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Rwanda's Militarized Involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Revisionist Account

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Abstract

In 1996, a civil conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) escalated to a continental conflict following the intervention of Rwanda and several other African states. President Paul Kagame's post-genocide regime has asserted national security and human protection incentives to explain Rwanda's motivation for intervening in the Congo conflict. However, a critical review reveals a sharp disconnect between the two stated incentives and the extremely intrusive operational dynamics of Rwanda's intervention. This article critiques official explanations for Rwanda's military involvement in the DRC. Furthermore, relying on process-tracing techniques while citing relevant literature, the article develops a revisionist account of Rwanda's intervention accentuating a prestige-seeking, mass mobilization, and regime consolidation agenda amidst state- and democracy-building ambitions as the underlying motivation for Kagame's regime's intervention in the DRC.

Key Words: Rwanda, Kagame, Congo, conflict, intervention

The name Rwanda often revives memories of Africa's bloodiest genocide and the continent's severest international militarized disputes (MIDs) which occurred in Rwanda's western neighbouring state, the Democratic Republic of Congo (hereafter, simply Congo). The international conflicts involved confrontations between Congo and Rwanda (1996 – 1997; 1998 – 2002), Zimbabwe and Rwanda (1998 – 2002), and Namibia and Rwanda (1998 – 2002), among several others listed in Maoz's (2008) dyadic MID data set. Together, the various MIDs in Congo constitute what a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs termed the 'First African World War' (quoted in Cuvelier and Marysse 2003). As of 2007, according to a series of mortality surveys by the International Rescue Committee (2007), the 'war' had caused 5.4 million conflict-related deaths.

Rwanda played a prominent role in initiating the international dimension of the continental conflict when it intervened in a civil conflict in Congo in 1996. However, the two reasons advanced by President Paul Kagame's post-genocide regime for Rwanda's intervention in the resource-rich state appear flawed. This article provides a revisionist account of Rwanda's intervention in Congo. The revisionist narrative asserts an inconsistency between the two extant official explanations – highlighting national security

and humanitarian incentives – for the intervention on the one hand and the extremely intrusive operational dynamics of the intervention on the other. The intensity of Rwanda's intervention, the protracted occupation of extensive parts of Congo (including the capital city, Kinshasa), and the acceptance of government nominations and exertion of authority in Congo by Rwandan soldiers undermine the credibility of official explanations for Rwanda's involvement in Congo.

More realistically, as elaborated in the present revisionist account, the intrusive features of Rwanda's involvement in Congo expose the former's claimed security and humanitarian motivations as convenient excuses for an ulterior prestige-seeking, leadership consolidation agenda by Kagame and his post-genocide administration. Upon ending the 1994 genocide of Tutsis by Hutus, Kagame and his insurgent Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took over state leadership, promising to pursue national unity and multiparty democracy in Rwanda. A retrospective analysis of Kagame's performance upon assuming power reveals that, the rebel-turned-leader adopted a mixture of liberal (persuasive) and illiberal (coercive) strategies towards achieving his regime's noble ambitions and sustaining its survival. The RPF regime's intervention in Congo is reviewed in this article as a key coercive instrument in Kagame's mixed tool box for political survival.

A successful lengthy and intrusive foreign military venture in a state gigantic as Congo would have shored up prestige and cross-ethnic popularity for Kagame as a national hero capable of protecting all Rwandans, of guaranteeing national security, and worthy of every vote in future competitive elections. Thus, the RPF regime decided to maintain an occupying force in (and to participate in the governance of) much larger Congo after having effectively redressed any possible security and humanitarian concerns in its initial intervention in 1996. The regime's protracted and invasive intervention suggests that the regime's involvement in Congo was motivated more by egoistic prestige-seeking and regime consolidation calculations than by altruistic national interests.

Structurally, this article proceeds in three main parts. First, it descriptively reconstructs how popular discontent with Mobutu Sese Seko's regime in Congo escalated to international violence following foreign intervention from Rwanda and other African states. Second, it outlines and critiques the two official (security and humanitarian) explanations for Rwanda's military engagement in Congo. Third, using process-tracing techniques and citing supporting documents/literature, the article avers an RPF prestige-seeking and regime consolidation agenda amidst the RPF regime's state- and democracy-building program as the underlying motivation for the regime's intervention in Congo. The article concludes with prescriptive comments for breaking Rwanda's 'democratization deadlock' that has inadvertently resulted from the combination of liberal and illiberal strategies adopted by the Kagame regime in its quest for prestige, cross-ethnic popularity, and ultimately regime survival.

