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Rwanda and the Difficult Business of Capitalist Development

Graham Harrison

ABSTRACT

This article argues that current schisms in the research on post-genocide Rwanda are not *sui generis* but symptomatic of a broader set of separations within our understanding of development. Both the research on Rwanda and the most prominent intellectual responses to the rise of neoliberalism in development research have generated separations between a concern with rights and individual agency and structural transformation. The article sets out a way to reconcile key aspects of this separation and offers three empirical themes which provide original insights into Rwanda's apparent determination and partial success in pushing ahead with a bold strategy of capitalist transformation.

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RWANDA AND THE TENSION BETWEEN RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT

Rwanda is perhaps the most commonly cited example of a supposed new African development. It is used as an exemplar — for better or worse — of a situation within which some African states have embraced developmental or transformative governance modes (Hickey, 2012) in which relatively high and sustained rates of economic growth are associated with state-driven strategies to transform their political economies. This article focuses on Rwanda as an especially important and revealing case to explore how these bolder post-neoliberal ambitions generate questions concerning the place of human rights in development. Rwanda's post-genocide governance reminds us that politically contextualized understandings of development as a process of transformation do not easily conform to an idealized human rights framework. In the midst of this recognition, we explore how Rwanda's agrarian transition strategy tries to balance authoritarian state action with legitimacy claims based in transformatory outcomes.¹

Two Rwandas?

It is commonplace to note in a discussion of Rwanda's politics that writing on this topic is distinguished by its high levels of contention and, at times, quite different narrative presentations of the nature of change since the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) took control of the state. Broadly, the difference might be characterized as between a narrative of decline and one of renaissance. The former relies on a narrative structure in which Rwanda's post-genocide politics experienced a brief liberal possibility followed by a series of authoritarian measures, ratcheted one upon the other to produce a situation that is increasingly totalitarian and liable to generate a recrudescence of mass violence. The key metaphor here is a building up of pressure that will lead to a volcanic explosion. The renaissance narrative focuses on 'the genocide and the country's subsequent post-conflict transition towards impressive economic growth in the last decade' (Perks, 2013: 732). The key metaphor here is a sunrise, a rebirth, a prospective optimism.

¹ As argued above, 'transformatory' here connotes something structural and based in a macro-economic political economy of change. There is another more rights-focused notion of transformation which connects to values of empowerment and participation.

This contrast is not unique to Rwanda but it is extreme if not exceptional.² The force of argument can — even within the moderating protocols of academic research rather than say, journalism or blog posts — become polemic. If one could remove the name of the country from a number of representative research articles on Rwanda and then hand them to a reader, that reader might be forgiven for assuming the articles were about two different countries (Hintjens, 2014): one pushing forward towards a state of modernity and another on the verge of collapse. This generates a sense that ‘interpretations of almost every aspect of Rwanda and its history are exceptionally polarized’ (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2012: 384; Ingelaere, 2014: 214; Jones, 2012: 228).³ Whilst this polarization should not be exaggerated, it is certainly present; its significance derives both from its relative intensity compared with the academic scholarship on other East African countries and the fact that the polarization organizes around a single division between a sense of condemnation or support for the current government, both of which produce a certain kind of ‘blindness’ to a fuller picture (Stys, 2012: 720).

Nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration simply to argue that research on Rwanda’s politics is bifurcated. With some exceptions that read as partial and polemic, the disagreements concerning Rwanda’s post-genocide governance acknowledge other positions and facets of Rwanda’s politics but make analytical choices that marginalize those other positions. Of course, this is standard academic practice, a procedure to ensure some expositional and analytical clarity and to avoid simply being overwhelmed by the dense complexity of social reality. But, in this case, the degree of separation that does exist can make it difficult to address phenomena which are substantially interconnected. This is particularly true with regard to the politics of human rights and development. Studies of human rights and studies of development in Rwanda each make certain epistemic prioritizations that constrain them from understanding the inseparable nature of human rights and development in Rwanda (and arguably everywhere else). Nowhere is this more evident than in the fact that both rights and development research are actually focusing their analysis on the same single political agency: the Government of Rwanda (GoR).

² For example, a similar kind of polemic often emerged after radical-nationalist revolutions in the post-colonial world during the Cold War. An interesting recent treatment of one case is Pawson (2014).

³ Other researchers who acknowledge the specific contentiousness of Rwanda studies currently include Clark (2014); Perks (2013); Straus and Waldorf (2011).

Human Rights and Political Context

Some writers focus very centrally on Rwanda's human rights politics, and the insights that they provide are extremely troubling. The leading scholar here is Filip Reyntjens who has, in fine detail, provided an account of the government of Rwanda's incremental totalitarianism (Reyntjens, 2013). There are numerous facets to this analysis: the shutting down of party political opposition, the disciplining of civil society, assassinations and threats, the domination of a core elite around the president, the wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Prunier, 2009; Stearns, 2011), the authoritarian social engineering embedded within development policy (Ansoms, 2009), and the effective banning of public discussion of ethnicity. The human rights concern provides a stark analysis in which the Government of Rwanda has little to recommend it, and its mode of rule is likely to generate an explosion of violence — which is where the previously-noted 'volcano' metaphor comes from (Marijnen and van der Lijn, 2012: 24).

However, it is not quite that straightforward. Whilst the human rights critique is often empirically valid and based in strong and highly consensual liberal premises concerning democracy and freedom, it is not immediately clear how one reconciles an a priori human rights concern with the construction of political authority in extremely adverse circumstances. To put it plainly, it is absurd to imagine that any post-genocide government could address the circumstances within which it was operating in a way that was entirely rights-congruent or based on an overarching process in which the construction of sovereignty and the expansion of human rights were coeval and positive-sum. These circumstances included: a profound collapse of state institutions; insurgencies and raids along borders; the resettlement of at least three million refugees and internally displaced people; a generalized social trauma in the wake of the world's most intense genocide; an extreme lack of resources for government; and an impoverished economy. This being so, human rights critiques are both right and necessary, but also beg more proximate political questions about what constitutes a set of reasonable expectations with regard to governance. This is not an apology for authoritarian state actions; it is a necessary and difficult analytical step if one is going to treat human rights in a fully political fashion.

