid-1980s, only one other sub-Saharan nation enjoyed a faster growth rate in agricultural exports (Cleaver 1993, tables A-9, A-5), and though Rwanda was hardly unique in its export profile—relying mainly, like many sub-Saharan nations, on coffee production3—itss marketing system was comparatively so sound that growers in Zaire, Uganda, and Burundi routinely smuggled in coffee for sale on the world market (Newbury 1992, 201).

2. In 1965 Rwanda was more dependent on peasant labor than any other sub-Saharan country, relying on agriculture for 75 percent of its GDP. By 1990 this percentage had been cut in half, falling to 38 percent—the eleventh highest figure among thirty-four sub-Saharan nations (see Cleaver 1993, table A–2a).

3. World Bank research shows that coffee is by far the most widely produced agricultural export commodity in sub-Saharan Africa (Cleaver 1993, table A–5). Almost half of forty nations listed in a 1992 study specialized in coffee production (19), while more than 25 percent specialized in cotton production (11), and the remaining 25 percent specialized in other products—cocoa, rice, and so on.
Though still extremely poor, Rwanda was clearly on an ascending curve. Once the most impoverished of the five Great Lakes nations, Rwanda was “the least poor” in 1990 (Reyntjens 1994, 35). It was not a great surprise, then, when Rwanda became one of four African nations invited to participate in the Food Strategies program of the European Community in the 1980s (Pottier 1993, 5), or that the World Bank, looking back on nearly a decade of African development, gave Rwanda its highest accolade, calling it an “enabling environment” for private production and trade (1989, 105). Rwanda is a “successful case of adaptation,” the World Bank concluded (Newbury 1992, 193).

Few observers in the immediate postindependence period would have predicted so much optimism a quarter of a century later. Rwanda was very poor, very small (about the size of Vermont), and notoriously extreme in many ways—“extremely landlocked,” with “an extremely high population density, an extremely high population growth, and an extremely low degree of urbanization” (Braun, de Haen, and Blanken 1991, 15). Of almost no geopolitical significance, Rwanda was almost an afterthought even for its colonial conquerors. Imperial Germany, which ruled Rwanda from 1899 until 1916, was less interested in the Rwandans than in running a transcontinental railroad through Rwanda’s hills. Even Belgium, which seized Rwanda and nearby Burundi during World War I, initially hoped to trade “Ruanda-Urundi” to Portugal for territory elsewhere in Africa. When this trade failed to materialize, the new Belgian rulers decided to use Rwanda as a source of food and labor for the Katanga copper mines in the Belgian Congo (now Zaire). The Congo was vast and thinly populated, with comparatively few resources to support its rapidly growing mining centers. Rwanda, small but dynamic, seemed ideally suited for a supporting role.

Nestled east of the Congo in a fertile part of the Great Rift valley just below the equator, Rwanda was one of the most productive farming regions in all of Africa, rich in bananas, sorghum, and more than two hundred kinds of beans (Gravel 1968). This food had little export value, but it was perfect for Katanga. And although Rwanda as a breadbasket for others placed the Rwandan people at risk for famine, this was a risk, evidently, that the Belgians were willing to take. In the 1920s, Rwanda therefore sent an abundance of food and thousands of laborers to the Congo (while others fled to greener pastures in Uganda). All this changed, however, when the copper market collapsed at the start of the Great Depression. Since Katanga now ceased to be a magnet
for food and labor, the Belgians decided to optimize their income from Rwanda itself.

Accordingly, like the British in Uganda, the Belgians in 1931 brought coffee to Rwanda, which they forced the peasants to grow for the world market. The peasants, who paid taxes from the resulting income, were also compelled to perform a great deal of "akazi" (forced labor, corvée). Over time, as Belgian labor exactions grew increasingly onerous, the conditions of life in Rwanda worsened drastically, setting the stage for the spiral of disasters to come.

During the Second World War the peasants were forced to work at redoubled speed, and even amid a long drought "they were forced to sell beans to European middlemen for one franc per kilo" (Newbury 1988, 158; cf. Dorsey 1994). Soon the combined effects of drought, labor corvées, and labor flight to Uganda yielded a famine of epic proportions, in which at least three hundred thousand people died—10 percent of the population.

Additional misery and tension sprang from the heightened polarization of Rwandan society. Precolonial Rwanda had been divided into two ethnically tinged social classes, the Tutsis (warrior nobles) and a "Hutu" peasantry with roots in a mix of Bantu-speaking farm peoples who were already present when the cattle-rearing Tutsis arrived about five centuries ago (Newman 1995). The key to early Rwanda is that the term "Hutu" refers not to a primordial ethnic group, as journalists assume, but to a servile class drawn from a spectrum of peoples whose shared identity as "Hutus" (literally, "subjects" or "vassals") reflects their common subjection to the Tutsi nobles, who exploited yet also protected them. The Rwandan empire, which soared to prominence in the late precolonial period, was the joint product of both classes. When this empire fell to Europeans, the mutuality of Rwandan class relations declined sharply. The Germans and especially the Belgians recast the Tutsi nobility as a stratum of tax collectors and corvée labor bosses, whose power over the peasants rose as their obligations to them declined.

Hostility to the Tutsis swelled as Belgian exactions increased, reaching a crescendo in the 1950s. A proudly Hutu regime surged into power on a wave of emotion in the early 1960s, leaving thousands of Tutsis dead and many more in exile, the victims of a harsh Hutu nationalism that manifested signs of racism (for many Hutus accepted the Belgian myth that Tutsis are "black Caucasians," racial enemies of the Bantu peoples). The cycle of violence that climaxed in Rwanda in 1994 had begun.
The second act in this classical tragedy unfolded in Burundi (Lemarchand 1994, 174), where Tutsi supremacy had been left intact when Belgium withdrew. Fear of Hutu nationalism, however, and the rise of the extremist "Tutsi-Hima" wing of the ruling minority led to a fateful hardening of Tutsi chauvinism. In 1972 a flicker of Hutu insurgency served as a pretext for a "selective genocide" (Lemarchand and Martin 1974). In short order, the Tutsi military killed at least a hundred thousand Hutus, including every actual or potential leader they could identify. Smaller but similar Burundian massacres that occurred later (most notably in 1988 and 1993) can be understood only in the light of this chilling precedent.