Congo's Crisis under Mobutu and Rwanda's Intervention: Upon seizing power in a 1965 coup, President Mobutu Sese Seko administered the resource-rich Congolese state autocratically (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 141 – 170). Disaffection for Mobutu's regime engendered the emergence of several rebel groups, some of which sought and fought for decades to topple Mobutu, but only succeeded in 1997 following the robust pro-insurgency intervention of Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi in 1996. Prior to Rwanda's direct participation in the campaign that overthrew Mobutu, the post-genocide Tutsi-dominated Rwandan army had restricted itself to recruiting, training and arming Congolese Tutsis who were being oppressed and violently attacked by Congolese Hutus.¹ Rwanda escalated its intervention in the second half of 1996 following the Hutu massacre of Tutsis in North Kivu in early 1996 and upon receipt of intelligence of a Hutu plan to slaughter ethnic Banyamulenge Tutsis in South Kivu (Reyntjens 1999, 242). The South Kivu Tutsis mounted a rebellion in September 1996 which Rwanda instrumentalized to invade Congo, sending troops, unifying and further arming rebels, and providing leadership to the campaign that overthrew Mobutu and installed rebel leader Laurent Kabila at the helm in May 1997 (Pomfret 1997; Reyntjens 1999, 242; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 225 – 226).

The reasons why the rebellion succeeded in producing regime change are two-fold. On the one hand, Mobutu's military had become 'weak and demoralized' (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 226) from decades of recurrent civil conflicts. Reyntjens (1999, 241) concurs, noting that the state army had 'extreme weakness'. On the other hand, Kabila's rebel groups gained disproportionate strength following the direct operational intervention of Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and Angola in support of the rebellion. The contribution of Rwanda was particularly instrumental. Its intervening soldiers were predominantly former insurgents who had fought between 1990 and 1992 under the banner of the RPF against Habyarimana's (pro-Hutu) ethnocratic regime in Rwanda. Though facing a state military force that was three times larger and receiving training and equipment from France (Pomfret 1997), the RPF had successfully invaded Rwanda (from its base in Uganda), marshalled its way to the capital city Kigali, dominated peace negotiations, ended the 1994 genocide, and taken over power. It was such a successful insurgency legacy that the Rwandan rebels-turned-soldiers brought to bear on the Congolese rebellion.

Intervening Rwandan army strategists understood the importance of mounting a united front against Mobutu's forces. Thus, Rwandan agents initiated contacts with the Congolese rebels and masterminded the formation of the Alliance des Forces Démocratique pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre (AFDL) under Kabila's leadership. It was a coalition of various rebel groups and provided a vehicle for effectively coordinating the rebellion. Though the AFDL fought alongside Rwandan troops, the most complex and decisive operations requiring precise outcomes were executed by Rwandan commanders (Pomfret 1997). For instance, Gettleman (2012) reports how Rwandan field commander James Kabarebe (now Rwanda's defence minister) successfully hijacked planes and opened new fighting fronts across Congo. Rwandan soldiers were also instrumental in the capture of various strategic

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cities, including the copper-mining town of Lubumbashi, the diamond-rich city of Kisangani, and the capital city Kinshasa (Pomfret 1997).

Kabila's presidential take-over in May 1997 after the capture of Kinshasa brought peace, although the country relapsed to another cycle of foreign-fuelled civil war in August 1998. Upon seizing power, Kabila appointed some of his Rwandan allies to high echelons of power in the new Congolese army. For instance, commander Kabarebe was appointed chief of staff of the Congolese military, with many of his unit commanders equally chosen from the Rwandan intervening contingent (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 226). Edith Ssempala, former Ugandan ambassador to the U.S. recounted in a Washington Times (March 17, 2000) roundtable forum that Kabila also invited his foreign backers to station their troops in eastern Congo to boost security on their borders. Kabila's benevolence to his rebellion backers was, however, short-lived. It ostensibly infuriated native Congolese, so much so that by July 1998, Kabila felt a need to reassert his independence as president and boost his public ratings by distancing himself from his Rwandan (and Ugandan) collaborators.

President Kabila's apparent popularity campaign commenced at the end of 1997 with the arrest and imprisonment (for 'indiscipline') of commander Masasu Nindaga, a Rwandan who led one of the member groups of the AFDL. Underrating Masasu's contribution to AFDL's insurgency, Kabila lambasted the Rwandan officer after his arrest as: 'a simple corporal from the Rwandan army that we picked up along the way ... he was never associated with the strategic centre of military operations during the liberation war' (quoted in Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 226). Further hurting his Rwandan partners, Kabila dismissed his Rwandan-born armed forces chief of staff, commander Kabarebe, in July 1998. Pre-empting a coup, Kabila repatriated Kabarebe and his Rwandan comrades at the end of July 1998 (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 228). The repatriation, according to Reyntjens (1999, 245 – 246) and Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002, 227 – 228), ignited a second and bloodier cycle of insurgency violence which started on August 2, 1998.

Like the first (1996 – 1997), the second Congo conflict (1998 – 2002) witnessed colossal Rwandan and Ugandan military collaboration with rebels who this time fought under the banner of the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD), the organization that coordinated the anti-Kabila insurgency. The second crisis ended with a series of peace accords in 2002 after the insurgency failed to topple Kabila who had successfully mobilized military support from Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. Kabila, however, did not live to negotiate the accords as he was killed by in 2001 and succeeded by his more diplomatic and less confrontational son, Joseph Kabila.