Let us offer some examples which might be collectively defined as the absence of convincing counterfactuals. Take, for example, Reyntjens' augury that 'the RPF unilaterally imposed its constitutional order' after the genocide (2013: 3), something that is normatively presented as part of the ratcheting up of authoritarian governance, an imposition without the consent of the people. But, one might ask, what kind of politically contextualized counterfactual might one deploy to make this statement a concrete rather than idealized or abstract critique? The bare bones of the situation after the genocide was that the RPF seized control of a heavily depleted state that had both collapsed and created the infrastructure for a genocide. The country more broadly was in the midst of a series of profound traumas of which the genocide was in fact only the most terrible. Security and stability were major-order and immediate issues up until 1998 and then sporadically afterwards.⁴ In these political circumstances, what might one reasonably expect of any government? Is it not a fairly commonly accepted historical truism that post-conflict state-building involves some kind of 'unilaterally imposed... constitutional order'?⁵

There are other examples of human rights critiques which are abstractly pristine but concretely less easily rested on clear counterfactuals. The RPF provided limited access to power for opposition parties after the genocide and it has indeed incrementally marginalized other parties from power (Reyntjens, 2013: Ch. 1). But, after the genocide, surviving political parties had either been directly mobilizing the genocide or had been internally split and undermined as some leaders were murdered, others sided more or less willingly with the 'Hutu power' transitional government that prosecuted the genocide, and some hid or went into exile. With such a compromised and weakened polity, what reasonable counterfactual might one pose to argue that the RPF excessively or prejudicially claimed power at the cost of opposition parties?

Furthermore, although it is clear that the RPF has come to consolidate a monopoly of power over and within the state, making Rwanda substantially a single party state, this has taken place within a historic context in which the contestation of power between political parties has provoked

⁴ Until 1998 there were frequent border raids by the rump of the genocidal army/militia from bases in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

⁵ This is something readily accepted within the academic literature on post-conflict statebuilding. On Rwanda, see for example Samset (2011).

major challenges for state stability and social order (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2014: S176). From 1959 onwards, multi-partyism generated a ‘political ethnicity’ (Berman and Lonsdale, 1991) that has reified ethnic identity, mobilized ethnic-party militias, and played a central part in creating periods of violence and displacement, some on a large scale (Ingelaere, 2009: 447; Kimonyo, 2016: 361 ff.; Longman, 2011: 32). The counterfactual, then, that after an emergency period the RPF should have opened up space for political opposition, is suggestive at best unless it in some fashion takes on board the historic fact that political party contestation of state power and the mobilization of ethnic constituencies are very closely inter-twined.

One could take multiple examples to make the same point: that a ‘pristine’ human rights critical analysis is necessary but not in itself fully equipped to calibrate a regime’s political practices with context and history. This is an analytical point, not a normative one: it is about thinking through modes of explanation not apology. As such, ‘context’ does not serve to justify human rights abuses but rather to assess authoritarian practice as a varied political phenomenon. Some forms of rights violations have different political meaning to others; some rights violations are squarely *sui generis*, produced directly to make some suffer or to instil fear; some kinds of rights violations are effected as a component of some larger government project. Taking the latter as a point of departure brings us squarely to the specific aspect of Rwanda’s post-genocide governance that we will concentrate on in this article: its agricultural development strategy.

Development and Consequentialism

Starting with development rather than rights produces a striking contrast. There is a broad consensus that the GoR has achieved a remarkable amount of post-conflict development. This is something that is celebrated within aid consultancy reports and the global business and management literature, but it is also recognized in the critical academic literature as well (Ansoms, 2011: 241; Reyntjens, 2013: xvi). There is a large body of statistics that substantiate the claim that Rwanda has achieved a great deal of development on the basis of an extremely austere starting point and that it has sustained this well beyond any post-conflict recovery moment into something more closely resembling a social project, a permanent condition of

governance. Real GDP growth between 2001 and 2015 was 8 per cent per year. The government itself has set this out in broad aspirational terms in its Vision 2020 which — unlike some other ‘vision documents’ in Africa — is known by the majority of officials and taken seriously.

The statistics clearly relate a narrative of economic growth, improved social provision, and a decrease in poverty. But, politically, exactly what they say is less obvious. The most prominent meaning in the presentation of statistics is to demonstrate progress through measurable outcomes (Davis et al., 2015; Fioramonti, 2014) and to make legitimacy claims on this basis, what Power insightfully calls ‘rituals of verification’ (. There is a sense in which, in development programmes at least, success creates its own justification. At the level of national projects and programmes, the hitting or exceeding of targets and deadlines is the *raison d’etre* for the project itself and, as a result, is difficult to criticize or condemn. Success is paradigmatic. This makes it possible to ignore, marginalize, or minimize the effects that the project has *not* measured by a performance indicator or identified within a logical framework. It also allows this kind of mentality to ignore what one might loosely call popular agency: the statistics demonstrate the rightness of the strategy and the views of people are incidental. It is simply assumed that the ‘good statistics’ will create real legitimacy and well-being effects. This developmental episteme is now well known through studies of grandiose development projects such as damming and villagization but it is an equally valid concern for any kind of development endeavour. Analytically, this is a consequentialist understanding of development in which some combination of positivist metrics and a focus on the utility of achieved outcomes (measurable increase in income, output etc.) steers focus away from issues of rights and agency.

In a Rwandan context, one can see the pertinence of this concern in the frequent use of James Scott’s insightful concept of high modernism (Scott, 1999; cf. Van Damme et al., 2014), especially in the work that focuses on agricultural development. Successful development becomes social engineering (Hasselkog and Schierenbeck, 2015), a project not done for the benefit of the people but rather done to the people whether they like it or not. This perspective is based in the following core insights. First, that the Rwandan government neither understands nor values peasant ways of life and, as a result, wishes to transform them into something else (Ansoms, 2011). Second, that this transformation is based on a rather reified model of agrarian

modernity in which peasants are re-made through new technologies, the introduction of new crops, the reorganization (spatially and socially) of livelihoods, and a series of laws that prohibit anti-modern behaviour (Purdekova, 2012). Third, that this specific kind of transformatory vision requires authoritarian state practices: modernization is imposed upon peasants (Wyss, 2006). And finally, that this imposition generates resistance, conflict and resentment to such a degree that it is likely that the whole project will fail (Des Forges, 2006).