Yet another act in this tragedy took place in strife-torn Uganda, where more than a million Rwandans had fled to escape famine or the pogroms of the 1960s. In 1981 an insurgency backed by many Rwandans provoked a scorched-earth campaign by the Obote government in the Luwero Triangle in central Uganda (Mutibwa 1992). At least three hundred thousand people were killed in this campaign, including about sixty thousand Rwandans (Watson 1991, 11).

After Obote was defeated in 1986, several Tutsis assumed top positions in the new regime—but they, like most Rwandans, were disconnected in Uganda. Bias against them was rife, and memories of the recent slaughter were indelible. When petitions to return from exile were rebuffed by the Rwandan government, Tutsi-led regiments of the new Ugandan military reconstituted themselves as the Rwandan Patriotic Front. In October 1990 RPF troops entered Rwanda to overthrow the one-party Hutu state with a "multi-party, multi-ethnic" regime. In 1994, after Habyarimana and nearly a million other Rwandans perished in a genocidal massacre planned and led by Habyarimana’s closest associates, the RPF did indeed come to power.

Rwanda’s "enabling environment" had turned into a vast killing field, and the World Bank’s talk of "successful adaptation" now sounds like hollow rhetoric. Why? Why did social relations in Rwanda polarize to this extent? What forces plunged Rwanda into this vortex of murder and mass death?

As Patrick Chabal points out, it would be easy to conclude that Africa is simply "a continent of violence, perennially on the edge of survival" (1992, 179). Violence is indeed epidemic. Leaving southern Africa aside,
Richard Sandbrook shows that 4.5 million people died in political strife in sub-Saharan Africa from 1960 to 1987—a figure vastly greater than in Latin America or Asia. Almost all of these deaths (nearly 4 million) occurred in civil wars, insurrections, and other internal conflicts (see table). Since 1987 the death toll in Africa has continued to spiral, as Somalia, Liberia, and now Rwanda have been engulfed in deadly strife. The “ultimate reason,” Chabal argues (1992, 189), “has more to do with the flaws in the construction of the post-colonial political order than with the inevitability of atavistic hostility.” Is this claim accurate? To what extent, we might ask, is the spiral of violence in Rwanda the result of flaws in the political order? And how, if at all, is ethnicity bound up with this disorder?

I have argued elsewhere (Smith 1995) that ethnicity and ethnocentrism remain pivotal to Rwandan society, as they have been for cen-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Opponent</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1975–1987</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
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<td>1980–1987</td>
<td>7,000</td>
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<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>1974–1987</td>
<td>546,000*</td>
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<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>RENAMO</td>
<td>1981–1987</td>
<td>401,000*</td>
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<td>Biafra</td>
<td>1967–1970</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
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<td>North/South</td>
<td>1963–1972</td>
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<td>North/South</td>
<td>1984–1987</td>
<td>10,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>various</td>
<td>1981–1987</td>
<td>102,000**</td>
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<td>Katanga</td>
<td>1960–1965</td>
<td>100,000</td>
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<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Ndebele</td>
<td>1983</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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*This figure includes war-induced famine deaths.
**This figure indicates the caution of Sandbrook’s estimate, since it omits every death attributable to Idi Amin’s regime and—if we are to believe the International Committee of the Red Cross—it understates the deaths in the Luwero Triangle by a factor of three (Watson 1991).


4. Writing in 1992, before the latest Rwandan and Burundian slaughter, Chabal listed Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda as the sites of three of the most “dreadful” civil wars in recent history (189).
turies. Rwandan "ethnicity," however, is so mutable, so much a part of the discourse of genocide, and so fatally entwined with state and class power that it must be analyzed with extraordinary care. Briefly, I would argue that, in the interval from the Belgian withdrawal to the genocide (from 1962 to 1994), the "ethnic" division between Tutsis and Hutus had grown progressively less significant in real terms. Ethnocentric feeling persisted, as the genocide proves—but the object of this hate was an increasingly ephemeral social construct, a memory of oppression more than an actual social division. The new oppressors (a "Hutu" ruling clique from the northwest) sought to exploit residual anger toward the remnants of the former oppressors to legitimate their own predatory rule.

Ethnicity, in other words, increasingly served as an ideological counter in the period that culminated with the genocide. What, formerly, had been a real antagonism turned into a legitimating myth—a myth used to justify murder.

To grasp this point we must turn to the history of Rwandan ethnicity. In the earliest phase, when the Tutsi/Hutu nexus was first established, the division between them was more purely "ethnic" than in any later period. The original "Tutsis" were a mix of the Lwo-speaking peoples who fled the western Nile to escape Dinka raiders. Newly settled in the Great Lakes region, these immigrants soon coalesced into a stratum of cattle-breeding warriors with an ethnic profile very distinct from that of the Bantu-speaking farmers they soon began to dominate (as "Hutus"). In the next phase, however, the terms "Tutsi" and "Hutu" acquired a primary class connotation (Newbury 1992; Vidal 1985; Chrétien 1985; Freedman 1979; Des Forges 1972; d'Hertefelt 1971). Precolonial Rwanda was most fundamentally divided between patrons and clients, who were bound by the labor obligations that clients owed patrons in return for lordly protection (Newbury 1992; Freedman 1974; Vidal 1969; Maquet 1954, 1961). Although the lords were nominally "Tutsis," this had ceased to be a strictly ethnic designation. Wealthy "Hutus," for example, who renounced "Hutuness" (servility) by an act of "kwihutura" were welcomed into the ranks of putative Tutsis. Thus, by the dawn of the colonial period, the Tutsi/Hutu connection was above all a class affair.