An Outline and Critique of Rwanda's Official Reasons for Intervention in Congo:
Rwanda's official explanations for intervening in Congo highlight security and humanitarian (ethnic protection) incentives. But, as earlier mentioned, the overly intense, intrusive and protracted nature of Rwanda's intervention betray more underlying prestige-seeking and regime consolidation incentives associated with the RPF post-genocide

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regime's overtures towards state- and democracy-building. Upon ending the 1994 genocide, rebel-turned-leader Paul Kagame and his RPF regime committed to building national unity and democracy as the regime's key ambitions. The regime's intervention in Congo is recast in this article as a strategic tool that was used alongside other instruments to cultivate prestige and popularity for Kagame and leverage his political survival in planned democratic transitional multiparty elections. Prior to elaborating the revisionist explanation for the RPF regime's intervention in Congo, an outline and analysis of the regime's formally declared reasons for the intervention is in order.

Advanced by RPF rebels who dominated Rwanda's leadership after ending the genocide, the primary official explanation accentuates state security concerns. Per the post-genocide government's narrative, Hutu refugee camps in eastern Congo, near Rwanda's western borders, constituted a source of insecurity to the Rwandan state. Hutu Power radicals were amongst the camps' occupiers. The extremists, composed of former Rwandan soldiers and militiamen who participated in the 1994 genocide and fled RPF's counter operations, constructed armed units within and around the refugee camps, and used them as bases for cross border attacks (on Rwanda) and retreat (Reyntjens 1999, 242). Paul Kagame, Rwanda's defence minister and vice president at the time of the invasion, recounted that:

The battle plan ... was simple. The first goal was to 'dismantle the camps.' The second was to 'destroy the structure' of the Hutu army and militia units based in and around the camps either by bringing the Hutu combatants back to Rwanda and 'dealing with them here or scattering them' (cited in Pomfret 1997).

Richard Sezibera, former Rwandan ambassador to the U.S. reiterated Kagame's account:

Our aims were to deal with the threat of the 120,000 armed men in the camps on our borders, because the camps were right at the border...and we felt that was a big threat to us, and we went in to deal with that problem (roundtable forum, Washington Times March 17, 2000).

Also articulated by the post-genocide government, the secondary, but typically more internationally appealing, motivation for Rwandan military operations in Congo relates to humanitarianism. Under Mobutu's dictatorship, some Congolese, specifically Tutsis in the Kivu region, endured systematic discrimination, oppression, and ethnic violence on account of their 'doubtful citizenship' (Reyntjens 1999, 242). According to the humanitarian account, Rwandan operations in Congo sought not only to crush border security threats but also to assist AFDL's 'liberation' struggle. Vaguely referring to Rwanda's humanitarian incentives for intervention, Sezibera added to his above statement:

We were also aware that ... there were [Congolese] who thought, who agreed with us that [Mobutu] was bad for them, and our friends in the region also felt the same way. So we helped. There was a convergence of interests between the [Congolese], led by

Rwanda's Militarized Involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo ... Afa'anwi Ma'abo Che Kabila, and our own interest in dealing with the threat posed by the genocidal militia. That is why we went into the Congo in 1996 (Washington Times 2000).

The intensity of Rwanda's intervention, however, challenged the credibility of expressed motivations for the intervention. If border insecurity in Eastern Congo was the driving force for the intervention, then perhaps it was out of order for Rwanda to mount military operations beyond the bordering region. Even if Rwanda had humanitarian concerns for the Kivu Tutsis, it could well have restricted its intervention to equipping the Congolese Tutsis with relevant diplomatic and military capacities. Invading Congo, never mind taking over the capital in Western Congo, and accepting nominations in Kabila's government, suggests the Rwandans had ulterior motives, with the oft-proclaimed security and humanitarian concerns serving only as convenient excuses.

If the rationale for Rwanda's intervention in 1996 was dubious, it became doubly so two years after when the second Congo conflict erupted. According to Rwandan officials, the two issues that influenced Rwandan intervention remained unresolved, and had become even worse by 1998 (Washington Times, March 17, 2000; Reyntjens 1999, 243). But the second crisis only started after commander Kabarebe and other AFDL's foreign backers were dismissed from Kabila's government and repatriated. The militarized reaction of Rwanda to the expulsion betrayed any credibility associated with Rwanda's expressed objectives for its involvement in Congo. Instead of withdrawing from Congo after its victories in the 1996 – 1997 conflict, the Rwandans and their Ugandan allies opted to occupy the resource-rich country and violently resist any threats to their occupation.