In this sense, the critical research on Rwanda's agricultural strategy fits well within a broader tradition of development studies in which 'high modern' development is authoritarian, rights-denying and prone to spectacular failure. In a second and more specific sense, this approach to Rwanda's agricultural transformation constitutes the key articulation between the work which prioritizes human rights concerns and the work which assesses development practices of the GoR. It is within the Rwandan countryside that we can best consider further how one might contextualize human rights with a concrete reality of a transformative development strategy; but first we must understand in a little more analytical detail what development transformation entails.

CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION

Conceptualizing Capitalist Transformation

Rwanda's 'vision' follows a central tradition in development thinking and strategy in which agrarian societies are the subject of a range of programmes that aim to promote industrialization and a transformation of agriculture towards commercialized and technology-intensive forms of production. At the heart of this kind of development thinking is profound and pervasive change across the board: in forms of production, social identities, modes of governance and spatial organization. Developmental transformations of this kind are very likely to be based in practices that are either indifferent to human rights or actively repress them. Practices of development are creators and destroyers of political values (Goulet, 1992). The more 'transformationalist' and

ambitious the development project, the more likely it is to contain practices of top-down social engineering (Cowen and Shenton, 1996: 439 ff.).

It is revealing that the bulk of rights-focused understandings of development are not transformatory in this sense, but rather incremental and based in an episteme that is person-focused, based in studies of livelihoods and well-being (Alston and Robinson, 2005), interspersed with vignettes (Nussbaum, 2011),⁶ and a normative disposition towards the small changes that happen organically from the improvement in people's capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen 1999). This approach to development is clearly more normatively appealing but less easily transformatory in our sense of the term.

Research in the political economy of development has recently brought the notion of structural transformation back into some prominence in ways that connect with the distinction made above, and which connect with other traditions of analysis based in modelling the developmental state or industrialization.⁷ These approaches remind us that, within a historical-comparative framing, successful development has commonly involved authoritarian state practice, sustained over more than a generation: 'all societies' transitions to capitalism have been accompanied by a large degree of violence; Africa's history has been especially so' (Moore, 2014: 106).

Development transformations are always extremely politically demanding and indeed very risky. And, in all instances — of success or failure — we are talking about *capitalist* transformation. The corollary of adding this prefix is to focus on ways in which diverse processes of socio-economic transformation are driven by accumulation — profits generated through investment and the putting of people to work. The expanded accumulation of capital is not an easy process. It requires considerable power to put people to work; it requires strong state actions to reallocate property and maintain social order during periods of social turbulence and hardship; and it requires capitalist classes that are disciplined not simply to make money but to expand, upgrade, adapt, and of course make some kind of commitment to improve the well-being of the general population.

⁶ Nussbaum deploys the life story of one woman (Vasinti) throughout her argument as illustration.

⁷ This work has focused around the research of Justin Lin's new structural economics. A meticulous review and consideration of this notion is Fine and Van Waeyenberge (2013).

Capitalist development can be seen as the project to organize and discipline labour in the pursuit of expanded accumulation which improves general material well-being. It is necessary and important to recognize that in countries (like Rwanda) in which capitalism is very much present but not ‘universal’ or especially transformative, there are some significant other factors to bring in. There are important developmental issues concerning: the extent to which existing businesses are incentivized to invest in new technologies of production and seek various economies in scale, scope and space; the nature and intensity of the incorporation of diverse and complex livelihoods into the remit of capital and, vitally, the extent to which these incorporations generate improvements in material well-being; the allocation and enforcement of property regimes and their repercussions on social equality. Understandably, these major-order challenges have historically required a prominent role of the state. With a slight tweaking of the language, the challenges set out above can be associated with the kinds of programmes pursued by developmental states (Leftwich, 1995; Wade, 1990). These projects are in themselves strongly conditioned by the historical contexts within which they act (Doner et al., 2005; Kholi, 2004) and also by the dynamics embedded within the forging of relations between government and business groups (Chibber, 2006; Khan, 2010).

One might note that this rather austere setting out of the basic business of capitalist development leaves little room for the normative desires to focus on the grassroots and rights expansion. The politics of capitalist development involve the allocation of suffering. Apart from the most determinedly liberal historiography, accounts of capitalist development are strongly characterized by processes which dispossess, alienate and disempower. Historically, this has also involved the heavy exploitation of peoples from other countries as well. It is a remarkable amnesia that many Western intellectuals construct frameworks of development which are *declass * and premised on a consensual process of social change, as if the historic experiences of capitalist development in the developed world can be airbrushed away when they look elsewhere, a liberal ‘makeover fantasy’ (Cramer, 2006).

This framing is very relevant to our endeavour to integrate development and rights concerns into Rwanda’s agrarian transformation strategy. It has become increasingly apparent in the

comparative research on ‘late’ development that industrial transformations are based in associated agrarian transformations (Henley, 2015). There has, in an African context, emerged an extensive literature on the agrarian question, focussed on the dynamics generated by capitalist social relations in the countryside (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2010; Bernstein, 1996). There is a fair amount of debate within this genre of research but also some common premises that in effect translate the broader understanding of capitalist development as, in part, a coercive and imposed transition into specific agrarian contexts. For example: the use of state institutions to extract surplus from peasants, the creation of landless or land-poor social groups within the peasantry, the dispossession of land, the emergence of diverse wage labour markets within agricultural production, and the expansion of large-scale commercial farming, all set within a core *problematique* about agricultural productivity (Byres, 1996).

Capitalist Development, Human Rights, Social Movements

We do not need to explore the specific meaning of the agrarian question in Rwandan agriculture here⁸ to note that — as a specific component of the broader political economy of capitalist development — it suggests that rights-affirming agrarian transitions are both historically extremely rare⁹ and analytically extremely difficult to specify.