Ironically, at this point, the colonial rulers of Rwanda put a renewed ethnic spin on the old distinction. Convinced that the Tutsis were racially superior to the Hutu masses, the Germans and (after 1916) the Belgians not only forced Tutsi "chiefs" to coerce rising quantities of labor from the Hutu peasants but also justified the many privileges they
granted the Tutsis on overtly racial grounds. This racism drove a wedge between the Hutu masses and the newly christened Tutsi "Hamites," simultaneously hardening the class division between them and conferring a new ethnic quality on this division. Accordingly, under Belgian rule, the Tutsis became objects of a passionate hatred among Hutu peasants, who, in turn, became objects of Tutsi disdain. A class division thus became what Fein (1993, 89) rightly calls an "ethnoclass" hatred.

This hatred burst into the open during the anti-Tutsi violence that marked the inaugural period of Rwandan independence. However, in the generation that followed, the Tutsi/Hutu conflict dissipated. The division between the two groups diminished to the vanishing point, as most "Tutsis" became peasants, subject to the depredations of the very same "Hutu" regime that also preyed upon "Hutu" peasants. As the class difference evaporated, only ethnocentrism was left—an ethnocentrism that drew its charge from unhappy colonial-era memories and was nursed by predatory regimes for whom "Hutu" status was a claim to legitimacy (Omaar and De Waal 1994).

To summarize: the Tutsi/Hutu division was originally ethnic; subsequently class-based; acutely and simultaneously ethnic and class-based during the colonial period; and then "ethnic" once again in the postcolonial period, when the Rwandan state found it expedient to promote Hutu chauvinism in lieu of political and economic justice.

Should we conclude, then, that ethnicity is simply a mirage in Rwanda? That "Tutsi" and "Hutu" are simply empty words? I think not. Although the Tutsi/Hutu divide has been reinvented time and again, it remains very real to many Rwandans. Claudine Vidal is right, I think, to resist the temptation to say "that Tutsi and Hutu 'do not exist,' or that they are merely an 'invention' springing from ignorance and colonial Machiavellism" (1991, 24). It is certainly true that modern Rwandan identities are "socially constructed"—yet, they have real consequences. For the Hutu chauvinists of the genocidal regime, Tutsi status was an invitation to murder. The Tutsis in Rwanda are thus what Vidal (echoing Sartre) calls an "objet négatif," for which "it is not enough to establish, from the viewpoint of truth, the mythical aspects of ethnicity" (1991, 24). On the contrary. Ethnicity, once constructed, can be exploited—and it is a vain hope to imagine that pointing to its constructed character will deprive it of its sting.

5. Vidal cites Sartre (1960, 344); see the English-language edition (Sartre 1976, 293–307). By the same logic the Hutus in Burundi are equally an "objet négatif."
Ethnicity, then, is a powerful force. Yet as Bayart and Chabal agree, other factors are at least equally influential. In Rwanda in 1994, a four-sided struggle embroiled a predatory state, a popular opposition, a guerrilla army (the RPF), and international lending agencies (mainly the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and World Bank). Tutsi peasants were the focus of racist propaganda in this conflict and they suffered its consequences more horribly than anyone else, but they were not its raison d'être. An authoritarian regime, caught in a vise between the IMF, the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front), and domestic opposants, lashed out with cold calculation and visceral fury. Their plan was to stay in power by sheer coercive force, to keep a death grip on the means of accumulation, to rule without consent. Hutu racism served this party, but power and profit were its main motives.

My thesis in this chapter is threefold: that the Rwandan genocide was not the “elemental outburst” that the media portrayed, but was, rather, meticulously staged by a state that hoped to profit from the fear and anger of its citizens; that the impetus for this gamble was a grave legitimation crisis; and that the IMF and World Bank played shadowy but pivotal roles in driving the state to the edge of the abyss—and over.

My first proposition, that the genocide was engineered by the state, has been massively documented (Omaar and de Waal 1994; see Human Rights Watch 1992, 1994a, 1994b). The evidence reveals just how coercive the ruling MRND was prepared to be when consent vanished and the IMF/RPF vise tightened. That this ruling party had lost its legitimacy—my second proposition—is the final chapter in a long saga. I will contend that the MRND’s legitimation crisis was the terminus of a long process by which power in Rwanda was desacralized and “depatrimonialized.” A royal state, which, in the precolonial period, staked its claim to authority on the sacredness and fatherly liberality of its kings, was transformed by colonialism into a predatory bureaucracy, relying less on the loyalty of its subjects than on forced coffee cultivation for the export market.

In the postcolonial period, after toppling the Tutsi king and nobility, the new rulers made a half-hearted effort to leaven their forced-labor agenda with neopatrimonial concessions to the peasantry (most notably

6. MRND (Mouvement Républicain pour le Développement et la Démocratie) is usually pronounced “emerendi.” Until falling in 1994, this party ruled Rwanda for nearly two decades.
by forming producer cooperatives). But the main object of these conces-
sions, to mask and rationalize the regime’s predatory agenda, became
less compelling in the 1980s, when a sudden influx of international
loans sharply reduced the state’s dependence on the world coffee mar-
et (and thus on the peasantry). Less worried now about the loyalty of
the coffee producers, the MRND became even more predatory than
before. Hence, when the coffee market collapsed in 1988, it was second
nature for the party to turn the screws on the peasants to recoup its
losses. When the public resisted, and when the IMF/World Bank ex-
erted great pressure on the MRND to relinquish its monopoly on power,
the party leaders felt that they had been backed into a corner. Rather
than gracefully accepting defeat, they chose the most violent alternative
available to them—total war on much of their own public.

