

Part I

Creating What You Are Afraid of: The Rwandan Patriotic Front's Transitional Justice Program

There is a group of leaders who have their own project for society, and they want you to join into this project. If you fall outside, they are afraid that you will go in a different direction. There is also a visceral reaction that if you leave these lines that they have set, it could lead us into what happened before. ... But you create what you are afraid of.

– Rwandan Civil Society Leader, 2002

Introduction to Part I: The RPF as a Janus-Faced Movement

Two widely divergent images have emerged of post-genocide Rwanda and the party that has dominated Rwandan politics since 1994. Development experts praise the Rwandan Patriotic Front's efficiency, resistance to corruption, and commitment to economic growth.¹ Many diplomats praise the RPF for promoting national unity, advocating reconciliation rather than revenge, and seeking to eliminate the ethnic differences that have divided the country. The seriousness of purpose of leaders impresses outside observers. For much of the world, the RPF represents a model of good governance in the aftermath of a terrible disaster, not only bringing order and economic development but also altruistically promoting forgiveness and reconciliation in the face of horrific violence.² Journalist

¹ Praise from the head of the United Nations Development Program in Rwanda is typical of the views of many development experts. "Rwanda has made tremendous socio-economic progress and institutional transformation since the 1994 Genocide. Today Rwanda is a peaceful state enjoying a steady progress toward the achievement of national development goals under a visionary and dedicated leadership." Aurélien A. Agbénonci, "Introductory Remarks," *Delivering as One: Annual Report 2009*, Kigali: United Nations Rwanda, 2010, p. v.

² C.f., Margee Ensign, "Rwanda at 50: Reflections, Reconstruction, and Recovery," *Huffington Post*, July 3, 2012; Michael Fairbanks, "Nothing Good Comes Out of Africa,"

Stephen Kinzer, for example, contrasts Rwanda with Somalia and contends that against expectations, Rwanda has become peaceful and unified:

Rwanda ... rebelled against its destiny. It has recovered from civil war and genocide more fully than anyone imagined possible and is united, stable, and at peace. Its leaders are boundlessly ambitious. Rwandans are bubbling over with a sense of unlimited possibility. Outsiders, drawn by the chance to help transform a resurgent nation, are streaming in ... Rwanda is not being torn apart by civil war, like Somalia, or by criminal violence, like Kenya. Instead, it is stable, its people groping their way toward modernity and liberation.³

Paul Farmer, whose organization Partners in Health has worked closely with the government to implement health sector reforms, is a particularly strong defender of the regime:

Today Rwanda has been transformed. Mass violence has not recurred within the country's borders, and its gross domestic product has more than tripled over the past decade. Growth has been less uneven than in other countries in the region, partly because both local and national governments have made equity and human development guiding principles of recovery. Recent studies suggest that more than one million Rwandans were lifted out of poverty between 2005 and 2010, as the proportion of the population living below the poverty line dropped from 77.8% in 1994 to 58.9% in 2000 and 44.9% in 2010. Life expectancy climbed from 28 years in 1994 to 56 years in 2012. It is the only country in sub-Saharan Africa on track to meet most of the millennium development goals by 2015. Although metrics for equity are disputed, it is an increasingly well known fact that Rwanda today has the highest proportion of female civil servants in the world.⁴

For Kinzer, Farmer, and many others, the RPF's success at building peace and stability is due largely to the influence of the RPF leader, President Paul Kagame. Kinzer writes that, "President Kagame ... has accomplished something truly remarkable. The contrast between where Rwanda is today and where most people would have guessed it would be today in the wake of the 1994 genocide is astonishing."⁵ Phillip Gourevitch, the most widely-read author on Rwanda, similarly portrays

Huffington Post, May 3, 2010; Emily Holland, "Dispatches from a Humanitarian Journalist: Dispatch I: Kibuye, Rwanda," *McSweeney's*, September 4, 2007; "Rwanda: Trying to Move on," Public Radio International's *The World*, Jeb Sharp, producer, 2007.

³ Stephen Kinzer, *A Thousand Hills: Rwanda's Rebirth and the Man Who Dreamed It*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2008, pp. 1–2.