There are two important points that set a less optimistic but more historically contextualized approach to the role of popular politics in development. In the first place it must be recognized that capitalist development is not simply the dismal science of primitive accumulation or dispossession. There must be some form of general material improvement in people’s lives and some kind of ‘contract’ within which the rising power of capital is legitimized through some form of national project of improved conditions of life. Otherwise, what is happening is not development. This is an important historical driver of capitalism: its insistent ambition to accumulate wealth and power and its necessary reconciliation with the demands of broader

⁸ On this issue, see Harrison (2016).

⁹ One might wish to note that the ‘original’ agrarian transformations in the global North were also protracted and coercive affairs, whether from ‘above’ or ‘below’ (Byres, 1996). See also Perelman (2000).

publics to commit to some form of social provision and accountability (Polanyi, 1944/2002). The outcomes of this interaction can be extremely varied.

Second, capitalist development produces its own political agencies and contestations (Vogel, 2006). This observation opens up a focus on popular and collective political agency that goes beyond the human rights episteme. Peasant movements have arisen in response to a variety of agrarian transformations driven by capital through land alienation, the restructuring of markets, and various forms of ‘adverse incorporation’ into commodity chains (Borras and Edelman, 2016). Rights within wage labour (which is, it should be stressed, a core component of agrarian change) emerge through struggles and organization within industries and sectors.

The previous two points suggest that thinking about the political economy of capitalist transition maps a great deal better on to the literature on social movements than it does human rights. Social movements research explores popular agency not as an immanent property within the individual but as contextualized and specific assertions of collective political agency around contention (Tarrow, 1998) and collective identity (Gamson, 1995; Johnson and Klandermans, 1995), focusing on the ways in which political agendas¹⁰ are constructed. Nothing in this approach precludes a concern about limited democratization or the suppression of human rights, but the meaning and importance derived from this can only be understood in relation to political mobilization.

To summarize, I have suggested that capitalist development is a broad-ranging and profound social transformation that requires pervasive reorganizations of agrarian social relations, driven both by capital and political coercion. It is a risky and difficult enterprise. The pivotal issues in a consideration of capitalist development’s prospects are the extent to which accumulation becomes *transformatory*, generating economies of scale, technological upgrades, the drawing in of more people into wage labour and the increases in productivity of labour that this might involve. The politics of this process are not easily rendered through notions of preternatural rights and empowerment; more useful are the relatively novel forms of collective resistance and

¹⁰ The social movement nomenclature here is of diagnostic and prognostic framing; see Snow and Benford (1992).

agency that are ushered in as societies change. The argument that we derive from this rendering of development is that specific cases of development are best understood as normatively agonistic cohabitations of authoritarian and coercive action that are embedded within projects of social transformation that have as their core justification, and even legitimation, the prospect (more or less realistic) of an expanding and transforming economy that will make general improvements to people's lives. Making this step allows us to return to Rwanda with a sense of context and analytical nuance in our understanding of 'top-down' agrarian transition.

RWANDA'S CAPITALIST AGRARIAN TRANSITION STRATEGY

Rwanda's Agrarian Context

Agriculture matters a great deal for Rwanda. It is at the heart of the majority of the population's livelihood: 72 per cent of Rwandans have an agricultural base¹¹ to their livelihood (Abbott et al., 2015: 927). Geographically, outside Kigali, Rwanda's social landscape is one of homesteads and villages set in densely-farmed hilly fields. Agriculture employs almost 90 per cent of Rwanda's active working population and represents about 45 per cent of its GDP (Ansoms, 2008: 2).¹² Rural society in Rwanda is perceived as the heart of 'traditional' social identities (Verwimp, 2013); it is also the location for most of Rwanda's extreme and chronic poverty: it is estimated that over 70 per cent of the rural population are 'food poor' (Vinck, 2006: 1) and poverty rates in rural areas are twice as high as in urban areas (African Development Bank, 2013: 12). Rwanda is a land-scarce country: there is very little unused land and average landholdings are reported to be very low — between 0.75 ha (Diao et al., 2010: 20) and 0.33 ha per household (World Bank, 2014: 3) depending on source. There has always been an anxiety amongst Rwandan governments and development researchers that increasing land scarcity will exacerbate contestations over land tenure and access, and there is some evidence that land scarcity and inequality were factors in

¹¹ Note the phrasing here. I do not wish to imply that Rwanda is a nation of self-sufficient subsistence farmers. As with the rest of Africa, Rwandan peasantries reproduce themselves through small-scale production, trade and wage employment (formal and informal). See Jefremovas (2002) for a detailed case study.

¹² There is some variation in the estimates of people living primarily from agriculture, but they all demonstrate Rwanda's strong base in farming accompanied by a slow decline in its relative share of GDP.

provoking the genocide (Andre and Platteau, 1998; Des Forges, 2006: 354; Van Hoyweghen, 1999: 353–4). Rural population density is extremely high (Sennoga and Byamukama, 2014: 13). Climatic unpredictability leaves Rwandan smallholder agriculture (and agriculture in general) subjected to productivity declines and frequent ‘hunger years’. Agricultural development is a major development concern.

In the first ten years after the genocide, the GoR did not have a clear agricultural development strategy. This was primarily because its major concerns were with the re-establishment of state authority throughout the territory and managing the return of millions of people from internal displacement and international refuge. These things the government achieved with remarkable success, eventually backed by donor support. Connected to these two objectives of re-establishing a state presence and resettlement, the government and donors rolled out a diverse set of what one might call ‘ordinary’ agricultural development projects: nutrition initiatives, the provision of cows, NGO-funded projects on specific villages and districts.

From 2000, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Vision 2020, and the formal ending of the insurgencies and DRC border incursions in the north, led the government to allocate large portions of its budget to the provision of basic healthcare and education throughout Rwanda’s rural landscape. This was a period in which Rwanda moved from a series of state-building, reconstruction and emergency response measures to a more systemic, ambitious and transformatory development strategy. The strategy itself was not strongly based in agriculture, but rather in the ideal of becoming a service, transport and information ‘hub’ (Kimanuka, 2009). In 2001, the government introduced the Rural Sector Support Programme but it did not receive strong political backing.