Rwanda's occupational force boosted Tutsi hegemony, which in turn amplified anti-Tutsi sentiments in Eastern Congo. Frustrated by Rwandan occupation, local militias (like the mai-mai and the Bembe) and some of Kabila's government troops assisted the few Rwandan Hutu rebels who survived the 1996 invasion in launching cross border raids on Rwanda (Reyntjens 1999, 243). Thus, if Rwanda's border insecurity compounded two years after invading Congo and controlling influential positions in the Congolese army, then Rwanda was to blame, at least partially, for its rekindled security problems.

Some critical analysts have reviewed and depicted Rwanda's intervention and occupation of Congo as functions of imperialist ambitions. For instance, Cuvelier and Marysse (2003, 9) reveal how Rwanda deliberately created an economic 'sphere of influence' stretching a thousand kilometers away from its home territory. Also, Rwanda established mechanisms for looting and exporting (through Rwandan soil) Congolese natural resources (including gold, diamond, coltan and timber), and continued to extract rents even after the withdrawal of its troops at the turn of the century (Cuvelier and Marysse 2003, 4).

Linking Rwanda's Intervention to Prestige-Seeking and Democratization Ambitions: More fundamentally underlying the above explicitly admitted and implicitly attributed motivations for Rwanda's Congo operations were RPF's state- and democracy-building

campaigns which, as critically reviewed here, propelled the new, rebel-dominated post-genocide government's foreign belligerency. The implementation of the Arusha Accords – expected to end the 1990-1992 Rwandan civil wars and induce inclusive liberal democracy in the country – collapsed with the assassination of president Habyarimana and the eruption of the Tutsi genocide. Upon intervening and ending the massacres masterminded by extremist Hutu Power elements of the Rwandan army (then known as the Forces Armées Rwandaises, acronymed FAR) and two Hutu Power militias called interahamwe and impuzamugambi, the RPF, led by Kagame, took over state leadership. Amidst the mutual Hutu – Tutsi mistrust, fear, and suspicion plaguing the country, the new RPF-led regime prioritized i) national unity and reconciliation, and ii) multiparty democracy on its political agenda.

However, under the leadership of Kagame, the new regime employed a mixture of liberal (persuasion) and illiberal (coercion) tools towards achieving its national ambitions. This mixture, at best, has only yielded a fragile national unity and an illiberal electoral democracy; at worst, it suggests that the Tutsi rebel-turned-leader Kagame's regime was focused more on keeping political power for 'ethnic/private gains' and less on delivering 'national/public goods'. Building durable social cohesion and liberal multiparty democracy ostensibly requires respect for human rights and freedoms. But liberal respect for human rights potentially limits leadership longevity while (illiberal) human rights violations (especially through repressive violence) enhance political survival.² Kagame's illiberal criminalization of ethnic identities and violent harassment of suspected ethnically mobilized oppositional parties, especially during presidential election run-ups, bear testament to a possible paramount preoccupation with preserving his political power.

Plotted in Kigali, and executed by Rwandan officers under Kagame's authority, the plan to invade Congo arguably occupied a central place in Kagame's mixed persuasive and coercive tool box. If successful, the invasion would elevate Kagame's status from an ethnic Tutsi militant to a civic nationalist hero. By extension, it would also generate the prestige and cross-ethnic popularity required to prevail in future competitive multiparty elections that were expected to culminate the transitional period. In revisionist hindsight, the [coercive] invasion plan was included in Kagame's political survival tool kit because RPF rhetorical commitments to national unity and multiparty democracy appeared inadequate for mobilizing mass support and approval of the new regime.

According to a theory linking democratization and foreign wars, leaders of democratizing states often engage in prestige-generating schemes, including making belligerent nationalist appeals, to mobilize mass allies, minimize political opposition, and maximize chances of retaining state power (Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 7). But the success of [civic] nationalist appeals in inducing political prestige – as were made by Kagame upon assuming power (Bonner 1994a; 1994b; Henry 2013, 4) – is facilitated by emphasizing [real or fabricated/perceived] external threats to national security (Mansfield and Snyder 2002,

Rwanda's Militarized Involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo ... Afa'anwi Ma'abo Che 299). Hence, the border security problems posed by Hutu Power genocidal refugees in Congo were exploited by Kagame's regime to invade Congo and to advocate national unity in Rwanda in the face of presumed external security threats whilst projecting Kagame as a veritable civic nationalist worthy of every vote in future elections.

Kagame and his RPF won a landslide victory in the belated 2003 democratic transitional presidential and parliamentary polls after mounting a ferocious harmonizing 'rally round the flag' electoral campaign. Presumably on account of intensive state-wide consultations that marked the drafting of Rwanda's new constitution by the Transitional National Assembly, the 2003 elections took place two years behind schedule. The elections were supposed to mark Rwanda's transition from ethnocratic politics to inclusive competitive democracy, but Kagame's victory was tainted by electoral gerrymandering (The Economist 2003; Samset and Dalby 2003; Meierhenrich 2006, 629 – 630) and failed to produce democratic outcomes in Rwanda (Meierhenrich 2006, 633).

