

Rwanda: Chaos from Above

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The Africanist scholarly community has reacted with considerable ambivalence to the process of state reconfiguration that has swept the African continent in the 1990s. While scholars have generally approved of the decline in the authoritarian nature of rule, many have also expressed considerable reservation about the forces propelling the process of sociopolitical change. They credit the drive for state reform with supporting peaceful transitions to democratic rule in Malawi, South Africa, and Benin, but also with undermining the centrality and power of the state, leading to a disintegration of order in Somalia and Liberia. According to the warnings of some scholars, the social forces undermining authoritarian rule, if taken too far, may lead to a dissolution of the state and, ultimately, to chaos and violence. Thus, while democratic reforms to state institutions may be necessary for Africa to emerge from crisis, the forces of democratization must somehow be contained if the continent is to avoid what Zolberg has termed the "Specter of Anarchy" (1992).

In this chapter, I wish to challenge the assumption that the preservation of a strong, centralized—albeit more democratic—state represents the only alternative to chaos on the African continent. Based upon the experience of Rwanda, I argue first that social chaos may arise from excessive state power rather than from state "recession" or "decline." The extreme chaos that has engulfed some African countries results at least in part from efforts by the international community to preserve unpopular and ineffective state structures. Second, I contend that the vision of political change supported by many Africans involves a radical decentralization of power and contraction of the state. Rather than deserving condemnation as a threat to order, this political vision offers a potential basis for reconstructing African societies along more equitable, and ultimately more stable, lines.

The violence that swept through Rwanda in 1994 is commonly cited as evidence of the chaos that can result from the decline of the state. In

reality, the ethnic and political massacres that killed as many as 1 million members of the minority Tutsi group and moderate members of the Hutu majority did not arise spontaneously from inherent ethnic tensions in Rwandan society but rather was meticulously prepared and orchestrated by government and military officials who sought to reassert their control over the population by eliminating all potential opponents. While the growth of independent social and economic organizations in the 1980s and early 1990s empowered the Rwandan people and provided them bases for challenging the authority of the state, a massive expansion in the size and capacity of the Rwandan Armed Forces beginning in 1990, supported by arms shipments from France and elsewhere, simultaneously increased the coercive capabilities of the state. The Rwandan state remained strong, even as the population increasingly sought alternatives. The violence that shook Rwanda in 1994 demonstrated not the decreasing ability of the state to maintain order but rather the continuing power of the state to organize support and exercise coercive force.

State Theory and Sociopolitical Change

In the discussions of the state that have dominated Africanist literature in the past decade, the need for a strong, effective, and centralized state has been a nearly universal assumption. The wave of publications in the mid-1980s that attributed Africa's expanding ethnic and regional conflicts, deteriorating economic conditions, and increasing insecurity to state decline assumed that a reformed and reinvigorated state at the center of social, political, and economic life was necessary to direct Africa's emergence from crisis. These works viewed the tendency for African populations to "disengage" from the state—to limit as much as possible their contact with public officers, the military, and the police in order to protect themselves from excessive official and unofficial taxation and other hazards—as a threat to state integrity and thus a factor contributing to the continental crisis (cf. Azarya and Chazan 1987; Callaghy 1984; Sandbrook 1985; Young and Turner 1984).

Implicit in this analysis is a Hobbesian pessimism regarding African societies. Looking at countries that have experienced civil war and disorder, analysts have concluded that without a powerful state to act as a Leviathan, the war of all against all ensues, making life "poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Places like Zaire or Liberia or Sierra Leone become violent and disorganized, because the Leviathan has become "lame," to use Callaghy's expression (1984).

In the early 1990s, the advent of national conferences and orderly democratic transitions in several African countries demonstrated that movements based within African societies can potentially play a positive

political role by helping to reform and reinvigorate the state. Scholars have been quick to caution, however, that social movements can be dangerous if not properly circumscribed. By challenging the authority of rulers and encouraging disobedience, they may draw the population further from the state and thus contribute to state decline. Driving dictators from office is much simpler than establishing sustainable democratic regimes, as continuing problems in Congo, Zambia, and Burundi suggest.

The challenge that scholars have identified for African societies is to find a means of increasing state accountability without encouraging social deterioration. To this end, some scholars have developed a concept of "civil society" that attempts to distinguish between those social activities and associations that contribute to state capacities and make sustainable democracy possible (the "good" parts of society that should receive international support) and those activities and associations that draw people away from the state and push societies toward chaos (the "bad" that should be discouraged) (cf. Ake 1991; Chazan 1992a; Harbeson 1994). Naomi Chazan, for example, defines civil society as "that segment of society that interacts with the state, influences the state, and yet is distinct from the state" (1992a, 281). To implement sustainable democracy requires nurturing this narrowly defined civil society, because these organizations "simultaneously contain state power and legitimate state authority" (283). Other social groups and trends may help to undermine authoritarian rule, but they do so by eroding state legitimacy, thus making sustainable democratic government difficult to accomplish.