In 2003 — crucially as a result of adverse climatic conditions and their impact on agriculture — Rwanda’s GNI growth dipped. Furthermore, in the mid-2000s, it became clear that Rwanda’s growth was not addressing poverty and inequality very effectively and that rural poverty had remained largely unaffected by growth, something that started to affect donor attitudes towards Rwanda. It was in this political and economic context that the GoR rolled out the first of three Strategic Programmes for the Transformation of Agriculture (PSTA) in 2004. From 2004, and especially from 2007 when the Crop Intensification Programme (CIP) commenced, agriculture

came to occupy a central place in the government's strategic thinking about development, something reflected in the government's first Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2007.

Agricultural production doubled from 2000 to 2012, with most of this increase taking place within the third phase outlined above (World Bank, 2015: vi). It is clearly the case that agricultural development has the statistical narrative of outcome-based success and legitimacy. In what ways and to what degree might we consider this success to be evidence not only of growth but also of transformation?

From Agricultural Development to Agrarian Transformation

The GoR does not only want to improve the well-being of people in rural areas; it also wants to transform rural society in a systemic fashion. Rural development in Rwanda is agrarian *transformation*, a change in the social relations of peasant production. It involves changes to the technologies of production, their spatial organization, their modes of articulation with other economic agents, and their knowledge or habits of thinking.

There is a distinction worth making here between agricultural development and agrarian transformation. The former is characterized by projects in a range of livelihood aspects: irrigation schemes, the introduction of new materials (tools, livestock, seeds), the provision of social infrastructure (feeder roads, wells, schools, health posts), and extension services (training, pilot or demonstration fields, the monitoring and 'correction' of farming techniques). The latter is a strategic integration of all of these facets (and possibly others) into a politically and institutionally driven medium-term state practice, the overall aim being not only the improvement in discrete development indicators but the realization of a different agricultural society. It is the argument of this article that Rwanda is experiencing the beginnings of the latter. The PSTA is currently in its third iteration which will run to 2018. The PSTA is a broad encompassing document that aligns a set of actions and agencies to realize a certain vision for Rwanda's agriculture. At the heart of this vision is the CIP which aims to generalize the

production of six key crops and maximize productivity, allocating specialisms in these crops to different regions, promoting the use of improved seeds and chemical fertilizers. Production responses in these six crops has been very positive: ‘the total production of maize, wheat and cassava tripled from 2007 to 2011, the production of beans doubled, and that of rice and Irish potato increased by 30 per cent’ (Golooba-Mutebi, 2013: 3; IFAD, 2013:). More recently, the World bank stated that ‘between 2008 and 2011, yields increased 225 percent for maize, 129 percent for wheat, 90 percent for cassava, 66 percent for potatoes, 62 percent for bananas, and 34 percent for rice’ (World Bank, 2015: vi). National average fertilizer use was raised from 6 kg/ha per annum in 2006 to 30 kg/ha in 2010 (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2014: S184).

Additionally, the PSTA includes irrigation, erosion control and wetland reclamation. It is driven by the Ministry of Agriculture which has, since about 2007, become a more active, donor-connected and well-resourced ministry. It also includes a set of government specialized agencies: the Rwanda Agricultural Board, the National Agricultural Export Board and the Rwanda Cooperative Agency. Each of these agencies has a functional specialism which closely intersects with the PSTA, respectively to provide improved production technologies and extension services, to promote and market agricultural exports, and to support the formation of producer cooperatives. The Ministry of Lands has carried out a full cadastral survey of tenure and promoted villagization well beyond its original function of providing shelter to returnees. From 2006, the Office of the President has cascaded performance contracts down to the District levels (and often beyond),¹³ the core of which is often a set of agricultural output targets. The Rwanda Development Board has as one of its key strategic aims the promotion of private sector investment in agriculture, either in the form of private commercial farms or as suppliers of services to peasant cooperatives. All of this is also integrated into the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and enjoys strong backing from donors who were largely indifferent to agriculture until around 2007 (Golooba-Mutebi, 2013).

¹³ From 2012, there has been a declaration to implement household-level *imihigo*, the neo-traditional name for performance contracts.

In interviews¹⁴ with those prosecuting Rwanda's agricultural development no-one was in any doubt that agricultural transformation as set out in the PSTA and CIP constituted a single integrated and politically backed programme of transformation. There was no critical commentary from donors (as there often is)¹⁵ concerning a lack of 'political will', coordination, or patronage. Government officials were all entirely focused on the 'vision' and their role in it, providing detailed reflections on target achievement (something of an institutional cultural obsession in Rwanda) and aspirations to improve. At the centre, there is an elite — governmental and international — with a strong shared vision, institutionally coordinated, well-resourced and scientifically specialized, that wants to see a transformation of Rwandan agriculture. We might ask: why has this transformatory vision arisen?

The Political Drivers of Agrarian Transformation

There are three salient political motivations for Rwanda's determined agrarian developmentalism. In the first place, we should recognize that the core of the government is staffed by a group within the RPF who grew up in Uganda and returned through military action against the then incumbent Rwandan government. Closely connected, there are many Rwandans who have returned from Europe and North America into middle- and high-ranking positions within the ministries (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2012: 392; Van Hoyweghen, 1999: 365). Both groups see in Rwanda a country that they have returned to, and which they desire to re-make in their own image. These two groups¹⁶ have not grown up amidst Rwanda's 'thousand hills' and they draw their political values from a more diffuse pool of ideas than those that prevail in Rwanda's villages and small towns (Ansoms, 2009: 294–5; Des Forges, 2006: 359). Government programmes have been articulated through neo-traditional rural symbols — *umuganda*, *gacaca*,

¹⁴ Twenty-nine interviews with leading government personnel, donor representatives, multilateral organizations and directors of agribusinesses, carried out in 2014 and 2015.

¹⁵ Having carried out interviews with donors on various aspects of development policy in East Africa, what makes Rwanda distinct is that donor spokespeople do not take some time either in interview or off the record to set out their experiences of dysfunction, corruption, or exasperation concerning the government.