Noble National Ambitions and Mixed Strategies: After ending Rwanda's genocide, the RPF assumed state control and issued a Declaration concerning the Establishment of Institutions (Samset and Dalby 2003, 9; Meierhenrich 2006, 627). The 1994 Declaration exuded the first signs of the new leaders' commitment to build national unity and a more inclusive political system. It named a 'Government of National Unity', with moderate Hutus appointed as President (Pasteur Bizimungu), Prime Minister (Faustin Twagiramungu) and Deputy Prime Minister (Alexis Kanyarengwe).³ Though named Vice President and Minister of Defence in the transitional government, real powers rested with Paul Kagame who led RPF military operations in Rwanda to successfully end the genocide.⁴

Even before the Tutsi-dominated RPF took over, national unity had been 'its target and its doctrine', (Rusagara, quoted in Henry 2013, 3) evinced by its recruitment of Hutu soldiers and Hutu politicians such as Bizimungu, a former moderate ally of the Habyarimana regime who defected to the RPF in 1990.⁵ Promoting national unity remained 'a key pillar' of the RPF's domestic programme when it assumed power (Henry 2013, 4). Hence, a National Unity and Reconciliation Commission was created in 1999 with a mission 'to strengthen unity, reconciliation, and good governance' (Henry 2013, 4). In addition to its national unity goal, the RPF-led government pledged 'to build a multiparty democracy' (Kagame, quoted in Bonner 1994b).

To convince the country of their civic nationalist ambitions, Kagame and his ruling RPF made a number of persuasive promises. For instance, whilst naming both Hutus and Tutsis in the Government of National Unity, the RPF promised 'to protect all Rwandans', irrespective of ethnic identity (Bonner 1994a). Even the mostly Hutu individuals who were fleeing the country in fear of Tutsi reprisal killings for the genocide were assured of protection and urged to 'stay put' (Bonner 1994a). In an interview, Kagame also promised to remove all references to ethnic origins in all official documents, including national identity cards (Bonner 1994b). Ethnic entries in identity cards were under previous Hutu

regimes used to leverage ethnic discrimination and persons found guilty of falsifying their ethnic designations were imprisoned or fined (Prunier 1995, 76). The RPF regime was particularly keen to do away with ethnic classifications in national identity cards because they facilitated Hutu domination and Tutsi marginalization. Without the ethnic specifications in identity cards, commonalities between Hutus and Tutsis (common language, religion and frequent intermarriages) potentially impeded ethnic differentiation. If ethnic entries in identity cards represented 'the only way [former Hutu regimes] could maintain their discriminatory system' (Bonner 1994b), then, engendering civic reforms of the cards was indispensable for ending (and/or reversing) ethnic discrimination.⁶

Further employing persuasive rhetoric to convince Rwandans of his commitment to civic liberal values, Kagame condemned communal violence upon assuming de facto leadership of the country. Addressing 30,000 Rwandans in Kigali in 1994, Kagame appealed to Tutsis not to undertake revenge killings of Hutus in retaliation of the Tutsi genocide: 'You must be careful not to wreak vengeance. I promise we will bring to justice those responsible for the [genocide]' (quoted in Lorch 1994). In a vague reference to aid agencies, particularly to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees which accused the new, Tutsi-dominated government army of slaughtering Hutus in the southeast during its counter genocide operation, Kagame cautioned: 'Beware of foreigners who preach ethnic divisions' (quoted in Lorch 1994).

Perhaps the most significant persuasive promise of the transitional government was its offer of return and resettlement rights to its refugee diaspora, including the ex-FAR soldiers and interahamwe militiamen who had fled to Congo when the RPF intervened to end the 1994 genocide. If the RPF was serious about its commitment to nation-building, then it had to ensure the effective repatriation of Rwanda's predominantly Hutu refugees in Congo. Tom Ndahiro, a prominent genocide scholar avers that the repatriation constituted 'an important step in the conflict management process in post-genocide Rwanda' (quoted in Henry 2013, 3). The repatriation promised by Kagame (Bonner 1994b), if fulfilled, would prevent a further mass Hutu exodus for family reunions in Congo and considerably reassure those 'staying put' of Kagame's devotion to their social welfare and physical security.⁷

But Kagame needed much more than words to accomplish the repatriation and generate popular approval of his regime. Although some of Rwanda's refugees in Congo had returned by September 1994, they were mostly former FAR soldiers (Bonner 1994b). Many civilian refugees were harassed and discouraged from leaving by soldiers and militiamen who opted to remain in Congo.⁸ Intimidation and insecurity in the refugee camps inclined the RPF regime towards coercive action.⁹ By 1996, Rwanda's armed refugees in Congo had started orchestrating cross-border raids on Rwanda, with, at least, the 'complicity' (Reyntjens 1999, 242), and alleged 'connivance' (Sezibera, Washington Times 2000) of the Mobutu regime in Kinshasa. Together, the intimidation and the raids provided a major impetus for the invasion of Congo. Thus, the transitional regime did not have to fabricate unfounded national security threats to initiate military action and register a major foreign

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policy victory desired by the regime – to generate prestige and strengthen its domestic position.