Democratization is a dangerous process, because if not carefully managed it can challenge not simply a particular regime but the very nature of the centralized state. Many scholars therefore concur with John F. Clark's conclusion that African states need to move incrementally toward democracy: "African states and societies cannot, at this juncture, make the sudden leap from the coercive forms of control now commonly practiced to the complex and costly democratic forms of the Western world. . . . [F]or democracy to work in the new African regimes, it will unfortunately have to be limited in a number of ways" (1994a, 107). Democracy must be limited and controlled so that democratizing forces do not challenge the centrality of the state and lead to a dissolution into anarchy.¹

State-inspired Anarchy in Rwanda

Based upon the experience of Rwanda, I wish to challenge the assumption that African societies must choose between a strong, centralized state and chaos. I contend that, at least in Rwanda, chaos has been a product of the strength of the state, not its weakness. The political transformations envisioned by the bulk of the Rwandan population in the early 1990s involved

not simply a reorganization of power within the state or a reestablishment of links between the state and the society, but a radical decentralization of state power and a diminution of the privilege that this power provided to a limited elite. Violence and chaos emerged because the coalition that dominated Rwandan politics and society used the coercive capacities of the state to protect state hegemony (and thus the privileges of the ruling class) against the increasingly empowered and autonomous society.²

Contrary to news reports that suggested Rwanda's ethnic conflicts date back hundreds of years,³ the flexibility and complexity of precolonial social arrangements and the decentralization of power in the precolonial state allowed Rwanda's three social groups to live in relative peace prior to colonial occupation. Under German and Belgian administration, the classifications Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa became fixed as ethnic identities and the divisions between the groups became rigid. Colonial policies allowed the pastoralist Tutsi, who comprised about 14 percent of the population, to consolidate political and economic power and to become increasingly enriched at the expense of the Hutu peasant majority. As decolonization appeared increasingly imminent in the late 1950s, offering the prospect of an independent country firmly controlled by Tutsi, an emerging Hutu counter-elite demanded rights for the majority. Hutu peasants became increasingly conscious and resentful of their exploitation and staged a *jacquerie* in 1959 that drove Tutsi officials from government and administration and launched a process that, by the time of independence in 1962, transferred nearly all political offices from Tutsi to Hutu hands (Lemarchand 1970; Linden 1977; Newbury 1988).

Ethnic conflicts persisted throughout the first decade of independence, as groups of Tutsi who had fled Rwanda after the revolution launched periodic attacks into the country and Hutu responded with attacks against those Tutsi remaining in Rwanda. Ethnic violence declined after 1967, when the attacks from abroad ceased, but an outbreak of conflict between Hutu and Tutsi in neighboring Burundi in 1972 inspired a renewal of ethnic conflict in Rwanda. Due to the insecurity created by ethnic discord and to the stagnation of the economy, public support for President Grégoire Kayibanda's government declined precipitously. Kayibanda's efforts to consolidate power in the hands of trusted associates from his home region in central Rwanda ignited regional tensions and led in July 1973 to a coup d'état by Hutu military officers from the north (Lemarchand 1970; Linden 1977; Reyntjens 1985).

Major-General Juvénal Habyarimana, who became president after the coup, initiated an aggressive agenda to address Rwanda's social and economic problems. Under the banner of "peace, unity, and development," Habyarimana launched a "moral revolution" to complete the work of the 1959 revolution. To quiet ethnic tensions, he implemented an ethnic quota system in education and employment and banned political activity for two

years. He started a program of cooperative communal labor, *umuganda*, that required citizens at all levels of society to join together once each week to accomplish public projects such as building roads and bridges, planting forests, and constructing terraces to fight erosion. In 1975, Habyarimana established a single political party, the *Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement* (MRND), to increase links between the government and the people. Party membership became compulsory, and the party organized regular displays of loyalty and support called *animation* in each community. With increased internal security, the regime was able to attract considerable international donor support, and Rwanda became a test site for development programs, allowing rapid improvement of the infrastructure and helping Rwanda's economy grow at an impressive rate for a country with few natural resources and little industry (Mfizi 1983; Rumiya 1985).