¹⁶ The 'Ugandan' and 'diasporic' groups might work in uneasy coexistence. My own and others' interviews with diaspora civil servants suggest both some admiration for Kagame's forcefulness of purpose and some fear.

abunzi, ubudehe (Clark, 2014)¹⁷ — but these are revealing not only for their attempts to render policy in culturally vernacular terms and in reference to a longer history of Rwandan nationhood,¹⁸ but also in their purpose which is to fit within a strongly transformational and modernizing project (Rwiyereka, 2014).¹⁹

If there is a ‘core’ elite within the Rwandan state that shares experiences of return and a sense of alienation from Rwandan everyday life, this might give an insight into the desires to change Rwanda without strong attention to what already exists. But — and this is the second point — there is also something else in the ‘mode of re-entry’ into Rwanda that matters a great deal. The core of the ruling elite gained power in the throes of a genocide and civil war. Although the post-1994 government was multi-ethnic and the PRF strongly eschews ethnic politics, the core of government was largely made up of ethnic Tutsi, and they faced a country traumatized by violence and politically mobilized ethnic politics (Van Hoyweghen, 1999: 372). Few governments come to power in such insecure circumstances.²⁰ It is difficult to imagine how these returning or immigrant groups at the heart of government would easily live in Rwanda without control of the state: it is the construction of statehood that defines this group and its place in Rwanda. The historical circumstances of Rwanda’s post-genocide government are that it is staffed by a core elite that identifies extremely strongly with the state (Marijnen and van der Lijn, 2012: 17) and understands very well that its control of the state depends on its ability to assert and justify its rule to a rural population that is both traumatized and in some degree alien (Chemouni, 2014).

The general response to these specific circumstances is that the Rwandan government has pursued a consistent and determined project of national development. One can see constantly in Rwandan media coverage of Kagame’s visits throughout the country the same message: this

¹⁷ Respectively: coming together for a common purpose, grassroots/’traditional’ courts, mediation, mutual support.

¹⁸ Rwanda’s national history is — like many nationalisms — more recent and problematic than is often portrayed; see Des Forges (2011); Newbury (1988). The notion of a long-standing national unity provides a vital resource for those who wish to move away from the erroneous notion that Rwanda has endured fixed antipathies between ‘Tutsis’ and ‘Hutus’.

¹⁹ This is most clearly the case in respect to *imihigo* which has effectively become a universalized performance contracting system (Chemouni, 2014).

²⁰ Taiwan and Israel come to mind.

government's legitimacy should be tested by its ability to deliver development. Development legitimacy is the key to the current core elite's security (Longman, 2011: 41). The corollary of this is that the pursuit of development is not based in rights and capabilities expansion but rather two other political values: a demonstration of the state's ability to act in an authoritative way — to get things done — and to generate results through resource inputs and modes of mobilization.

One can see these two values in all aspects of Rwanda's development practice. The pervasive performance culture instilled within the state and rolled out into society is accompanied by a constant setting of ambitious targets. Within sectoral policy, the government invests capital in projects and programmes with strong political discipline and a focus on efficacy. One can see this in road construction, irrigation schemes, the development of industrial parks, its investment in wireless internet technology and in a range of more 'micro' interventions such as the banning of plastic bags. Rwanda is often identified as an exemplary case of effective health provision (Golooba-Mutebi, 2011). There is also a raft of evidence that corruption within government is minimal. The argument here is that, whatever the intrinsic value governing elites put on development as a good in itself, there is a strong extrinsic motivation to maintain a state that has as its 'basic legitimation demand' (Williams, 2007) order through development. This is the key to post-genocide sovereignty.

There is a third core component that reinforces the political motivations behind developmental governance in Rwanda. The reliance on developmental legitimacy is thoroughly intertwined with the government's nationalist discourse. This is not only another instantiation of the generic post-colonial phenomenon of national development as a tool to promote unity under state sovereignty. It is also the government's main way to address the legacy of genocide. Understandably, the government aims to restrict public expressions of ethnic politics. Against ethnicized political discourses, the government propounds a strong discourse of Rwandan unity that poses a national identity above an ethnic one (Purdekova, 2012). This is, like the claims to developmental legitimacy, a message repeated constantly by politicians. It is articulated through a historiography in which ethnic difference was constructed by colonial power and exacerbated by previous Rwandan governments, especially the Habyarimana regime, the rump of which was the core agency behind the genocide. The counterpart to a public repression of political ethnicity is a

positive proposing of a national identity not only based in ‘Rwandan-ness’ but also in national development. A key purpose of development as social transformation is not only to create ‘modern’ Rwandans,²¹ but also to create social identities within which ethnicity is less prominent (Golooba-Mutebi, 2013: 5). In short, development is a political project that aims to construct and enforce social identities that are less liable to generate political violence in the future: ‘development for peace and stability’ (Van Hoyweghen, 1999: 365). A great deal of this state project is oriented towards rural society (Ingelaere, 2014; Purdekova, 2011).

Agrarian Transformation from Above

These political imperatives underpin the GoR’s prosecution of what we have already identified as an integrated and ambitious state-driven agrarian transition. In this section, we identify two aspects of this project which most clearly connect to the authoritarian facets that this situation generates. In each case, we can see the interplay of authoritative state action and development ambition which contains both a coercive aspect and a design to transform the countryside in ways that aim to generate improvements in people’s well-being.

In the first place, there is a socio-spatial reordering of rural society through villagization and cooperativization. This takes place not on the back of a stable pre-existing social milieu but rather after a series of massive socio-spatial disruptions (Newbury, 2005). It is based in a universal cadastral and land registration process that has re-inscribed Rwanda’s land tenure relations into private freehold (Pritchard, 2013). It is also based in a (related) process of villagization (*imidugudu*) that aims — as with many villagization programmes — to concentrate people in order to more effectively provide public services and to lock people into a political order (Ingelaere, 2014; Leegwater, 2011). Villagization is accompanied by the Land Use Consolidation Programme which establishes single crop specialisms for different regions.

²¹ The quotation marks here simply signal that it is easy to produce stark oppositions between ‘indigenous’ and ‘traditional’ identities in ways that essentialize and reify what are heuristic terms that extract facets of social identities that often display more flexibility and hybridity than these terms allow.

In comparison with other villagizations in the region (Ethiopia, Tanzania and Mozambique in the 1970s and 1980s), the process has been gradual and more ‘incentivized’ than merely coercive.²² Villagization was accompanied by two connected strategic goals of government: the reorganization of land in order to deal with the increasing pressure on land and its fragmentation (Musahara and Huggins, 2005: 326); and the government’s design to create agricultural zones throughout the country, each of which is assigned a certain set of crop specialisms.