Thinly veiled as an eruption of communal violence, the genocide
was a calculated gamble. The hope was that, by eliminating the politi-
cal opposition, the MRND could stave off the IMF/RPF juggernaut.
The Tutsi peasantry bore the brunt of this genocide for several rea-
sons: a measure of real ethnocentrism on the part of the killers; the
MRND’s cynical and desperate wish to exploit residual ethnic hatreds,
in a final bid for a shred of legitimacy; and the assumption that all
Tutsis were naturally opposants. But hundreds of thousands of Hutus
were massacred as well, mainly for political reasons. They opposed
the regime. They exposed—and could exploit—the MRND’s fatal lack
of legitimacy.

The Rwandan state, desacralized and depatrimonialized, could rely
only on violence to fight its enemies. And yet even violence on the
most appalling scale proved unavailing in the end.

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Readers familiar with Africanist literature may see parallels between
my argument and related positions—Migdal’s theory of “strong states”
dominating “weak societies” (1988), Lonsdale’s thesis of the decline of
“political accountability” (1986), Sandbrook’s concern about the col-
lapse of consent (1993), Hyden’s account of the crisis of “reciprocity”
(1992), and Fatton’s analysis of the rise of “predatory rule”: “As
quasivoluntary compliance diminishes,” Fatton writes, “coercion in-
creases” (1992, 4).

My thesis is, in fact, a variation on Göran Hyden’s influential
theme of the “uncaptured peasantry” (1980). Briefly, Hyden says that
although peasants may have less clout than proletarians vis-à-vis the state, they are far from defenseless. Since most African states rely on export taxes for the bulk of their revenues, they have to treat export producers with a degree of diplomacy. If states overtax the coffee, cocoa, and cotton that peasants produce for the export market, they risk driving them back to subsistence farming and away from export crops entirely. This would be tantamount to killing the goose that laid the golden egg. Hence, African states have good fiscal reasons to retain the goodwill of their peasants.

African history is "replete" with episodes that reveal the soundness of Hyden's theory (Isaacman 1993, 239f.). Peasants in many places have uprooted crops, boiled seeds, burned harvests, or turned to the black market. But as many critics point out, Hyden seldom takes complicating or contrary facts into account (Lemarchand 1989). This practice leads some scholars, like Kajsa Ekholm Friedman, to conclude that Hyden's theory is simply "the opposite" of the truth. In the formerly "Marxist-Leninist" Congo, she writes, the state "has disengaged itself from the people. . . . It is not dependent upon ordinary people in any significant way, and it can therefore turn its back to them" (1993, 225).

The truth of this claim vis-à-vis the Congo is not in question (see Mpélé 1993). It is not obvious, however, that Hyden's thesis is irrelevant in cases of the Congolese kind, where the peasantry seems to have been decisively "captured." In Rwanda, too, the state seemed to have captured the peasants. It was able to do this, however, only to the extent that the World Bank freed the MRND from its dependence on the market. Nearly 95 percent of all Rwandans are peasants, and coffee revenues are always crucial. Hence, the state can never be wholly deaf to peasant concerns. But the infusion of foreign aid here, as elsewhere, had a liberating effect on the state. This seems to have been true in Congo, too, since Friedman lists "aid and foreign loans" as two of the state's three main income sources.

In Uganda the parallel is even clearer. This is plain in a study by Stephen Bunker, whose fieldwork initially seemed to confirm the original Hyden thesis. Before the lending boom, the Bugisu coffee cooperative was clearly uncaptured: "I found, however, when I returned to Uganda during the summer of 1983, that [the new] regime was far less susceptible to local political demands than . . . any of the previous national or colonial governments had been" (1987, 228). Instead of courting coffee growers, Obote was preoccupied with foreign loans. From 1981 to 1985 there was "a dramatic increase in external borrowing"
(Mugenyi 1991, 65). Hence, although "still dependent . . . in the long run on peasant crop production," Obote's "more immediate need was to satisfy the demands of these agencies" (Bunker 1987, 229).

In the short run, Obote showed merciless disdain for the Ugandan people. He squeezed the coffee growers, and scourged the Luwero Triangle. It seemed, that is, that the Obote regime was a classically "strong" state; backed by the IMF and World Bank, Obote was free to impose his will on an ever "weaker" society. The 1986 victory of the insurgency against Obote calls this appearance into question. Without legitimacy Obote could not save himself even by slaughtering three hundred thousand people. In Rwanda the numbers differ but the logic is the same.

My stress on the IMF and World Bank parallels a recent current of thought in IMF circles. Prefigured by Sidell (1988) and Nelson (1990), this current is now best represented by Jean-Dominique Lafay. Perturbed that "unexpected violent reactions . . . have accompanied some stabilization or IMF programs," Lafay and his associates scrutinized data on twenty-three African nations (including Rwanda) to find correlations between IMF policies and various forms of political conflict (Lafay, Morrisson, and Dessus 1994, 175–76). The results they obtained are sobering.

In a model that revolves around a trio of "decision-making forces"—the IMF and World Bank, the state, and the public (176), Lafay tracks an arrow of causality that runs from the IMF/WB, acting through the state, to the public, whose protests evoke state reactions.7 Often, the result is a spiral of violence.

IMF aims are well known, Lafay says (1994, 180–81): cuts in "public expenditures . . . an increase in consumer goods prices . . . more rigorous monetary policy, devaluations, and cuts in public employment." However, the political effects of IMF interventions are seldom studied. It is often said that international lending policies are harsh and unpopular—but Lafay goes further to show that only one of sixteen carefully coded IMF and World Bank interventions is even remotely popular. Spending cuts, rationing tax hikes, and price increases prompt both strikes and demonstrations, often over a long period of time. Wage cuts spur strikes; job cuts, devaluations, and privatizations spark demonstrations (1994, table 9.2).