Initially, the Habyarimana regime enjoyed considerable public support. In the first decade of rule, the government seemed to have brought peace and prosperity to the country, and ethnic conflict appeared to have been eliminated. In the 1980s, however, a variety of problems emerged to undermine support for the regime. After a decade in office, government officials at all levels had become detached from the masses. They increasingly used their positions to benefit themselves and their friends and family, often through exploiting the peasants they ruled—demanding bribes, embezzling from development budgets, and diverting *umuganda* to their own enrichment. The benefits of the economic development of the 1970s accrued primarily to a limited elite—government officials and their allies in the commercial sector. Those at the highest levels of the government and military, mostly people from Habyarimana's home region, dominated the national economy and were able to invest in large homes, cattle, land, and other symbols of wealth. At the same time, the majority of Rwandans were becoming increasingly impoverished. In the second most densely populated country in the world and one of the least urbanized, overutilization of land caused serious soil degradation and diminishing harvests, and there were few opportunities for off-farm income (Bézy 1990; Newbury 1992).

As in many African countries in the late 1980s, public discontent developed into open opposition to the regime and demands for political reform. A sharp downturn in the economy, due largely to the collapse of coffee prices, deeply affected the middle class and compromised the ability of government leaders to organize support through patrimonial networks. Growing economic hardship among the masses made the lifestyles of public officials appear particularly extravagant and fed public resentment. Moves by the president to consolidate power in the hands of trusted associates from the north exacerbated regional resentments. An expansion of press freedom that began in 1988 helped give concrete expression to

previously inchoate public dissatisfaction by bringing to light examples of official corruption and by openly discussing Rwanda's economic problems, such as a famine in the south of the country in 1989. The Catholic newspaper *Kinyamateka* first broke the rules of censorship, inspiring (despite legal actions taken against the editor and several reporters) a proliferation of independent journals and newspapers in the country (Higiro 1991; Newbury 1992).

As the winds of political liberalization swept from Eastern Europe into Africa in 1990, various sectors of Rwandan society began to voice demands for political reform. The Episcopal Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a letter in February that criticized corruption, nepotism, and regionalism in the government. Various other elite groups began to demand a national conference like those held in Benin and Congo. A fight that broke out between students and gendarmes at a concert in the university center of Butare in late May 1990 resulted in a number of injuries and one death and inspired a nationwide student strike that reflected the growing tension between the government and the public (*Dialogue*, issues 141 and 142, 1990).

In an attempt to seize the political initiative, President Habyarimana announced in July 1990 that he would implement reforms to the political system and possibly allow the country to move toward multiparty government. In September he appointed a commission to draft a national charter for the country's political future. Although these promises gained Habyarimana some political capital, they fell far short of demands for a sovereign national conference. While Habyarimana allowed some political changes, he maintained an ability to control and direct the process of reform (Des Forges 1992; Newbury 1992; Reyntjens 1993).

On 1 October 1990, a band of Rwandan refugees, mostly Tutsi who had served in Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army, invaded northeastern Rwanda. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) launched their attack apparently under the impression that the democracy movement had made Habyarimana vulnerable, and they claimed to be fighting both for the right of return for refugees and for the establishment of democratic government. With assistance from Zairian troops (and moral support from the arrival of French and Belgian troops), the Rwandan army was able to repel this initial attack fairly quickly (Watson 1991).

Despite success on the battlefield, the Habyarimana regime used the war as an excuse to arrest many of its political opponents, both Tutsi and southern Hutu who had advocated reform. At the same time, to retain the political initiative and probably to discourage popular support for the RPF, Habyarimana announced that he would accelerate the process of political reform. He initiated a mode of operation that persisted throughout the remainder of his regime in which, under internal and external pressure, he publicly supported reform and implemented limited changes, but undermined the

effect of reforms in practice to ensure his retention of power. Habyarimana and his supporters sought to increase their public support at home and abroad, while undermining the position of their opponents. Thus, for example, while the regime advocated freedom of the press and accepted legal changes that guaranteed that freedom, gendarmes and soldiers continued to harass and arrest reporters who were critical of the regime. As another example, shortly after the invasion, Habyarimana announced that he would concede to one of the demands of Tutsi that ethnic identity no longer be listed on the identification cards that all Rwandans were required to carry. He made a public display of issuing new cards to a group of released prisoners, but nothing more was ever done; the policy was never carried through for the remainder of the population, whose ethnic identities continued to appear on their identity cards (Onyango-Obbo 1993; *Africa Confidential* 1992c). Following this strategy, during the next three years the Habyarimana regime did adopt various political reforms, but the members of the coalition that dominated the government managed to protect their dominant position.