⁴ Paul Farmer, et al., "Reduced Premature Mortality in Rwanda: Lessons from Success," *BMJ*, January 2013, pp.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

Kagame as a moderate leader who has embraced former adversaries and promoted forgiveness and reconciliation. He cites a genocide survivor referring to her *génocidaire* neighbors, “It’s because of the President that they don’t kill. Forgiveness came from a Presidential order. If he were not there, we would all be killed.”⁶ Both Kinzer and Gourevitch praise Kagame’s deft management of the economy, having attracted considerable foreign investment, aggressively fought corruption, and brought about impressive economic growth. Kinzer writes that, “Kagame has set out to do something that has never been done before: pull an African country from misery to prosperity in the space of a generation.”⁷

In contrast, among human rights activists and many scholars of Rwanda, a much less sanguine perspective on post-genocide Rwanda prevails.⁸ Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, who raised the alarm early about the 1994 genocide, also denounced human rights abuses perpetrated by the RPF as it fought its way to power and sought to establish authority, and both organizations have remained consistent critics of the post-genocide regime.⁹ A growing body of academic publications based on recent fieldwork conducted in Rwanda portrays a heavy-handed state that uses fines, arrests, and other forms of intimidation to force the population into mobilizing for government programs and implementing far-reaching plans to restructure social relations, economic activity, political engagement, and even personal hygiene.¹⁰ Long-time Rwanda observer Filip Reyntjens argues that, “The [RPF] regime

⁶ Philip Gourevitch, “The Life After: 15 Years after the Genocide in Rwanda, the Reconciliation Defies Expectations,” *The New Yorker*, May 4, 2009.

⁷ Kinzer, *A Thousand Hills*, p. 336.

⁸ A recent collection of essays in honor of the late Alison Des Forges by a group of twenty-eight Rwanda scholars was uniformly bleak in its portrayal of post-genocide state and society. Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf, eds., *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights after Mass Violence*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011.

⁹ Amnesty International, “Rwanda: Reports of Killings and Abductions by Rwandese Patriotic Army, April-August 1994,” AFR 47/16/94, London: Amnesty International, October 19, 1994; Amnesty International, “Rwanda: Human Rights May be the Main Casualty of Tensions in the Rwandese Government,” AFR 47/18/95, London: Amnesty International, August 30, 1995; Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*.

¹⁰ An Ansoms, “Striving for growth, bypassing the poor: a critical review of Rwanda’s rural sector policies,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46, no. 1, 2008, 1–32; An Ansoms, “Re-engineering rural society: the visions and ambitions of the Rwandan elite,” *African Affairs*, 108, no. 431, 2009, 289–309; An Ansoms and Stefaan Marysse, eds., *Natural Resources and Local Livelihoods in the Great Lakes Region in Africa: A Political Economy Perspective*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; Larissa Begley, “‘Resolved to Fight the Ideology of Genocide and all of its Manifestations’: The Rwandan Patriotic Front, Violence and Ethnic Marginalisation in Post-Genocide Rwanda and Eastern Congo,” PhD Dissertation, University of Sussex, March 2011; Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us*; Anuradha Chakravarty, *Investing in Authoritarian Rule: Punishment and Patronage in Rwanda’s Gacaca Courts for Genocide Crimes*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016; Christopher Huggins, “Seeing Like a Neoliberal State? Authoritarian High

seeks full control over people and space: Rwanda is an army with a state, rather than a state with an army.”¹¹

The contrast between these two perspectives of post-genocide Rwanda could hardly be more stark, yet ample evidence exists to support each. Any reasonable observer of Rwanda cannot ignore the numerous accomplishments of the post-genocide regime. The RPF-led government has consistently employed a discourse of national unity, justice, and reconciliation. Since the suppression of the uprising in northwestern Rwanda in 1998, the country has been free from large-scale violence. Strong promotion of women’s rights has given Rwanda the distinction of having the highest percentage of women in parliament of any country in the world, the first where women are a majority of members of parliament.¹² The regime has placed considerable emphasis on education, leading to a proliferation of schools at all levels, raising the elementary school completion rate from 51.1 percent in 1991 to 79.0 percent in 2011 and the adult literacy rate from 58 percent in 1991 to 70 percent in 2008. Investments in healthcare have helped to lower child malnutrition from 24.3 percent in 1991 to 18.0 percent in 2008.¹³

Shortly after Kagame became president in 2000, the government released *Rwanda Vision 2020*, an ambitious economic program “to raise the people of Rwanda out of poverty and transform the country into a middle-income economy” in twenty years.¹⁴ The government has since aggressively promoted policies to attract international

Modernism, Commercialization and Governmentality in Rwanda’s Agricultural Reform,” PhD Dissertation, Carleton University, 2013; Bert Ingelaere, “Do We Understand Life After Genocide: Center and Periphery in the Construction of Knowledge on Rwanda,” *African Studies Review*, 53, no. 1, April 2010, 41–59; Bert Ingelaere, “Peasants, Power and Ethnicity: A Bottom-Up Perspective on Rwanda’s Political Transition,” *African Affairs*, 109, no. 435, 2010, 273–292; Andrea Purdeková, *Making Ubumwe: Power, State, and Camps in Rwanda’s Unity-Building Project*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2015; Marc Sommers, *Stuck: Rwandan Youth and the Struggle for Adulthood*, Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2012; Susan Thomson, *Whispering Truth to Power: Everyday Resistance to Reconciliation in Post-Genocide Rwanda*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013.