7. From this point on, for ease of reading, I refer to Lafay as the author of the study cited below. It should be kept in mind that Morrisson and Dessus are his coauthors.
There are, in fact, so many correlations between protests and IMF/World Bank policies that it can hardly be denied, Lafay says, "that economic adjustment is a risky venture" (1994, 182). The magnitude of this risk is manifest when we consider Lafay's finding that African states typically greet protests with violence, arrests, and measures to ban unions and parties, censor the media, forbid rallies, and close schools and universities (1994, table 9.3). Indeed, the "suppression of demonstrations is much more violent than in developed countries" (1994, 183). The African state is so dictatorial and rigid that virtually "any conflict turns into a dispute over the legitimacy of the regime" (1994, 184).

In Rwanda this had not always been true. Indeed, the political process that led to the genocide can be understood as a long-term decline in the legitimacy of a once-"sacred" state. The kings who ruled in the precolonial period were regarded as divine personifications of the highest power, imaana, which they showered upon the Rwandan people through royal rituals. This observance, it was believed, ensured the fertility of Rwandan women, cattle, and land (Coupez and d'Hertefelt 1964, 460; see Taylor 1992, Bonte 1991). The kings were also classically "patrimonial" figures in the Weberian sense that they maintained a degree of real reciprocity with the peasants and minor nobles in the pyramid beneath them (see, for example, Weber [1922] 1978, 1010). While relying on the public to fill their granaries and feed their entourages, they also sought to play the role of generous "fathers of the people," granting favors and even opening their granaries during famines (Vanwalle 1982, 73; in Pottier 1986: 222–23).

Toward the end of the precolonial period, the balance of power tilted in favor of the kings, leading to a diminution of reciprocity between the monarchy and the Rwandan people (Des Forges 1972, passim). But the tie that bound them was not severed until the Germans and Belgians entered the scene. A stream of colonial decisions so weakened and humiliated the royal house that, by the end of the colonial era, royalty was no longer sacred in Rwanda. The king had been reduced to a spectral figure, who was relevant in the contemporary setting only as the greatest of the Tutsi lords. When many of the now-hated Tutsis were driven into exile in the early 1960s, the king went with them. State power in Rwanda had been radically desacralized.

Meanwhile, the state was also undergoing "depatrimonialization." Reciprocity between rulers and ruled had declined drastically during the colonial years, as the Belgians, whose power sprang from European sources, effectively "captured" the Hutu peasants. A flicker of
hope burst into flame when Hutu nationalists came to power in the postcolonial era, but patrimonial relations were not restored. This became particularly clear during the second decade of the “Second Republic,” which was born in a coup in 1973. Reciprocity, it seemed, was not on the agenda. The state was bent on capturing the peasants just as thoroughly as they had been captured by the Belgians.

In the short run, this objective was easily attained, for (until recently) there has been virtually no civil society in Rwanda. Even the capital, Kigali, was a town of just a few thousand as late as 1970, and most Rwandans do not live in towns or even villages, but are dispersed in family farming compounds. Desperately poor, and willing, at first, to give the new “Hutu” regime the benefit of the doubt, the peasants grew increasingly unhappy. Ultimately, the legitimacy of the state fell precipitously, setting the stage for the decidedly post-patrimonial conflict of the present period. To this we now turn.

The fall of the Tutsi bureaucracy profoundly changed the political physiognomy of Rwanda. Power now devolved upon circles of Hutu intellectuals (the so-called evolues), who had formed two parties in the 1950s to press for independence. Parmehutu, a “Hutu” party with chauvinist impulses, drew its main support from Gitarama, in central Rwanda, and from the northern provinces (Gisenyi, Ruhengeri, and Byumba). Aprosoma, a party based in the southern province of Butare, was multiethnic in ideology and composition.

The regional division here is crucial. The peoples of the northwest—the “Abakiga”—had been the last of the independent Bantu-speaking peoples of the Great Lakes region to be annexed to Rwanda. They had been conquered, in fact, only in the 1920s, and they had never adjusted to the foreign idea that they were “Hutu” pawns in a Belgo-Tutsi chess match. Indeed, as late as the 1970s, many Kigans still considered it an insult to be called a Hutu (Freedman 1979). Nevertheless, in the first decade of independence, avowedly “Hutu” evolues from Gitarama (where Tutsi/Hutu relations had prevailed for centuries) joined with anti-Tutsi forces from the Abakigan northwest to forge a common “Hutu” front.

Parmehutu emerged as the leading force in independent Rwanda after a quasi-revolutionary initial phase in which peasant anger, harnessed to the ends of anti-Tutsi nationalism, drove most wealthy Tutsis
into exile (while many Tutsi peasants stayed in Rwanda, eking out a precarious, almost rightless existence in a setting where everyone was assigned an official ethnic identity, and where most privileges were reserved for "Hutus"). Without reviving forced labor, the new regime nevertheless soon proved to be a worthy heir to the Tutsi bureaucracy. As early as 1965 Parmehutu became the nucleus of a one-party state, and by the late 1960s the "Gitaramistes" in the party had elbowed aside the Abakigan northerners. The inner circle of politicians from Gitarama (grouped around the party leader, Gregoire Kayibanda) soon emerged as a noblesse d'état, bent on self-enrichment through the medium of the state.

The main instrument of this quest was the state-run marketing system TRAFIPRO, which channeled export profits to Gitaramiste leaders and businessmen. "The economic power of TRAFIPRO was much feared in the northern prefectures. Controlling 27 shops nationwide and 70 buying-up points for coffee (in 1966) TRAFIPRO was accused by influen-
tial Northerners of running a monopoly that strangled other forms of economic enterprise, especially in the North” (Pottier 1993, 11; see Reyntjens 1994, 511f).