Both internal opposition and the continuing pressure of the War of October pushed the Habyarimana regime to accept reforms. In January 1991, the RPF launched a new offensive in the northwest of the country, briefly capturing the third-largest city. The rebel army was driven back across the Uganda border, but the war subsequently grew in intensity, displacing many people in the country and undermining the prestige of the military and the government. Dissidents within the country also continued to place pressure on the regime, as calls for greater political freedom continued to mount.

In response to these pressures, in June 1991 the national legislature adopted a new constitution that established an office of prime minister and legalized opposition parties. Over the next several months, a number of new political parties formed and began to press for a national conference, elections, and, in the meantime, a transitional "government of national union" with an opposition figure as prime minister. Disregarding these demands, Habyarimana in October named as prime minister a man from his party, the MRND, and the opposition parties therefore refused to participate in the government. The three major opposition parties formed a coalition to provide a united response to the government and organized a public demonstration in November to demand a national conference that drew 13,000. When the new prime minister in late December named a cabinet with all ministries but one held by the MRND, the opposition coalition organized a massive public response, including one rally in Kigali that drew 50,000 people. With the prospect of protests spreading, Habyarimana agreed to negotiate with the opposition under the mediation of a committee of Catholic and Protestant clergy, and in March 1992 Habyarimana named a new prime minister, Dismas Nsengiyaremye, from the Mouvement

Démocratique Républicain (MDR), the successor party to Kayibanda's PARMEHUTU, with a base of support among Hutu in the central region of the country (Helbig 1991; *IMBAGA* 12, 1992; *Dialogue*, various issues).

While forced to accept reforms publicly, behind the scenes Habyarimana and his supporters worked to protect their power and to make it impossible for the opposition to gain real control. After the beginning of the war, the military expanded rapidly and massively in size, growing in a few months from 6,000 to more than 30,000, allowing the government to extend its coercive presence throughout the country. France, Egypt, and South Africa supplied the Rwandan military with large shipments of guns, ammunition, and other armaments. With an expanded presence, gendarmes and soldiers regularly harassed journalists, opposition politicians, and other critics of the government. Many people were arrested on minor charges, such as improper identity papers, several had their homes burned, and some faced assassination attempts (Smyth 1994).

Another program launched by Habyarimana's supporters was to reignite ethnic conflict in an attempt to divide and discredit the opposition. In public addresses and in the state-run newspaper and radio station, members of the administration and leaders of the MRND accused opposition politicians, human rights activists, journalists, and peasant organizers of colluding with the RPF and urged the public to retaliate. According to local and international human rights investigators, members of the administration authorized massacres of Tutsi in several communities in an attempt to raise ethnic tensions in the country and antagonize the RPF. The attacks were organized by local MRND functionaries at strategic times, such as during the negotiations for the multiparty government in March 1992, and in December 1992 and January 1993, when the coalition government was negotiating a peace agreement with the RPF (FIDH et al. 1993; ADL 1992, 1993; Africa Watch 1993).

After the coalition government took office in April 1992, supporters of the Habyarimana regime sought to discredit the opposition politicians and to frustrate their attempts to take real power by raising the level of internal insecurity in the country. Beginning in early 1992, assassination attempts and other forms of harassment increased against prominent Tutsi, human rights leaders, journalists, and opposition politicians. In addition, a rise in more generalized violence and crime, particularly armed robbery and rape, was attributed at least in part to military personnel and the youth wing of the MRND, Interahamwe. Beginning in 1992, Interahamwe organized numerous rallies that disrupted life in the capital and other cities and that often ended in violent confrontations with opposition supporters. A new political party organized in 1992, the Coalition pour la Défense de la République (CDR), espoused vitriolic anti-Tutsi rhetoric. In their publications and their rallies, the CDR called for all Tutsi to be driven from the country and urged Hutu to defend themselves against the implementation

of a new Tutsi monarchy by retaliating against the Tutsi and their Hutu allies (i.e., democracy activists and opposition politicians). As significant RPF successes on the battlefield in attacks in June 1992 and February 1993 pressured the government to accept a negotiated peace, the anti-Tutsi and antiopposition rhetoric of the CDR and elements of the MRND intensified (*Africa Confidential* 1992b; Tolotti 1993; Jefferson 1992).

In July 1992, one of Habyarimana's close associates, Christophe Mfizi, a former minister of information from the president's home region, resigned from the MRND in a public letter accusing the government of having fallen under the control of a narrow group of extremists who dominated all aspects of Rwanda's public life for their personal gain and were fighting to protect their hold on power (Mfizi 1992). A variety of international investigators corroborated Mfizi's claims that a nucleus of military, government, and business elites were orchestrating human rights abuses against Tutsi and anyone else they viewed as a threat to their power. An international team of human rights observers that visited Rwanda in January 1993 accused the government of organizing death squads and having a direct hand in the various massacres of Tutsi that were presented as spontaneous local actions (*Africa Confidential* 1992c; FIDH et al. 1993, 78-84).

The strategy of intimidating, discrediting, and dividing those who could threaten their power, combined with the continuing loyalty of the military to the Habyarimana regime, successfully prevented the political opposition from gaining full control of the government but also made rule more difficult for those in office. In research I conducted in Rwanda in 1992-1993, I found very limited support for multiparty government. For some people the rise in internal insecurity created a nostalgia for authoritarian rule, a desire for an all-powerful Leviathan who could maintain order, undoubtedly the intended result of the regime's policy of allowing conditions to decline. Most people I interviewed, however, supported many of the political reforms but felt that the opposition politicians were no different from those in the MRND, interested in their personal gain rather than the public interest. Although the opposition parties were given little real power, since the important ministries remained in MRND hands, they received equal blame for many of the problems facing the country.⁴ The specter of violence discouraged most Tutsi and many Hutu from involving themselves in politics, even if they supported one of the parties. While the Rwandan masses did not particularly support the opposition parties, this did not mean that they supported Habyarimana's ruling coalition, as those promoting the policies fostering insecurity might have hoped. Instead, people became further alienated from the state and lost any illusion that a change of personnel could in and of itself solve Rwanda's political problems.

After peace negotiations between the RPF and the government began in Arusha, Tanzania, in mid-1992, Habyarimana's supporters used ethnic

arguments to divide the opposition. Habyarimana regularly rejected proposals worked out by the representatives at the peace negotiations, claiming he was defending the interests of the Hutu. Prime Minister Nsengiyarmye strongly criticized Habyarimana for his resistance to a negotiated settlement, and Habyarimana therefore dismissed him in July 1993, replacing him with another member of the opposition MDR who was less sympathetic to the interests of the Tutsi. The opposition parties refused to support Agathe Uwilingiyimana's appointment as prime minister, and, in subsequent months, each of the major opposition parties split into a faction that supported a negotiated settlement with the RPF and another that sought to protect Hutu interests and, thus, allied itself with the president. Although a comprehensive peace treaty was signed in August 1993, the political crisis and Uwilingiyimana's inability to form a government made impossible the implementation of the peace accord, which would have brought RPF representatives into a transitional government (Block 1994; Braeckman 1995).

In late 1993 and early 1994, tensions in the country steadily mounted. Supporters of the CDR and MRND formed an independent radio station, Radio Mille Collines, which broadcast bitter attacks on Tutsi and political opponents, calling for their assassination. Army personnel provided military training to civilian militias from the CDR and Interahamwe and distributed arms to them. In December 1993, the Catholic bishop of Nyundo (the diocese that includes Habyarimana's home region and the location of several ethnic massacres between 1990 and 1993) issued a pastoral letter criticizing the distribution of arms to the youth militias. The level of political violence in the country escalated. In March 1994, the head of the Parti Social-Démocrate (PSD), one of the main opposition parties, was assassinated, and the next day a mob of PSD supporters lynched the head of the CDR (African Rights 1994, 42-88; Block 1994; Braeckman 1994; Chrétien et al. 1995).

Exact details of the plane crash that killed President Habyarimana and President Sylvestre Ntaryamira of Burundi on 6 April 1994 will probably never be known, but the most likely scenario attributes the downing of the plane to Habyarimana's own presidential guard. According to various reports, including a study by the Belgian government, individuals close to the president devised a plan in late 1993 or early 1994 to kill off anyone in the country who challenged their ability to maintain power. The president either rejected the plan as too extreme or felt the time for its implementation was not yet ripe. Those most closely tied to Habyarimana felt they had to remove the president in order to preserve their own power, and thus his plane was shot down and used as a pretext for launching the pogrom.⁵

Whether or not this explanation is accurate, preparations for a mass slaughter of Tutsi and of political opponents of the Habyarimana regime had clearly taken place in advance of the accident. At the time of the president's

death, lists of victims to be killed were already in existence. Within hours after the crash, groups of soldiers and members of the presidential guard went through Kigali, systematically killing all those they perceived as enemies. In addition to Tutsi, this included leading southern Hutu, and both Hutu and Tutsi opposition party activists, journalists, human rights workers, peasant organizers, outspoken clergymen and women, university professors, and others whose activities were believed to threaten the regime in some way. Under the direction of military elements and with the support of the civilian militias, the violence gradually spread from the capital into the rest of the country. The primary targets of the violence were Tutsi, because of the ethnic arguments used to inspire the militias, the nearly universal Tutsi opposition to the regime, and the ease in identifying ethnicity from the identity cards everyone had to carry (anyone not carrying a card could be assumed to be Tutsi), but in nearly every community progressive Hutu were targeted as well (Braeckman 1995; United States House of Representatives 1994; Plaut 1994).

The intention of the massacres, thus, was to crush the increasingly powerful social forces that threatened the control of those who dominated the state. In sad irony, however, the plan created so much chaos that those who initiated it ultimately could not maintain their positions. The violence that washed across Rwanda from April to July 1994 left between 500,000 and 1 million dead and reignited the war with the RPF. So many bullets and grenades were used against internal "enemies" that supplies were insufficient for fighting the invading army, and with the demoralizing and destabilizing effects of the violence on the Rwandan population, the RPF was able to advance quickly across the country, eventually driving the Rwandan army and the new government across the border into Zaire. Millions of Rwandan civilians fled into exile either within Rwanda or in surrounding countries to avoid the fighting and the possibility of reprisals by the RPF, creating the largest refugee exodus in modern history. The combination of the state-sponsored violence, the war, and the flight of refugees created a nearly unprecedented international humanitarian disaster.

Since taking control of the country in July 1994, the RPF has faced the mammoth task of rebuilding a country with a severely damaged physical infrastructure and a divided and demoralized population. With substantial assistance from international development agencies and non-governmental organizations, the RPF-dominated government has fairly quickly been able to rebuild roads and water systems, construct homes, and renew economic activity, but rebuilding the society has proven a much more difficult task. The difficulties arise in part because the current regime, while wanting a productive and peaceful populace, has no real interest in establishing strong and independent social groups that could challenge the new structures of power, particularly since the population is largely Hutu, while the government and administration are dominated by

Tutsi. Supporters of the current regime have systematically driven from positions of political, economic, or social authority those moderate Hutu who survived the violence of 1994 and did not flee into exile, often making false accusations of involvement in the genocide, leading to their harassment, arrest, or assassination. Those few Hutu who now hold important public positions find little respect among other Hutu. Cross-border attacks by Hutu extremists based in Zaire, repression by the current regime, and resistance by the population to the overly powerful and repressive state produce a situation of continuing social unrest.

A New Vision of the State

Crawford Young begins his exhaustive study of the colonial state in Africa with a citation from Amilcar Cabral: "We are not interested in the preservation of any structures of the colonial state. It is our opinion that it is necessary to totally destroy, to break, to reduce to ash all aspects of the colonial state in our country to make everything possible for our people" (quoted in Young 1994a, 1). In fact, as Young suggests, many structures of the African colonial state have persisted, with dire consequences for the continent. The record of the independent African state has been abominable. It has tolerated little freedom, grossly violated human rights, applied excessive force, encouraged ethnic and regional divisions, and redistributed wealth from the African masses to a limited domestic and international elite. In the international arena, the independent African state has facilitated the export of wealth from the continent, amassed crippling debts, and imported armaments that have contributed to destabilization. Nevertheless, most Africanist scholars have rejected Cabral's conclusions and stubbornly maintained a belief in the necessity of the centralized state "to make everything possible" for African people.

In light of the chaos and violence that has engulfed Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Zaire, and, to a lesser degree, Congo, Togo, Zambia, and other African states, scholars like Chazan, Ake, Migdal, Harbeson, Clark, and others have (at least implicitly) identified social attitudes and movements challenging the legitimacy of the state as a major source of the decline of order. To avoid descent into chaos, democracy and other social movements must be circumspect, encouraging limited reforms that increase government accountability without undermining the centrality of the state as the defender of order.

As I have presented it, the Rwandan case directly challenges these assumptions. In Rwanda, the deterioration of order was indeed related to the process of democratization that created pressures for political reform throughout Africa in the early 1990s, but disorder did not result from state decline and the unleashing of the lawless proclivities of the masses. Rather, disorder increased as a direct consequence of actions taken by state

officers seeking to preserve their hold on power against the challenges presented by an increasingly autonomous and empowered civil society. The War of October and related international military support allowed the state to vastly expand its coercive capacity, which it used to create an atmosphere of terror and to intimidate and silence those who sought to change the structures of power in the country. Power should not be seen as a zero-sum game, in which society gains power only by taking it from the state. In Rwanda in the early 1990s, society did become more powerful through increasing its organizational capacity, developing new political ideas, and other means, but the state was able to remain powerful as well. The disorder that spread across the country in 1994 was a direct result of state policies intended to eliminate the independent bases of power within the society. Hence, in Rwanda chaos came from the state, not from the society.⁶

Based upon my research in Rwanda, I want to go a step further in arguing against the scholarly insistence upon reforms that preserve a strong, centralized state. In 1992 and 1993, I conducted research in several locations in Rwanda, including Butare, the second-largest city, and several rural communities. In the interviews I conducted with peasant farmers, pastors, market women, school teachers, unemployed urban youths, and others, I found strong support for several reforms that had taken place in Rwanda: the elimination of mandatory membership in the MRND, the decline of *umuganda* (forced labor) and *animation* (loyalty rituals), the expansion of free speech and assembly, and the declining ability of authorities to demand bribes and excessive taxes. A few representative comments from my interviews reflect a broad consensus in the Rwandan population:⁷

I think [these political changes] are good, because in the time of single party rule, there was forced communal labor (*umuganda*), forced *animations* to exalt the president. You couldn't discuss the failings of the government. Now everything is in the process of changing. We are becoming more and more free.

I see that multipartyism is good. In the past we were pushed by force to participate in community work (*umuganda*). We built roads for the vehicles of the rich rather than working for our own children. The forced *animations* also took away from the time when we could be working.

As for us, we aren't yet in any party, but multipartyism has delivered us from oppression: forced work called *umuganda*, communal assessments. And now we are free to speak.

Despite support for reforms that expanded their freedom, few Rwandans, other than intellectuals, appeared to have much faith that reforms would change the operation of the state and make the country truly democratic. Poor peasants and landless urban poor believed that the system would continue to serve the interests of the upper classes, doing nothing to change their own abject conditions:

These changes have nothing to do with our poverty. Things are changing for the rich and intellectuals who want to occupy power. But for me, the power will be the same.

I am totally against [these political changes]. What do they want, these people? They are rich. They have cars. They have everything. And look at how they engage the children of the poor to kill each other for their own interests.

I am completely against people who sow war between innocents to have the means to become governors. They ought to think about our peace if they are truly struggling for us as they say in their meetings. We are waiting for someone who will bring governing back to us. Changes or no changes, for us poor peasants, it's the same thing.

In short, the Rwandan masses supported changes that limited the activities and reach of the state, while they saw little promise in reforms that could have changed the personnel who occupied state office. The Rwandan masses concluded that the opposition parties would offer very little real change to the structures of power that were exploiting them. The public will in Rwanda, thus, was in direct opposition to the advice of Chazan and other scholars.

What the Rwandan people realized—and many in the scholarly community have been reluctant to accept—is that if the state is the source of many of the problems in Africa, then simply tinkering with the structures of the state is unlikely to solve those problems. In Rwanda, as in Zaire, Kenya, and many other African countries, those who emerged to lead the new opposition parties in the early 1990s were familiar faces, well-known politicians who had previously served in the government but had a falling-out with the sitting regime. As the quotations above suggest, the Rwandan people believed that the opposition parties offered nothing really new. Were they to take office, they would continue to function much as those they replaced, perhaps favoring a different region or ethnic group or installing a different clientelist system, but doing nothing to alter fundamentally the exercise of power and the relationship of the state to the common people. The Rwandan population offered lukewarm support for the activities of the opposition parties, because they wanted a much more radical reform of the state than a mere rewriting of laws and reshuffling of offices among the elite.

Robert Fatton has recognized the limited meaning of the development of multiparty movements that offer no real change:

When the old guard, the "dinosaurs," abruptly discover that they are after all good democrats, a country's release from authoritarianism may be facilitated, but its future as a democratic society can only be endangered. It is indeed difficult to believe that the metamorphosis of the old guard is total and that the intolerant reflexes it had exhibited for so long can vanish in a sudden political change of heart (1992, 110).

Fatton's sentiments were echoed by many of the Rwandan people I interviewed. They did not trust that state power would be used wisely and justly by any of the established politicians, even if they were popularly elected. Thus, meaningful "democratization" involved not just linking the state more effectively to the society but actually diminishing state power. During the 1980s, there was a rapid expansion of associational life in Rwanda. Independent women's, farmers', and youth groups, producers' and consumers' cooperatives, rotating credit associations, black market trading systems, prayer groups, and basic Christian communities all proliferated, creating new opportunities for people to address the problems faced in their everyday lives. This represented a challenge to the totalizing project of the state, the attempt by the state to control all of social, economic, and political life, but it also represented an expansion of individual liberty. Having lost faith in the ability of the state to protect their interests, the Rwandan people sought a rolling-back of the state, a limitation of the state's reach into society to allow them greater freedom to pursue individually and collectively their needs and interests. While they did not have in mind a fully developed vision of an alternative state structure, the people I interviewed in Rwanda nevertheless clearly hoped for a smaller state and a radical decentralization of power. In the words of one Rwandan quoted above, "We are waiting for someone who will bring governing back to us."

I do not wish to imply that power distributed in the society rather than concentrated in the state will necessarily benefit the poor and exploited. As Fatton, Jean-François Bayart, and others make clear, civil society is a location of class conflict and it "has no predetermined destination" (Fatton 1992, 5). Nevertheless, the peasants and urban poor whom I interviewed believed that they had a much better chance of protecting their interests and fighting their exploitation within the social sphere than within the state sphere. And, indeed, during my field research, I recorded a variety of instances in which the poor were able to draw upon their grassroots organizations to defend themselves against exploitation by the wealthy and powerful.

Implications of the Rwandan Case

I would contend that my observations on Rwanda apply to Zaire, Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, and probably other countries. Rather than resulting from the anarchic tendencies of the populations released by the prodemocracy movements, insecurity in these countries has increased as a result of government efforts to protect the political status quo. I see no basis for believing that large, centralized states can be reformed to serve the interests of the masses. Neither do I believe that economic and social development in Africa must be driven by a strong state. Rather, I would agree with

Goran Hyden's contention a decade ago in his well-known work, *No Shortcuts to Progress* (1983), that Africa needs to develop from the bottom up, through the development of local capacity, rather than through the initiative of a strong and centralized state.

Bayart has written that, "Africa's potential for democracy is more convincingly revealed by the creation of small collectives established and controlled by rural or urban groups (such as local associations) than by parliaments and parties, instruments of the state, of accumulation and of alienation" (1986, 125). It is time, I would argue, for scholars to lose their romantic attachment to the state and to begin to look for what James Wunsch (1990) has called "alternative institutional paradigms" that allow for self-governance. If future disasters like the tragedy of Rwanda are to be avoided, the world community should focus its attention less on controlling and discouraging the elements of African societies that are challenging state power and more on limiting the ability of states to harm their populations. Without the infusion of arms and other support from the international community, President Habyarimana might have been successfully driven from power and an opening for meaningful reforms created. Instead, because of the insistence on preserving the centralized state, hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives.

Notes

Much of the information for this chapter was gathered during field research conducted in Rwanda in 1992–1993. The author would like to thank the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the Board of Higher Education of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for providing financial support. Additional field work was conducted in 1995 and 1996 under the auspices of Human Rights Watch/Africa and the Fédération Internationale de Ligues des Droits de l'Homme.

1. Far from being of purely academic interest, the conception of civil society that seeks to distinguish good (i.e., state-oriented) organizations from bad (i.e., "particularistic") has direct policy implications. USAID, in developing guidelines for supporting civil society, begins with a definition of civil society that excludes many local and small-scale groups because they do not seek a direct "advocacy role" with the state and thus do not help to build state capacity.

2. As I have elsewhere given a detailed explanation of the social and political developments in Rwanda leading up to the explosion of violence that rocked the country in mid-1994, I here give only a brief overview of events in Rwanda to make my points. For more detailed analysis, see Longman 1994, 1995a, and 1995b, as well as Newbury and Newbury 1994.

3. For example, Peter Smerdon (Reuters, 10 April 1994), writes "[Habyarimana's] death launched the age-old strife between the Hutu majority and Tutsi minority." Jerry Gray (*New York Times*, 9 April 1994) writes about "the centuries-old feud between the Hutu and the Tutsi."

4. The results of my interviews are corroborated by Helbig (1991) and Des Forges (1992), who also found that Rwandans saw little new in the political parties and thus felt little inclination to support them.

5. Guichaoua (1995, 675–693) contains an excellent collection of documents and research on the possible scenarios for the 6 April crash. See also *African Rights* 1994, 79–92; Braeckman 1994, 169–180.

6. Numerous other observers concur with my assessment that the Rwandan massacres were not spontaneous actions from below but part of a well-planned program from above. Cf. testimonies of Des Forges and Mujawamaliya in *U.S. House of Representatives* 1994; Braeckman 1995; Block 1994; Amnesty International 1994.

7. All of the interviews cited were conducted by the author in 1992 and 1993 in Butare, Kibuye, and Ruhengeri prefectures. Names and other personal information are withheld for the protection of the informants, who were guaranteed anonymity.