¹¹ Filip Reyntjens, “Constructing the Truth, Dealing with Dissent, Domesticating the World: Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda,” *African Affairs*, 2010, 1–34, citation p. 2. See also Filip Reyntjens, “Rwanda Ten Years On: From Genocide to Dictatorship,” *African Affairs*, 103, 2004, 177–210; and René Lemarchand, “Bearing Witness to Mass Murder,” *African Studies Review*, 48, no. 3, December 2005, 93–101.

¹² Timothy Longman, “Rwanda: Achieving Equality or Serving an Authoritarian State?” in Gretchen Bauer and Hannah Britton, eds., *Women in African Parliaments*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005.

¹³ “Rwanda,” World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/rwanda>.

¹⁴ Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, “Rwanda Vision 2020,” Kigali: Government of Rwanda, July 2000.

investment, and the economy has enjoyed annual gross domestic product growth rates as high as 11.2 percent. The government has thoroughly embraced neo-liberal economic reforms, privatizing numerous public assets and adopting extensive regulatory reforms to ease international investment. In 2010, the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report ranked Rwanda as having the third lowest burden of government regulation and the twelfth most efficient government overall.¹⁵ Rwanda's ranking in Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index was 44th in 2015, among the best in Africa and far ahead of any other East African state.¹⁶ Rwanda was welcomed into the East African Community in 2007 and the British Commonwealth in 2009.¹⁷

Yet strong evidence also indicates that extensive human rights abuses have simultaneously occurred. The RPF used widespread violence to establish its initial authority, perpetrating massacres, summary executions, and numerous arbitrary arrests in its first years in power, and carrying out a bloody counter-insurgency operation in the northwest in 1997–1998.¹⁸ Since 2000, even as the RPF has gained an international reputation for competence and moderation, the leadership has used more subtle means to maintain its power, tightly constraining public space and tolerating little dissent, while coercing the general population to implement sweeping social changes.¹⁹ Security forces regularly harassed, arrested, and even killed civil society activists, journalists, and politicians who dared to criticize the government, while average Rwandans who objected to the apparently arbitrary imposition of onerous new regulations or resisted the regime's constant mobilization programs (such as those for villagization, constitutional reform, elections, gacaca, public works, and land reform) also faced punishment. Beginning with the First Congo War in 1996, while the level of active violence declined inside Rwanda, the RPF carried out massive attacks on civilians in the

¹⁵ World Economic Forum, "The Global Competitiveness Report 2010–2011," <http://gcr.weforum.org/gcr2010/>, 2010.

¹⁶ Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index," www.transparency.org.

¹⁷ "Keep Looking Ahead Rwanda," *The Economist*, January 13, 2007; Josh Kron, "Rwanda Joins British Commonwealth," *New York Times*, November 29, 2009.

¹⁸ Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, pp. 692–735; Amnesty International, "Rwanda: The Hidden Violence: 'Disappearances' and Killings Continue," London: Amnesty International, June 22, 1998.

¹⁹ Chakravarty, *Investing in Authoritarian Rule*, contends that "Although its tight grip in the early transition years depended on the use of blatant force through killings and arbitrary arrests, the RPF has entrenched itself over the years, becoming thoroughly able to project power at the grassroots without over-reliance on these tools of repression" (p. 2).

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where violence and instability continue to reverberate.²⁰

In this first part of the book, I explore an aspect of public policy that reveals the Janus-faced nature of RPF rule – transitional justice. I review the government's diverse programs to shape popular understandings of Rwanda's past and thus promote a unified national identity. The regime has developed a narrative that emphasizes the historic unity of the Rwandan people, highlights the centrality of the 1994 genocide, and portrays the RPF in a favorable light. It has promoted these ideas through education and propaganda, trials, political reform, and memorialization and commemoration. While the RPF has created these programs in part to promote justice, accountability, and reconciliation, their implementation has also been influenced by the leadership's suspicion of the Rwandan population and the belief in the absolute necessity that they stay in power. As I explore in the second section of the book, the contradictions in these motivations ultimately undermine their ability to transform Rwandan society.

²⁰ Jason K. Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa*, New York: Public Affairs, 2011; René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009; Filip Reyntjens, *The Great African War: Congo and Regional Geopolitics, 1996–2006*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.