The leading northern politicians were incensed not only because they themselves were left out in the cold but also because they saw the Kayibanda regime as an enemy of traditional Abakigan property relations. Unlike the Gitaramistes, for whom the regime itself was the locus classicus of predatory accumulation, the northerners wished to put the state at the service of the _abakonde_, a stratum of Kigan landowners whose wealth and power sprang from _ubukonde_ clientship.\(^8\) Although _ubukonde_ closely resembled hated forms of Tutsi land tenure that were now banned, it was protected by the Gitaramiste regime as a “Hutu” institution. Hence, when Jim Freedman carried out fieldwork in the north in 1971, he found a way of life very much like the one described in the ethnohistorical records. In particular, “ideas about how social units settle on the land and the principles by which these social units identify themselves, form and fissure, seemed to remain in principle very much the same” (1974, 42). When Freedman returned six years later, he found that the situation had greatly changed. The source of this change was the coup of 1973.

The coup leader, Juvenal Habyarimana, was a military commander from the northwestern province of Gisenyi whose wife belonged to a powerful _abakonde_ family. In June, Kayibanda evidently crossed a fatal line when he announced a new bureau, ONACO, which assumed state control over private commerce. For property owners, this may well have been the last straw. In early July, Habyarimana seized power and “suspended” ONACO, which his regime vilified as “communist” (Reyntjens 1985, 505–6).

Quickly showing that he was no populist, Habyarimana took the bold step of reviving corvée labor in 1975. Under the aegis of a system called _umuganda_, all adults were required to participate in labor teams every Saturday under state direction; the penalty for refusal was imprisonment (Omaar and de Waal 1994, 16).\(^9\) In other respects, too,

8. Ubukonde was also common in the southwestern region of Kinyaga, which, like Kiga, was incorporated into imperial Rwanda at a very late date. See Newbury 1988, passim.

9. The reactionary daring of this step can be gauged by the fact that _travail-corvée_ had been expressly singled out in the revolutionary 1957 “Manifesto of the Bahutu” as a practice “no longer adapted to the situation and psychology of today” (see Newbury 1988, 192). No other single feature of Belgo-Tutsi rule had been more hated.
Habyarimana “greatly intensified” the process of “centralizing and reinforcing the postcolonial state” (Newbury 1992, 198).

The new ruling party, the MRND, was declared the “party of the Rwandan people,” and the party slogan, “responsible democracy,” was explained in classically Orwellian terms by a spokesman as “the free expression of ideas on condition that they are seen as useful to the collectivity” (Mfizi 1983, 61; cited by Newbury 1992, 198).

The undisguised class and nordiste biases of the new regime gave rise to concentric circles of winners and losers. Standing at the very heart of the regime was an inner circle known as the Akazu, “the little hut,” which consisted of Habyarimana’s intimates, many of whom were Bushiru from Rambura in Gisenyi (Reyntjens 1994, 276). Among the key figures in this group were Habyarimana’s wife, Agathe; three of her brothers (Séraphin Rwabukumba, former head of the national bank and director of the Centrale, which enjoyed a near monopoly on food imports; Protails Zigiramyirazo, former prefect of Ruhengeri; and Elie Sagatwa, Habyarimana’s secretary); and the former defense minister Theoneste Bagosora, who is widely viewed as the architect of the genocide (Omaar and de Waal 1994, 94–105; Braeckman 1994, 104).

Guarding the inner circle was the elite Presidential Guard, “ninety percent of whom,” a former finance minister says, “are from Habyarimana’s area, practically from his hill” (interviewed by Omaar and de Waal 1994, 91).


Habyarimana professed to speak for all Rwandans, but it was self-evident, a former ambassador reports, that “in reality he was only interested in the Bakiga people . . . especially those from Gisenyi” (interviewed by Omaar and de Waal 1994, 40). Gitarama and Kibuye, with 20 percent of the population, received just 1 percent of rural investments (excluding donor funds), while Gisenyi, Ruhengeri, Kigali, and Cyangugu shared almost 90 percent of the total (Guiachaoua 1989a, 173; see Newbury 1992, 203). Analogous disparities were plain elsewhere (Reyntjens 1994, 33).

In a book finished less than two months before the genocide, Reyntjens reported that the Tutsi/Hutu conflict had been “surpassed
by a regional conflict” (1994, 34). The north, prospering at the expense of the south, made a mockery of the old rhetoric of “Hutu” unity. Yet, even the north was not free of conflict and class division. When Freedman returned to Kiga in 1977, he found that *ubukonde*, torn from its moorings by an influx of money, had given rise to a sharply divided society. For the Abakiga poor, the “devil word is *amataranga*”—money (1979, 15). The landowners had capitalized on the new money economy to lure peasants into debt, a process leading to the “concentration of land holdings in the hands of a few” (1979, 3; cf. Pottier 1993, 15). An abyss had opened up between the wealthy and the land-poor, the *abakene*, many of whom could no longer support families.

Elsewhere conditions were equally desperate. A 1984 study showed that 42.9 percent of the land was controlled by 16.4 percent of the families (Reyntjens 1994, 223). Average land holdings shrank (Pottier 1993, 12), landlessness became widespread (Jazairy, Mohiuddin, and Pannucio 1992, 50), and peasant incomes fell to levels of “pauperization” well beyond “what is acceptable” (Bézy 1990, 58, cited by Newbury 1992, 203). Overall, Newbury says, Habyarimana’s Rwanda revealed “a growing gap between rich and poor as well as a more vigorous assertion of class interests by those in power” (1992, 203).

When the IMF, the RPF and a democratic opposition put this predatory system in question, the *Akazu* decided to take action.

5

“The old is dying and the new cannot be born,” Antonio Gramsci once wrote, musing over the miscarriage of capitalism in southern Italy. “In this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”

For Rwanda and the many African nations that share its political and economic profile (Sandbrook 1993; Bayart 1993), the twentieth century has been a time of plague and locusts. The old precapitalist ways were irrevocably destroyed, and yet the capitalist millennium never arrived. Corvée labor and coffee exports broke an empire but did not offer emancipation. A multiclass and multiethnic mosaic became a deadly dialectic.

Is there a solution? Is there a path forward for Rwanda and Africa?

