CHAPTER 1

Introduction

On April 27, 1994, black South Africans, for the first times in their lives, voted in an election to decide who would govern their country. The lines at polling stations snaked around many blocks. It had been more than thirty years since African political movements had been banned, and the leader of the strongest of them, Nelson Mandela, had spent twenty-seven of those years in prison. Most activists and observers inside and outside South Africa had thought that the apartheid regime, with its explicit policy of promoting white supremacy, had become so deeply entrenched, and its supporters so attached to their privileges, that only a violent revolution would dislodge it. In a world that, some thirty to forty years earlier, had begun to tear down colonial empires and denounce governments that practiced racial segregation, South Africa had become a pariah, subject to boycotts of investment, sports events, travel, and trade. Now it was being redeemed, taking its place among nations that respected civil rights and democratic processes. This was indeed a revolution – whose final act was peaceful.

Three weeks earlier, part of the vast press corps assembled to observe the electoral revolution in South Africa had been called away to report on another sort of event in another part of Africa. On April 6 what the press described as a "tribal bloodbath" began in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. It started when the plane carrying the country's President, Juvenal Habyarimana, returning from peace discussions in Arusha in Tanzania, was shot down. The government was dominated by people who called themselves "Hutu," which most of the press assumed was a "tribe" that had long been engaged in rivalry, and

eventually civil war, with another "tribe," known as "Tutsi." Indeed, a significant number of Tutsi had fled from periodic massacres over the previous decades, and a group of exiles was invading Rwanda from neighboring Uganda to fight for a place for Tutsi in Rwandan government and society. The Tanzanian discussions were an attempt to resolve the conflict. But on the night of the plane crash there began mass killings of Tutsi that within a few days became a systematic slaughter conducted by the Hutu-dominated army, by local militias, and apparently by angry mobs.

The killing spread throughout Rwanda, and it soon became clear that this was more than a spontaneous outburst of hatred; it was a planned attempt to destroy the entire Tutsi population, from babies to elders. When it ended, some months later, around 800,000 Tutsi had died – a large portion of the Tutsi population – as had numerous Hutu who had opposed the genocidal leaders. It only ended because the Hutu-dominated army, deeply involved in the genocide, proved unable to fend off the invading forces, which captured Kigali and moved to take control over the rest of the territory. The "Tutsi" military victory now produced a wave of "Hutu" refugees into neighboring Zaire. By the fall of 1994 many of the soldiers, militiamen, and thugs responsible for the genocide had joined fleeing children, women, and men in the refugee camps. These genocidal militias were intimidating other refugees into participating in raids on Rwanda, and counterattacks by the new Rwandan government were taking a toll among civilians as well as the militias.

It is now quarter of a century since the first fully free elections in South Africa and the genocide in Rwanda. South Africa has had regular elections ever since; presidents have succeeded each other in orderly fashion. The powerful apparatus of racial discrimination has been dismantled; the hated laws that required black South Africans to carry an internal passport and the restrictions on where black South Africans could live are gone. Black South Africans are well represented in the upper and middle classes. More Africans than before have access to running water and electricity, and many Africans in need receive some kind of cash aid from the government. Yet South Africa remains one of the most unequal countries in the world. Although the higher strata of society are now relatively integrated, the lower strata are entirely black and deeply impoverished. Unemployment is estimated at around 30 percent. Although elections are contested, the de facto domination of the party that led the

struggle for liberation, the African National Congress, has been so strong that the real contest for power takes place in the process of nominating candidates for legislative and executive office, and these processes are less than transparent. Critics of the current regime fear that patron–client relations, not open competition for office, are the substance of politics.

Rwanda has, since 1994, been a peaceful country, and it has achieved substantial economic growth. International tribunals, national courts, and locally constituted bodies – known as *gacaca* – have attempted to bring those responsible for the genocide to justice, with mixed results. That Rwanda has been as orderly as it has been is remarkable given the fundamental problem of building a post-genocide society: the families of victims and perpetrators often live side by side, and the fact that Tutsi were once a minority oppressed, exiled, or murdered by a government pretending to represent the majority makes it difficult for Tutsi as well as Hutu to feel that a truly democratic regime would protect them. Paul Kagame has ruled Rwanda since 1994. Because of the memory of the genocide, the rest of the world has tended to overlook his clinging to power and his government's marginalization – or worse – of potential opponents.

Rwanda itself has experienced surprisingly little violence in terms of retribution or renewed anti-Tutsi pogroms, but the same cannot be said of the wider regional context. The Rwandan government has intervened repeatedly in neighboring Zaire (later renamed Democratic Republic of the Congo or DRC), claiming to defend itself against raids by exiled Hutu militias, but its military, or militias allied to it, have engaged in violence against Hutu refugees and others in eastern Congo that some observers consider to border on genocide itself. Some see economic motivation in the sponsorship by Rwanda, as well as Uganda, of militia activity in Congo: access to its mineral wealth, channeled through Rwanda and Uganda to ports in Kenya and Tanzania.