In all three comparison cases from the 1970s, the military evacuated people from settlements and sometimes burned old settlements and trees to stop people returning. In Rwanda, it would be a stretch to claim that all villagization has been participatory, and there have been instances of the destruction of houses (Des Forges, 2006: 362) and a generalized strong and ‘threatening’ government instruction to move to villages (HRW, 2001) but this has not led to large-scale systematic forced relocation.

Reading the rights-based research on villagization, one would be forgiven for thinking that Rwanda’s rural population had been entirely reallocated into *imidugudu* villages forcibly by the state; this is not the case (Hitayezu et al., 2014: 458; Isaksson, 2013: 405; Van Hoyweghen 1999: 363). However, the government’s Vision 2020 is based on a transition towards universal villagization and it is prohibited to construct new houses outside the *imidugudu* (Musahara and Huggins, 2005: 326). In sum, the government relies upon some coercion and a strong directive to move people into communal villages and this has produced a regionally-varied but incremental shift in settlement patterns. This is not a participatory process; nor is it systemic forced relocation. It is, however, based on a broader strategy to transform the countryside. In 2015 about half the rural population were living in *imidugudu* villages (Sennoga and Diabate, 2015: 1).

²² Van Leeuwen (2001) has argued that there are substantive similarities. However, the evidence he presents actually suggests that while the similarities are certainly present, they do not demonstrate the kind or scale of systemic coercion that took place in the three comparators. This is not to downplay or trivialize the coercion that is present but it is to maintain an empirical distinction between Rwanda and other national villagization programmes.

Villagization is accompanied by a strong push to develop agricultural cooperatives. Cooperatives can take different forms: they vary considerably in size, modes of arrangement for the pooling of resources, trading relations, forms of governance, and function. What they have in common is a more generalized developmental purpose. In a society characterized by land-scarce smallholding, often with tiny dispersed areas of land, the identification of an agent of capitalist development is difficult. Although there is plenty of research showing that Rwandan peasants are knowledgeable farmers who maintain different plots of land to cope with seasonal uncertainties, intercropping in sophisticated ways and embedding their productive lives in rich cultures of sociability (de Lame, 2005; Van Damme et al., 2014; Van Hoyweghen, 1999: 355), there is far less evidence of how peasant farming in Rwanda can serve as the basis for capitalist development beyond the most gradualist and ‘organic’ perspectives which might work themselves through over a couple of generations.

Having effectively defined the peasant household out of the developmental vision, cooperatives are the government’s principal attempt to identify/construct a developmental agent in the countryside. By conceptualizing peasants as parts of ordered cooperatives, the government can provide support and regulation in ways that reconstruct peasant farmers as a kind of ‘corporate agricultural entrepreneur’. The cooperative form re-imagines smallholders as components in an organization that not only institutionalizes individual farmers’ labour into some form of corporate collectivity, but also enables the reframing of peasants as participants in an advantage- and opportunity-seeking market agency, ‘reducing transaction costs in input and output markets and improving bargaining power vis-à-vis buyers’ (Verhofstadt and Maertens, 2013: 3). In spite of organizational diversities, all cooperatives are registered with the government (through the Rwanda Cooperatives Agency and all have to have a ‘business plan’ which is based on increased production of cash crops. The government provides resources to cooperatives through subsidized fertilizer provision, extension services, and a range of promotions for the retailing of its production. It also facilitates and enforces contracts between cooperatives and other agencies, perhaps most notably in the production contracts cooperatives sign with agribusinesses. Cooperatives are also identified as the main way to provide credit to Rwandan farmers in very

thin financial markets (Ayalew et al., 2014: 650).²³ The aim of the government is to transform Rwanda's rural societies into a patchwork of cooperatives, each acting 'entrepreneurially' in the sense that they are incentivized and disciplined by investment plans, output targets and increasingly dense connections to other market agents.

This brings us to the second core facet of Rwanda's agrarian development strategy: agricultural chain development. The government relies heavily on the chain development metaphor; it enables a certain cognitive map of Rwanda's smallholders and their place in a broader capitalist transition, and it is premised on the expansion and eventual universalization of the cooperative. There are two main aspects to chain development. First, chain *integration* connotes the construction of more diverse and stronger connections between farmers and other market agents. It is understood that peasant farmers have some linkages to traders and suppliers but that these linkages have been limited and sporadic, and have disadvantaged smallholders. The government vision is of a peasantry that has manifold, reliable and robust connections to many other agencies within rural political economies. The government has encouraged an expansion in agrarian marketing and input supply within the private sector. It has provided support for microcredit mechanisms. With regard to cooperatives specifically, the whole constitution of the cooperative is based on the contracting of services and supplies from other agents. This might commonly involve supplies of fertilizer, seeds and credit (secured against a contract to supply produce). Cooperatives are also encouraged to agree supply contracts with traders and agribusinesses (Huggins, 2014: 372). All cooperatives have to have a business plan which is centrally about the setting of contract relations with other market agencies.

In the second place, chain integration is connected to a process of *upgrading*. Chain upgrading involves implementing the production of new and improved crops, moving into processing. Most well-known in this respect is the increasing number of coffee washing stations from two in 2001 to over 100 in 2007 (Murekezi et al., 2012) and in some cooperatives the establishing of marketing and branding activities (in tea and coffee). The government's programmatic focus here is the Crop Intensification Programme which has provided improved and subsidized inputs,

²³ The government's Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCO) are the main focus of attempts to provide credit to those with limited capital and collateral.

extension services, investment in post-harvest storage, and the selection of key crops for productivity increases.²⁴ Through CIP and a range of other projects and programmes,²⁵ cooperatives and smallholders are, it is expected, socialized into an ‘entrepreneurial’ mindset in which production is driven by the pursuit of new opportunities through deeper market-based networking. CIP has also pushed farmers to monocrop, fitting with the land consolidation, cooperativization and villagization programmes mentioned above.