As already mentioned, Kagame's army invaded Congo in 1996. Determined to make its Congo campaign a success story, the transitional government's army, officially named the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA),¹⁰ alongside its AFDL allies, crushed the genocidal ex-FAR and interahamwe militiamen mercilessly, presumably mitigating their menace. According to some Rwandan officers interviewed in Congo, the Tutsi-dominated RPA was 'given a free hand by the Congolese rebels to attack the [militant] Hutu refugees ... in exchange for backing the war against Mobutu' (Pomfret 1997). With the AFDL's acquiescence, the RPA massacred several Hutu refugees (Pomfret 1997), but also reportedly 'secured the return of some 700,000 Hutu civilians', followed by the repatriation of disarmed ex-FAR soldiers (Henry 2013, 3).¹¹

Kagame's decision to maintain an occupational force in Congo after the intense 1996 – 1997 military campaign was more dubious than his decision to invade in the first instance. If the threats posed by extremist ex-FAR troops and interahamwe militiamen to Rwandan state security were real (genuine) at the time of the first Congo conflict, they ostensibly became unfounded (invented)¹² when the second Congo conflict started in 1998. Suggestive of the implausibility of national security concerns underlying Rwandan official narratives of RPA's sustained involvement in Congo, former Congolese Deputy Chief of Mission to the UN, Lleka Atoki, rhetorically questioned:

But the Rwandan [officials] say that all the refugees went back to Rwanda ... that all the refugees, Rwandan refugees are back in [Rwanda]. So what is the security concern? ... If for more than two years in [Congo] you were not able to solve whatever your security concerns were, how are you going to solve it now? (Washington Times 2000).

By occupying Congo despite abated security threats, Kagame's transitional regime displayed determination to exploit the resource-blessed country as an external target for generating domestic prestige, irrespective of the presence or absence of real security threats. The regime could always fabricate or exaggerate national security threats to drum up domestic support and popularity as the protector of Rwandans. Without civic popularity amongst Hutus and Tutsis, officials of the ruling RPF stood little chance of dominating envisaged transitional elections as the RPF was, during its insurgent years, composed predominantly of Tutsis, the ethnic minority, relative to Hutus. Thus, by maintaining its presence in Congo, Kagame's RPA created an extensive security and economic buffer zone on which it could cultivate the RPF's civic nationalist credentials and mobilize mass cross-ethnic allies.

Coercive instruments were also used by the transitional regime domestically, especially in the run-up to the 2003 planned transitional elections. Under Kagame's leadership, the Rwandan government was (and still is) famed for suppressing dissent maliciously. Often used to perpetuate suppressive arrests and prosecutions is what the new post-genocide

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constitution (arts. 9(1), 13, 54 – 55) – adopted by popular referendum in 2003 – criminalizes as ‘divisionism’, encompassing actions or statements (oral or written) harbouring risks of sectarian violence.¹³ But because the law fails to specify what acts or statements qualify as sources of conflict, ‘divisionism’ has ‘become a tool that the [RPF government] authorities use against dissenters’ (Samset and Dalby 2003, 8), especially those opposed or indifferent to the RPF’s civic nationalist campaign.

For instance, at the turn of the century, the RPF sought to enlarge its diverse ethnic membership ahead of the 2003 elections. According to Human Rights Watch reports (quoted in Samset and Dalby 2003, 8), some of those who were reluctant to sign up were threatened with accusations of the grave crime of ‘divisionism’. In April 2003, the country’s main opposition party, the Hutu-dominated Mouvement Démocratique Républicain (MDR), was accused of mobilizing along ethnic lines and not reflecting ‘the unity of the people of Rwanda’ as required by article 54 of the new Rwandan constitution (Meierhenrich 2006, 629). The ‘divisionism’ charge resulted in ‘the “disappearance”, arrest and emigration of dozens of prominent MDR figures’, with the party itself ultimately banned and barred from the 2003 elections (Samset and Dalby 2003, 8). The RPF effectively criminalized ethnicity in favour of civic identities and used constitutional provisions sanctioning ‘divisionism’ to tilt the political playing field in its favour (Human Rights Watch, quoted in Meierhenrich 2006, 629). With the dissolution of the MDR, the RPF regime ‘ensured eradication of contestation’ (Meierhenrich 2006, 629)¹⁴ and made its victory in the 2003 elections inevitable.

Retrospectively, Kagame and his RPF regime officially emphasized state security threats and humanitarian concerns as the main motivation for Rwanda’s militarized involvement in Congo. But as critically reviewed above, both the invasion and occupation of Congo were also functions of Kagame’s regime’s civic nationalist prestige strategies, presumably meant to boost the regime’s popularity and democratic credentials, and ultimately enhance the regime’s longevity.