The conventional wisdom is that Rwanda has been sabotaged by its own irrepressible past. Primitive hatreds, pulsing beneath the veneer of civilization, have been reawakened. The solution, hence, can only lie outside Rwanda. This is the apparent rationale for a proposal,
in *Foreign Affairs*, for a new colonialism: "If anybody is competent to deal sympathetically with these countries, the Europeans are" (Pfaff 1995, 5). This proposal is, at least, imaginative.

A second, equally imaginative way to blame the Rwandan people for the cycle of violence is to focus, not on their "indelible hatreds," but on their soaring birthrate. Population pressure is surely a grave problem for the Rwandan people, yet it is wrong to say, in neo-Malthusian tones, that violence is a simple reflex of "excess" population density. And it is mistaken to imagine that paternalistic birth control campaigns, or anything short of genuine progress in the welfare of Rwandan families, will permanently ease population pressures. This becomes quite clear when we review the demographic facts.

The gravity of the population crisis in Rwanda is plain. Since the turn of the century, the population has risen nearly ninefold, from about a million when the Germans arrived (Des Forges 1986, 313) to three million at the start of the 1943–44 famine (Omaar and de Waal, 14) to a pregenocide total of close to nine million. The Rwandan birthrate, meanwhile, is extraordinarily high, whether measured by African or by global standards. Of all sub-Saharan African countries, Rwanda has the highest total fertility rate—8.3 children per woman. In 1985 each hectare of land supported 5.5 "adult-equivalent persons," yielding a population density seven times greater, for example, than that of Uganda (Braun, de Haen, and Blanken 1991, 12). And pregenocide projections showed that this total would double, at least, by 2005.

Considering how often Rwanda has been afflicted by famine, it is plain that concerns about population pressure are definitely warranted. But why exactly is this so?

Isidor Wallimann goes straight to the heart of the matter when he observes that "the more vulnerable people become economically . . . the

10. Equal amnesia, if less hope, was revealed by a former British ambassador, who lamented that Belgian charity had failed, alas, to pull up "Rwanda's bloody roots" long ago. It is "chastening," he says, to think that "bringing Rwanda peacefully to independence as a democratic society [may have been] beyond human ingenuity and statesmanship" (New York Times, Murray 1994, A-19). Enlightened opinion, in other words, is divided about the likelihood that well-meaning Belgians can solve Rwanda's problems.

11. The total fertility rate, Kevin Cleaver explains (1993, table A-1), "is the average number of children who would be born alive to a woman . . . during her lifetime if she were to pass through her childbearing years confirming [sic] to the age-specific fertility rates of a given year." No other sub-Saharan nation has a TFR above 8.0, and only three exceed 7.0. Burundi is one step removed at 6.8.
more they are inclined to maintain birth rates that enhance population
growth” (1994, 45). Far from being “irrational,” this is an illustration
of the kind of peasant rationality that Alexander Chayanov clarified
long ago. In a peasant economy—where, as Freedman notes, “birth is
nearly the only form of labor recruitment” (1984, 76)—prosperity and
progeny are practically synonymous.

This comes as no surprise to Rwandans, for whom fertility has
long been a veritable obsession (Taylor 1992). Indeed, the very idea of
well-being is tied to female fertility in the Rwandan language: “the
verb ‘to be fertile,’ for a woman, is most accurately rendered by the
verb which describes a general state of well being. This is kwera,” a
term that (with an implication of purification or “whitening”) design­
nates “good fortune in the reproduction of children, animals, and the
productivity of fields” (Freedman 1974, 144, 147). The customary term
for a home, meanwhile, is urugo, which also means a pregnant body.
And the circular outline of a home under construction “is explicitly
identified with the womb” (Freedman 1974, 136, 85).

It is hence no wonder that, in Rwanda, prosperity and progeny
are quite literally synonymous. “Poverty and existence without a
family... are rendered by the same Rwandan noun:ubukene” (Freed­
man 1979, 6).

Are the peasants wrong to make this connection? Not at all. Soar­
ing birthrates are undoubtedly a danger in the long run, but in the
short run, for each family, children are still the most precious of re­
sources. “Contrary to [our] study hypothesis,” Braun and others re­
ported in 1991, “an increased household size is found in this sample
in northwest Rwanda to be positively related to nutritional improve­
ment and significantly so for the long-term” (94). The solution to the
population problem in Rwanda, then, lies not in isolated measures to
curb birthrates, but in efforts to raise living standards. Not until chil­
dren cease to be an economic necessity will birthrates stabilize.

The prospect of raising living standards, meanwhile, is far from
hopeless. In 1990, though the Rwandan population was far greater
than it had been during the colonial era, “hunger was less pervasive”
(Omaar and de Waal 1994, 17). And although the Habyarimana regime
cynically used the rhetoric of “overpopulation” to keep Rwandan exiles
in Uganda, the data suggest that, as crowded as Rwanda has been, the
saturation point has not yet been reached. Most nations in Asia “have
to sustain populations which are infinitely larger in absolute and rela­
tive terms than they are anywhere on the African continent,” as Chabal
observes. “Despite a widespread belief to the contrary, Africa is not overpopulated in the sense in which these Asian countries are” (1992, 184).

Braun, de Haen, and Blanken report “the interesting finding . . . that increased land scarcity [in Rwanda] can still be substantially compensated for by intensification of labor and capital input per unit of land” (1991, 12). Scarcity in Rwanda is not, it appears, primarily a result of insuperable environmental barriers, but of policy limitations. Pottier (1993, 1986), for example, reports that, besides forcing the peasants to devote scarce time and land to badly paid coffee production, Habyarimana’s state imposed restrictions on cultivation that kept subsistence production well below optimum levels. And by forcing farmers to specialize in particular crops, the state created a situation of artificial scarcity in which it profited by selling farmers staples that it prevented them from producing.

The solution, plainly, is to abolish forced labor, establish democratic control over coffee production (and revenues), improve farming methods and technology while encouraging cooperative production and distribution.