In summary, the Rwandan government has a coherent model of agrarian capitalist development that is based on a state-driven reordering of rural space and the organizational form of production (Huggins, 2014: 366). This strategy is ‘designed to move the sector towards a modern market orientation, with farmers integrated into value chains and increased agro-processing’ (Abbott et al., 2015: 923). These aims have been pursued with considerable purpose and with resource inputs and they have generated a strong production response.²⁶ It would be a stretch to claim that any of this has been participatory, although the processes underlying these changes are formally voluntary. As already stated (and to pre-empt accusations that this analysis is a straightforward defence or apology for the RPF which, as the first section suggests, is a real risk in Rwandan studies) this is not an argument that Rwanda’s agrarian development has worked or that it is to be entirely celebrated. There is good theory and evidence to suggest that this model generates forms of impoverishment within transition (Ansoms, 2008). But, it is to say that *this is what capitalist development looks like*. If one wishes to maintain strong criticisms of the RPF, then one needs to identify other realistic development strategies or relinquish a focus on development and, in the process, de-emphasize concerns with material poverty or social transformations that possibly generate general improvements in social well-being.

²⁴ Maize, wheat, cassava, beans, potatoes and rice.

²⁵ These involve donors and the Rwanda Cooperative Agency.

²⁶ Government expenditure on agriculture is difficult to clarify. Some data suggest that it has steadily increased and is now over 10 per cent of government expenditure (IFAD, 2013: 2). An authoritative overview suggests that the trend in public expenditure on agriculture has been rather bumpy but that it is now close to 10 per cent (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2014). The ‘reality’ of agricultural development as a state-driven project is perhaps best understood in terms of the resources dedicated by government and donors who have established an increasingly strong intersubjectivity regarding agricultural strategy; this is something that has been facilitated by the language of agricultural chains.

CONCLUSION

In his detailed and rigorous treatment of the agrarian origins of capitalism in Germany and America, Terry Byers emphasizes the importance of class struggle, differentiation and the social relations of accumulation. He argues that these are at the heart of any agrarian transformation towards a sustained and dynamic capitalism, but that they suggest that development is neither quick nor clean (Byers, 1996: 420). This perspective both fits with the argument in this article and seems very pertinent for Rwanda.

Rwandan agriculture is undergoing an impressive period of growth. This growth is based in an intensification of production through practices outlined in the previous section. These practices can be readily understood as components integrated into a single vision of agrarian transformation. But, within capitalism, this transformation is both ‘dirty’ and protracted and, when observed in real time rather than in retrospect, it is far from certain that it will succeed. Rwanda has a long way to go.

We can make some broad observations about Rwanda’s transformation which offer suggestions about the prospects of its transformation. At present, Rwandan peasantry is not generating strong class-based social movements. This is hardly surprising bearing in mind both the extended traumas and insecurities of the last thirty years and the authoritarian nature of state power. Rwandan peasants are not immanently docile; the historical circumstances with which they live simply make it extremely difficult and even dangerous to mobilize collective political action. It might be normatively pleasing to identify and celebrate the ‘weapons of the weak’ that peasants might exercise to resist state power through micropolitical subterfuge (Thompson, 2013), but this kind of resistance does not contest the nature of the development strategy nor modify the terms upon which labour and accumulation take place. It is also the case that critical discussions of Rwandan agriculture are not very strong when faced with the ‘convincing counterfactual’ question posed at the start of the article.

Indeed, there are few clear statements about what a different but historically and politically proximate counterfactual might look like. Newbury (2011: 224) offers a comment on a

consultative approach, giving ‘real voice to the concerns of diverse constituencies, including rural producers’. Further specification is not offered, and this comment seems, *prima facie*, difficult to reconcile with Rwanda’s political situation. Ansoms et al. (2014: 181) argue that Rwanda’s agricultural strategy should be ‘broad-based’ and ‘founded on small-scale agricultural activity’; but subsequently and tellingly the analysis broadens out to general features of sub-Saharan African peasant agriculture, some of which — for example the provision of small-scale credit and market connections — make most sense in the larger and more ‘extensive’ agricultures of the continent rather than in Rwanda’s exceptionally dense and fragmented farming landscape. Dawson et al.’s astute study of Rwanda’s version of the Green Revolution follows the same mode of argument: having made some careful judgements about the authoritarian and unequal effects of Rwanda’s agrarian transition, an ‘induced innovation’ alternative is posed in the briefest sense and in a way that does not address the major challenges that — for better or worse — the current model addresses (Dawson et al., 2014: 215). These critical approaches which emphasize the rights-denying facets of Rwanda’s agrarian transformation at best infer a counterfactual, often without returning to the core challenges within the realities of Rwanda’s agrarian question. Taken as a single alternative vision, they refer to a social process characterized by incremental, ‘organic’ and consensual policy making based in an affirmation of current tenure and production relations. It is hard to see how this approach — in spite of its clear normative and rights-congruent appeal — would address the absolute scarcity of land for many, the precariousness of agricultural production in light of population pressure and climatic change, and the general and persistent low productivity of Rwanda’s agriculture compared with its neighbours.

In summary, there is little evidence of social mobilization within the peasantry or of clear and detailed alternative approaches to Rwanda’s agrarian question. In light of the facts of poverty, land scarcity and social tensions that Rwanda’s rural society contains, doing nothing or allowing a thousand flowers to bloom in their own good time seems, if anything, less progressive and more politically risky. It is within this context that we can recognize why GoR is heavily involved in peasant agriculture. To date, this involvement massively outweighs the private commercial involvement that is supposed to drive the transformation of Rwandan agriculture.²⁷

²⁷ Successive PSTAs give more emphasis to the role of the private sector — none more so than PSTA3.

For some, this ‘overbalance’ towards the state suggests that the market-based strategy is in essence a means to project state power (Mann and Berry, 2016). It certainly does not yet represent a sustained and expanded accumulation based in the social relations of class and social differentiation, although nor does it preclude it.

Rwanda’s slender hope of developmental success might revolve around the extent to which, in the next twenty years, it elaborates a ‘Vision 2040’, grounded in a shift from state-dominated social engineering towards more socially embedded forms of accumulation in agriculture, forms which will very likely evoke deeper levels of social mobilization and, as a result, less political certainty and less of an ability to imagine the future of agriculture through the meeting of targets. It is perhaps in this sense that, especially for the next generation, political agency in Rwanda matters for development.

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