Conclusion: Towards Breaking Rwanda’s Democratization Deadlock: Cycles of ethnic domination, discrimination, exclusion, violence and displacements have since colonialism cultivated inter-ethnic mistrust in Rwanda. Inter-ethnic mistrust engendered competitive zero-sum dynamics in the Arusha peace negotiation process that was meant to end Rwanda’s 1990 – 1992 civil war and usher in multiparty democracy in the country. The competitive transitional negotiations produced unequal ethnic outcomes, stirring Hutu dissatisfaction and the Tutsi genocide. Rwanda’s attempted breakaway from its ethnocratic past to a democratic future has ever since stalled. As noted in Reyntjens’ (2006, 1103) review of the RPF regime’s impact on Rwandan politics in the post-genocide era, ‘rather than liberation, inclusiveness and democracy, the RPF has brought oppression, exclusion and dictatorship’. To legitimize its hold on power, Kagame’s Tutsi-led government has officially criminalized ethnicity in favour of national identity (Beswick 2011, 497), even though the ethnic Tutsis dominate political life in reality (Ingelaere 2009).

Notwithstanding its political shortcomings, Kagame's regime has registered remarkable economic success,¹⁵ revamping Rwanda's tourism and coffee export sector¹⁶ and reducing poverty levels (as a percentage of Rwanda's population) from 60.4% in 2000 to 44.9% in 2011.¹⁷ The RPF regime constantly seeks to engage and enrich the mass population through local socio-economic developmental projects, as part of its strategies towards eradicating the country's ethnic conundrum. Hence, under Kagame, Rwanda is famed for effectively exploiting foreign aid to its economic advantage (Ruxin 2010). With Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore as one of Kagame's model states (Grant 2010; Chothia 2011), the Rwandan president is an ardent adherent of the 'Lee hypothesis' that, democracy hinders economic growth. In his opening speech at the seventh edition of the Africa Economic Conference in Kigali in 2012, Kagame once again articulated, albeit implicitly, priority for economic development over political democracy, by drawing a parallel between Rwanda and the more democratic but secessionist-destabilized Republic of Mali:

*...Mali which not so long ago was praised...as the most stable, democratic that we should learn from...Now, everybody is saying let us go help Mali and put her back together...These notions of democracy that are empty and are told everyday end up like that.*¹⁸

Kagame's autocratic pursuit of economic prosperity, however, appears redundant in the absence of evidence to support Lee's thesis in Knutsen's (2010) empirical evaluation of the negative correlation between democracy and economic evolution. Even before Knutsen's assessment, Feng (1997) and many others had shown that, democracy, not autocracy, fosters economic growth. Economic development is evidently more attainable and arguably more sustainable when built in a peaceful, property rights guaranteed setting. Better than any other regime-type, democracy, with its peaceful culture and structural checks against rights abuses, proffers suitable conditions for economic progress. Longstanding academic disagreements on the effects of political regimes on economic performance (Przeworski and Limongi 1993) may well undermine prescriptions for a more democratic path to economic prosperity in Rwanda. But when critically revisited, Rwanda's own past experience reveals that both Habyarimana's autocratic regime and state stability were most threatened not by economic pressures but by RPF's militarized demands for political reforms. If ethnic exclusionary politics induced the RPF insurgency in 1990, the RPF regime could well expect similar insurgencies to emerge from its trivialization of inclusive democracy and prioritization of economic growth in recent years.

Instead of exclusionary policies – evinced by Hutu party bans (Niesen 2010); Hutu elite exiles (Reyntjens 2006, 1105 – 1106); electoral gerrymandering disfavoured Hutu challengers in the 2003 (Samset and Dalby 2003; Meierhenrich 2006; 629 – 630; Reyntjens 2006, 1107) and 2010 (Somers 2012) presidential polls; decimal Polity IV scores ranging from -6 to -3 since 1995,¹⁹ with a Freedom House status of 'Not Free'²⁰ – Kagame's regime should aim to more persuasively and less coercively cultivate a stronger integrative civic culture to minimize chances of ethnic civil unrest and maximize prospects for peaceful

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presidential elections in 2017 and other future elections. Civic nationalist proclamations like the oft-averred 'we are Banyarwanda' [we are all Rwandans] line (quoted in Chothia 2010 and Grant 2010) must be backed, not by exclusionary, but by proportional inclusionary practices, especially in government appointments and electoral politics. Without ethnic tolerance and civic harmony, durable democracy and permanent peace are unlikely to be attained. The RPF government's aspiration for mass economic prosperity is laudable. But for Rwanda to mirror South Africa, a previously polarized state but now amongst Africa's most vibrant democracies and most productive economies, it must expand political participation and revive democratization which the Arusha peace process sought but failed to establish.

Notes:

1. On the plight of Tutsis in Congo, see Pomfret (1997) and Reyntjens (1999, 242).
2. This statement is based on Heger and Salehyan's (2007, 386) 'Ruthless Rulers' article portraying brutal repressive violence – a major form of human rights violations by illiberal governments – as a 'strategic' tool for sustaining leadership survival. Earlier, Bueno de Mesquita et al.'s (2003) selectorate theory of political survival had articulated a negative correlation between liberal leadership and leadership longevity.
3. On the composition of the new government, see Bonner (1994a) and Samset and Dalby (2003, 9).
4. Though relegating himself to the subsidiary role of Vice President on paper, Kagame was in journalistic and academic circles considered the country's de facto leader. For instance, *The Economist* (2003) projected Kagame as 'the Tutsi rebel who seized power in 1994 and has called the shots ever since'. *BBC News* (2000; 2004) confirmed that Bizimungu, the President, was 'a slightly peripheral figure' who felt 'marginalised and mistreated' in government. Opposed to Rwanda's occupational force in Congo after the AFDL's victory, former Congolese President, Laurent Kabila had accused the Rwandan post-genocide regime of seeking to create 'another Bizimungu in Kinshasa', alluding to Bizimungu's 'nominal or figurehead role' in the new Rwandan government (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002, 250).
5. Bizimungu had served the Habyarimana regime as director general of Electro-Gas, a powerful government-appointed position (*The New York Times* 1994). In 1990, Bizimungu joined the RPF after his brother, a colonel of the former FAR was murdered on suspected orders of the Hutu Power regime (*BBC News* 2004).
6. However, it was not until 1997 that action eliminating ethnic designations from national identity cards was ultimately effected (Fussell 2001, 1).

7. Countering concerns about the sincerity of Kagame's refugee repatriation pledge, Murigande, Bizimungu's presidential adviser, reassured that 'they [the Hutu refugees] are all Rwandans, and deserve the right to live here [in Rwanda]' (Bonner 1994b).
8. Major Jean-Guy Plante, United Nations military spokesman in Kigali, cited in Lorch (1994). Fear of reprisal attacks and 'shaky' security in some parts of Rwanda might have also impeded repatriation, but 'the biggest' block to repatriation was 'intimidation' in the refugee camps (United Nations refugee agency, quoted in Lorch 1994; see also Henry 2013, 3).
9. Kagame recounts that the Rwandan government wanted to send envoys to negotiate the repatriation but was concerned about the envoys' safety (see Bonner 1994b). The rejection of the government's request for UN security provisions (Bonner 1994b) ostensibly further increased incentives for Rwandan military action on the refugee camps.
10. The RPF-dominated transitional government, upon assuming power, discarded the FAR name and adopted RPA, hitherto, the official name of the RPF's armed wing.
11. The new government also sought to reintegrate the demobilized and repatriated FAR soldiers into the post-genocide army in line with Kagame's national unity programme. Thus, in 1997, the government established the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC), which according to Brig. Gen. John Bagabo (RDRC Commissioner), served to promote 'unity and reconciliation among former soldiers from different backgrounds', primarily ex-FAR and RPA (quoted in Henry 2013, 3). By 2001, more than 15,000 ex-FAR soldiers had been reintegrated in the national army, with the reintegrative reforms culminating in 2002 when the Rwandan legislature changed the army's name from RPA to Rwandan Defence Force (RDF). See Henry (2013, 4 - 5) for more elaborate literature on the integrative reconstruction of the national army under the RPF regime.
12. Nzungola-Ntalaja (2002, 227ff) projects the second Congo conflict as an 'invention' of Rwanda.
13. The mentioned constitutional provisions are known as "'divisionism' charges" (Meierhenrich 2006, 629).
14. Prior to the MDR's dissolution, Kagame had banned Bizimungu's party, Parti pour la Démocratie et le Renouveau (PDR), formed in June 2000 after the figurehead president resigned over the transitional government's 'unwarranted crackdown on dissent' (BBC News 2004). Accused of preaching divisionism and threatening state security, the PDR was banned almost immediately upon creation and Bizimungu was subjected to house arrest. The former president was subsequently prosecuted and imprisoned, but was released in 2007 after a presidential pardon from Kagame (Asiimwe 2007).

15. The RPF regime is heralded for championing Rwanda's post-genocide recovery by various analysts, including Ruxin (2010), Fairbanks (2012) and Sommers (2012).
16. Progress in these sectors in recent years is noted by various scholars like Mazimhaka (2007), Spenceley et al. (2010) and Goldstein (2011).
17. See World Bank data for Rwanda, retrievable at <http://data.worldbank.org/country/rwanda>.
18. A full version of the speech is available at <http://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/index.php?i=15164&a=60253>.
19. See Polity IV's graphical exhibition of Rwanda's authority trends from 1961 to 2010 at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/rwa2.htm>.
20. Freedom House qualitative and quantitative information on Rwanda is available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/rwanda>.

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