This is not, unfortunately, the path taken by the IMF and World Bank. It was, in fact, precisely Habyarimana’s success in organizing forced labor that first attracted the attention of international lenders in the 1970s (Pottier 1993, 5). This remained true thereafter: “In the eyes of the U.S. government and other donors, Rwanda before the [genocide] was a model of development efficiency. Every Rwandan citizen had to participate in collective labor on Saturdays.

The system was harsh but effective—roads were built, trees planted. During the 1980s, the U.S. provided the Rwandan government with significant development aid” (Hilsum 1994, 16; see World Bank 1989, 58).

Other donors were also impressed, and many were generous. From 1980 to 1986, Rwanda received at least $200 million in new aid commitments every year except one. In 1987 the total soared to $340 million. The result, as Catharine Newbury observed in 1992, is that “Rwanda depends, to an extraordinary degree, on foreign assistance” (199).

This made the Habyarimana regime all the more vulnerable when the coffee market collapsed in 1988 and export earnings fell 50 percent by 1991 (Chossudovsky 1995). Rwanda was compelled to seek assistance from the IMF for the first time, agreeing to a Structural Adjustment Program with stringent “conditionalities.” This was a very
inauspicious time to start a SAP, since the IMF had just decided to
demand rigorous compliance with far stricter requirements. And the
collapse of the Soviet Union gave the IMF a freer hand to push for the
decentralization of states that blocked the free action of the market.
Authoritarian allies of the West were no longer automatically exempt
from the pressure to “democratize”; and the IMF, which had been
preaching the gospel of laissez faire since the early Reagan/Thatcher
years, began to push Rwanda as hard as anyone (Omaar and de Waal
1994; Chossudovsky 1995).

The Habyarimana regime was soon in great difficulty. In October
1990, the RPF invaded from Uganda. The early invasion was re­
pulsed (with French help), but the RPF and its battle-tested leaders
remained dangerous. On the domestic front, after reluctantly bowing
to Western pressure to begin a process that would lead to full
“multipartyism” in a few years, the Habyarimana forces witnessed a
proliferation of opportunists parties and papers. Old Gitaramiste forces
sprang from the woodwork, to be joined by a plethora of others, including, for example, the Parti des écologistes, the Rassemblement
travailliste pour la démocratie, the Mouvement des femmes et du
baspeuple (Reyntjens 1994, 135). In 1992, suffering the consequences
of the coffee crisis doubly and trebly as the state intensified its
exactions—and refusing to be wholly “captured”—peasants uprooted
three hundred thousand coffee trees (Chossudovsky 1995). This was
an act of defiance and desperation, and strictly illegal (Potter and

In 1993, after further fighting with the RPF and increased pressure
from the IMF and its allies, Habyarimana signed the Arusha Accords,
committing the regime to carry reform through to completion. This
apparently convinced the Akazu extremists (organized as “Network
Zero”) that they would have to fight the RPF and the democratization
of Rwanda with or without Habyarimana. Bagosora, on leaving the
Arusha meetings, told colleagues that he was going home “to prepare
the Apocalypse” (Omaar and de Waal 1994, 79). Death squads, thou­
sands strong, had been in training since the early 1990s. Open threats
of genocide became common, and it was well known that opposition­
ists were in danger. Many were assassinated.

The signal for the start of the genocide was Habyarimana’s death
in a plane crash on April 6, 1994. In the ensuing days the regime’s
death squads, aided by the military, fanned across Rwanda, killing as
many actual and potential oppositionists as possible, many of whom
had been marked for death ahead of time. Peasants on many hills and in many prefectures were bribed, coerced, and cajoled to participate in the slaughter; many did, and many did not.

In barely three months, a shower of death rained on the Rwandan people, leaving as many as 750,000 dead (Omaar and de Waal 1995). The genocide came to an abrupt halt in July, when the RPF captured Kigali. Since then the situation has remained pregnant with danger. Burundi is profoundly volatile, and the remnants of the genocidal Akazu regime dominated the refugee camps in Zaire until the camps dissolved in late 1996. The cycle of conflict and mass death, in other words, is not necessarily at an end. Nor is concord truly likely until the underlying factors that promote conflict are resolved.

As long as Rwanda remains at the mercy of the world market, it is always in danger of reconstituting forced-labor. Tellingly, the genocidal death squads were known as *interahamwe*—a name formerly reserved for the teams organized to perform corvée labor. And the slang term for murder itself is “work” (Omaar and de Waal 1994, 70). The distance from forced labor to forced murder is evidently not as great as it might seem. And whenever power rests with a forced-labor state, there is a prospect of resistance—greeted, in normal cases, by repression.

In late 1994 the Rwandan human rights activist Monique Mujawamariya was asked, “What happened in your country?” “The people,” she said, “revolted against a well-armed dictatorial regime and they are paying a high price for their attempt to install democracy. . . . The dictator’s clan knew that, as a result of international pressure and the mobilization of the people, it would have to share power. People had massively joined opposition parties; this threw the regime into a fever. So it decided to crush the moderate opposition, to eliminate the intellectuals, to kill everybody who could have laid claim to power. It is a revolution, within which a genocide has taken place” (Saint-Jean 1994, 13).

The comparative calm in the first year after the genocide gives us reason to hope that new episodes of mass death can be avoided. But as long as Rwanda remains an orphan in the world economy, with few resources and fewer genuine friends, conflict will remain a permanent danger. Western banks and governments may express their “concern.” But “it is one thing,” as David Keen reminds us, “to condemn violence; it is another, and more useful, exercise to sponsor a pattern of development that makes violence less likely” (1994, 445).
Only the Rwandan people, and others who share their plight, can take the steps needed to avert mass death in the future. Unless this happens, Rwanda will likely remain adrift in the postcolonial twilight.

Wandering between two worlds,
one dead,
The other powerless to be born.\textsuperscript{12}

Powerless to be born? Only time will tell.

\textsuperscript{12} Matthew Arnold, “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse”