

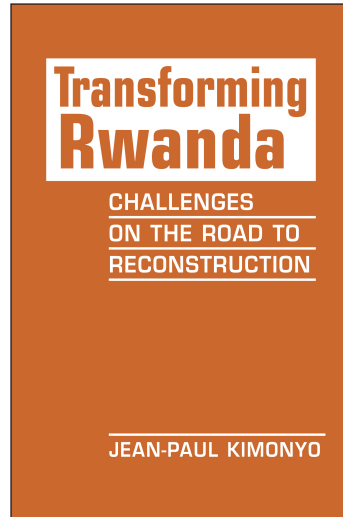
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Transforming Rwanda: Challenges on the Road to Reconstruction

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1

Transforming Rwanda

Twenty-five years after the publication of the first United Nations (UN) Human Development Report in 1990, Rwandans in 2015 were among the people in the world who had seen their living standards improve the most rapidly.¹ Rwanda is sometimes referred to as an “economic miracle.”² Nonetheless, also beginning in 1990, Rwanda suffered a civil war and a particularly radical genocide. Approximately 10 percent of its population, including three-quarters of the Tutsi community, was exterminated, owing largely to broad participation of the Hutu population in the genocide.³

Of late, the contrast between the country’s disintegration in 1994 and the vigor of its socioeconomic progress has started to produce a more diverse palette of accounts.

In February 2012, official statistics were published and confirmed by international organizations, showing that in five years one million people rose out of poverty.⁴ Rwanda is frequently mentioned among developing countries as a model for economic growth, provision of health care, good governance, and improvements in the role of women in society. Nevertheless, Rwanda’s stability and socioeconomic progress have had little effect on the dominant academic opinion and coverage in the media in the West. Specialists from the most prestigious US and European universities described in 2011 an almost apocalyptic situation of political and social repression, poverty, and growing inequality.⁵ This small, stable, African country of little conventional strategic importance has become a kind of cause célèbre,⁶ featured in the opinion and editorial pages of the *New York Times*, often in negative terms.⁷ Some analysts find the growing popularity of the “Rwandan model” in Africa alarming and warn against the empty promises of an emergent “Kigali consensus” based on the efficiency of a combination of socioeconomic effectiveness and political repression.⁸

Nonetheless, a number of academic studies, mostly from British universities and think tanks, standing out from the neoliberal normative doctrine, focus more on the government's developmental performance, its impact on citizens, and its legitimizing effects.⁹ One could raise the question of whether the progress made in different sectors of the country's social life is not a result of effective governance and overall government policy, with such consequences. In evaluating the course of postgenocide Rwanda, the central question should be that of political legitimacy. In this regard, a distinction could be made between domestic and certain outside legitimizing criteria, between legitimacy deriving from Rwandans with their own values and norms based on their life experiences and that based on liberal prescriptive tenets.

Scholar Mushtaq Khan, known for his work on the relations between governance and developmental states, shed some light on how genuine political legitimacy does not necessarily follow the path of "good governance" in these countries.

A broad enough coalition of elites which can sustain itself in power without significant violence from excluded elites or within its own ranks counts as a "legitimate" ruling coalition in the context of most developing countries. This should obviously not be read as an argument against democracy, but only as an argument against expecting it to solve problems which it cannot solve.¹⁰

Rwanda is considered by some a developmental state seeking rapid socioeconomic transformation.¹¹ Most often, the leadership in these types of societies did not operate historically in accordance with the canons of liberal democracy, although it has had the benefit of political legitimacy, primarily as the result of performance.¹²

Evolution of the international context and the difficulties of imposing a liberal agenda on politically fragile countries should encourage adoption of a more nuanced approach to understanding poor societies coming out of serious domestic conflicts. The Iraq disaster, the failures of the Arab Spring, the difficulties of democratic consolidation in Africa and in the world, plus the questioning of the liberal agenda within the very heart of mature Western democracies, point in that same direction.¹³

Aspiration to democratic freedoms today is shared by a large number of Rwandans as well as by many others throughout the world. The question is not the desirability of liberal values but rather, in contexts of poverty and political and social divisions, their proneness to cause widespread violence along with the obstacles that they can present in carrying out redeeming socioeconomic transformations.¹⁴ Given Rwandans' historical experience, there is some reason to raise the question of whether adherence to liberal ideals in Rwanda does not follow different patterns and priorities.

My first goal in this book is to understand and explain the postgenocide reconstruction process in Rwanda by placing it in the country's long-term historical context. A second related objective is to assess progress made in the transformation of Rwandan society that would shield it from political violence and lift it out of poverty and dependency, as stated by those who lead it.

To do this, one should be able to determine criteria showing when a transformation process is achieved or at least what steps lead to this result. For this, I rely on research that presents income thresholds as conditions for a political transformation toward a more stable and peaceful political system. The researchers I refer to deal with competitive electoral democracy; more narrowly, what interests me more about their results is rather related to the capacities for a given society to maintain peaceful political dynamics through confrontational or more consensual electoral competition. The use of income thresholds serves here to determine clarifying criteria for the social and political effects they induce.

Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi's influential work studies the relationship between economic development and democracy. According to these authors, statistical and historical evidence show that the transition from dictatorship to democracy cannot be inferred from the level of developmental or other structural conditions; rather, the establishment of democracy has more to do with actors and their strategies or with other factors such as outside pressure. This is certainly one of their most important contributions because it clarifies one of the points that tended to discredit modernization theories linking democracy to wealth when by the mid-1970s democracies started emerging in unexpected places. Przeworski and Limongi emphasize the role of agency and not structures in the emergence of democracy. By contrast, once democracy is established, chances for its survival are strongly determined by levels of per capita income. In very poor countries with less than \$1,000 per capita, dictatorships succeed one another with great regularity. In countries with between \$1,000 and \$4,000 per capita, dictatorships become less stable, and above \$4,000, already established democracies become almost immovable.¹⁵ In his statistical analysis of the relationship between political violence and democracy, Paul Collier finds that democracies systematically reduced the risk of political violence in middle- and high-income countries but made society more dangerous in low-income countries. He set the threshold at around US\$2,700 per capita per year. Collier asserts that democracy in the least developed countries not only increases the risks of violence but also fails to provide legitimacy or accountability.¹⁶

The level of income is not the only strong determinant of peaceful political dynamics; stagnation, decline, or economic contraction are also very important factors of political and social destabilization or even violence, even in rich societies.¹⁷ The explanation behind the link between

income levels and the possibility of maintaining peaceful political dynamics is based on the fact that in affluent countries wealth moderates the intensity of distributive conflicts in various ways. For the poorer social classes, economic development associated with higher incomes brings greater economic security and a “longer time perspective and more complex and gradualist views of politics.”¹⁸ The improvement of living conditions reduces the receptivity of these classes to extremist ideologies. The emergence of a large middle class plays a moderating political role as it tends to support moderate political forces and rejects extremists. A high level of organic development also makes the competition for power less explosive from the higher classes’ point of view. In this type of social configuration, the government has less power to crucially influence the life chances of the most powerful groups, and the country is rich enough to afford a smoother redistribution of wealth or social mobility. Finally, the level of wealth of a society affects the extent to which its elites adopt universalist and meritocratic norms. The poorer the country, the greater the emphasis placed on nepotism through the support of kin and friends.¹⁹

One of the main underpinnings of the postcolonial Rwandan conflicts, which eventually led to genocide, is certainly linked to the exacerbated distributive conflicts the country experienced, which rendered the country’s political evolution a deadly zero sum game. Be it the first or the second republic, their evolution can be read as a continuous process of political and social exclusion of larger and larger portions of society, first on an ethnic basis but then on regional, clan, and family bases, with disastrous consequences. This in spite of the fact that both regimes had a low level of inequality. These same distributive tensions of course continue to affect the postgenocide state.

Thus, a real political and social transformation should not only attenuate distributive conflicts by better distribution of resources but, more essentially, by greater wealth creation. Based on the work of Przeworski and Limongi, the first income threshold that brings a qualitative difference in the pacification of political competition is roughly the transition from low-income country to low-middle-income country status. For 2018, the World Bank establishes a low-income economy as one with less than \$995 of gross national income (GNI) per capita. This level is still modest for sub-Saharan Africa, excluding high-income countries; it reached \$1,452 in 2017. Coming from a very low point, Rwanda is still far from this threshold but steadily approaching it; it went from a GNI per capita of \$270 in 2005 to \$720 in 2017. In historical terms, this income is double the pregenocide pick level.²⁰

The concern about resources and their distribution does not mean that issues of representation and political identity are not important. Through

their ideological development they can take on an independent and potent life.²¹ But in reality, in situations of most violent conflict, often acute distributive tensions and identity factors are intertwined to produce explosive stratified political identities.²² Regardless of how the Rwandan state is ordered, its historic level of poverty, the highest in the world at the end of the 1980s, would not allow for stability or peace.²³ And as the two interludes of political liberation in the country (1957–1963, 1991–1994), both of which ended in massacres, have shown, confrontational political competition has made matters worse. This of course does not mean that the present and the future are prisoners of the past.

The analysis of the postgenocide reconstruction process offered here is inspired by the analytic eclecticism approach, which “takes on problems that more closely approximate the messiness and complexity of concrete dilemmas facing ‘real world’ actors.”²⁴ The analysis attempts to explain the course of events by referring to the challenges that Rwandans, rulers and ruled, had to deal with and the choices they made and by adopting an approach based on pragmatism and domestic understanding. One of the main efforts made in this book was to try to open the Rwandan Patriotic Front’s (RPF) “black box” through the presentation of internal documents of the movement, recounting sensitive moments of its evolution. In particular the crucial phase of the beginning of the process of change at the end of the postgenocide transition period, which is at the center of this book. This opening makes it possible to shed a somewhat new light on a number of episodes of the reconstruction process, or even on its entire trajectory.

In the book I adopt a multidisciplinary approach and discuss security, political, economic, social, and cultural issues. This study analyzes the reconstruction process in Rwanda, focusing on the action of the central source of authority, the RPF. It looks at the movement’s history and its evolution, from the time of its creation by refugee communities scattered throughout the subregion and the world up to when Rwanda became the object of international interest that it is today.

This book is divided into four parts. The first, historical, retraces the conflict’s origins and sources of change in Rwanda. Part 1 begins with the germination in exile of future change and retraces the history of refugees and the impasse in which they found themselves in the mid-1980s in host countries in the subregion, seeing a return to Rwanda as the improbable solution to their blocked situation. Chapter 3 returns to the evolution of the domestic situation in Rwanda, which, at the end of the 1980s, thirty years after independence, saw the country slide into political and social decay, famine, and widespread local violence. Chapter 4 deals with the collision of these two evolutions through the emergence of the RPF in refugee communities and the war fought to return to Rwanda.

Part 2 begins with the end of the genocide, the situation existing in Rwanda in July 1994, and the division of the country into three zones of influence, foretelling a continuation of the war. The reaction of the international community is also described. The rest of this part deals with the country's violent reunification through the closing of refugee camps inside and outside the country and the end of the insurrection in northwestern Rwanda. This second part continues with the breakdown of the initial postgenocide government coalition and its replacement by a new one, based partly on neopatrimonial co-optation and the spread of corruption among some leaders. The feeling of failure that resulted caused a revolt among RPF cadres, who demanded extensive changes in their political party and in the government. This part ends with a discussion of the adoption of a way out of the crisis aiming to engender extensive transformation in Rwanda. It then describes the circumstances that led to the political primacy of the future president, Paul Kagame, who took the lead in promoting this transformation.

Part 3 analyzes the various stages of the reconstruction process after the election of Kagame as president of the republic in 2000. This part describes a dense institutional development, a struggle for governance serving the general interest as well as implementation of new economic and social policies. It also describes the establishment of the Gacaca tribunals and the occurrence of acts of violence against survivors of the genocide that ensued as well as the campaigns carried out to repress them. This third part also describes the reelection of President Kagame in 2010, which was backed by strong popular support despite political tension and controversy. The book's final chapters and Part 4, the Conclusion, cover the evaluation by Rwandans, several years later, of the political and social offer that was made to them and describes the return of public affairs to normal along with the emergence of new challenges.

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6. A *cause célèbre* in the sense of a controversial issue that attracts a lot of interest.

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