In the spring of 1994 South Africa and Rwanda seemed to represent two possible fates of Africa: liberation from a racist regime into a democratic order; and descent into "tribal" violence. The trajectories of both countries since then reveal the ambiguity and uncertainty of Africa's situation. Both states have remained under the control of elites that came to power in 1994; both regimes have been politically stable; neither has been a model democracy. South Africa more than Rwanda has retained the formal structures of a democratic regime:

regular elections, a critical press, multiple political parties. Neither can be written off as an economic failure, but South Africa – already a relatively industrialized economy in the 1990s – has not become the Africa-wide powerhouse that some expected, and it has not lifted its population out of poverty. Rwanda has benefited from a generous foreign aid regime and its largely agricultural economy has grown, but it remains a country of farmers dominated by a small, government-connected elite.

The Past of the Present

What trajectories have led South Africa and Rwanda to their respective destinies? Looked at as a snapshot, in April 1994, they appear to represent the alternatives of liberal democracy and ethnic violence. But if one looks to earlier periods, what happened in South Africa and Rwanda becomes more complicated. That South Africa has come to be governed by institutions familiar in the West – an elected parliament and a system of courts – does not mean that those institutions function in the same way as they do in Western Europe or North America, or that people do not form other kinds of affiliations, view their lives through other kinds of lenses, and imagine their society through categories distinct from those of the West. Nor is it helpful to think of the Rwandan catastrophe as the result of the age-old division of Africa into neatly separate cultures, each a distinctive and exclusive community with a long history of conflict with people who are "different," unable to function within Western-style institutions that do not fit the reality of Africa.

History does not inevitably lead all peoples of the world to "rise" to Western political forms or to "fall" into tribal bloodbaths. This book explores the period when the rule of European colonial powers over most of the African continent began to come apart, when Africans mobilized to claim new futures, when the day-to-day realities of life in cities and villages changed rapidly, and when new states had to come to grips with the meaning of sovereignty and the limits of state power faced with the social realities within their borders and their even less controllable position in the world economy and global power relations. It is a book about possibilities that people made for themselves as members of rural communities, as migrants to cities, and as the builders of social organizations, political movements, and new forms

FIGURE 1 South Africa's first non-racial election, April 1994. A poster of Nelson Mandela, presidential candidate of the African National Congress, behind a military vehicle – of the kind typically used to control "township violence" – in the black township of Rammulotsi, South Africa. Philip Littleton/AFP/Getty Image

FIGURE 2 Genocide and looting, Rwanda, April 11, 1994. A looter removes a bed frame from a house whose murdered inhabitants lie on the ground behind him, Kigali, Rwanda. Pascal Guyot/AFP/Getty Images

of cultural expression. It is also about the ways in which many of those openings closed down.

This book cuts across the conventional dividing point between colonial and post-colonial African history, a division that conceals as much as it reveals. Focusing on such a dividing point either makes the break seem too neat – as if colonialism was turned off like a light switch – or suggests too much continuity, positing continued Western dominance of the world economy and the continued presence in African states of "Western" institutions as a mere change of personnel within a structure of power that remains colonial. We do not have to make a dichotomous choice between continuity and change. Indeed, even while colonial regimes remained in power, their institutions did not operate as their designers intended, but were contested, appropriated, and transformed by colonial subjects. Acquiring formal sovereignty was an important element in the historical dynamics of the last half-century, but not the only one. Family life and religious expression also changed substantially in Africa, but not necessarily in rhythm with changes in political organization.

Most important, one needs to understand how the cracks that appeared in the edifice of colonial power after World War II gave a wide range of people – wage laborers, peasants, students, traders, and educated professionals – a chance to articulate their aspirations, be they the hope of having clean, piped water in a rural village or of taking an honorable place in global political institutions. A distinguished Ghanaian historian, Adu Boahen (1996: 434) says of intellectual life in the 1950s, "It was really great to be alive in those days …" – a phrase that conveys not only the excitement of being part of a generation that could shape its own future but also hints that "those days" were better than the ones that followed.

The colonial state that came apart in the 1950s represented colonialism at its most intrusively ambitious, and the new rulers who came to govern independent states had to take over the shortcomings of colonial development as well: even if the mineral and agricultural production of Africa had increased in the post-war years, the African farmer and worker had not become the predictable and orderly producer European officials dreamed of. African governments inherited both the narrow, export-oriented infrastructure that development-oriented colonialism had not transcended and the limited markets for producers of raw materials that the post-war boom in the global economy had only temporarily improved. But now they had to pay for

the administrative structure that 1950s colonial development had put in place and, more important, to meet the heightened expectations of people who hoped that the state might really be theirs.

The historical sequence outlined in the first chapters of this book brought into being states that had the trappings recognized around the world as "sovereignty." But the particular characteristics of those states were consequences of the sequence, not merely the sovereignty. Colonial states had been gatekeeper states. They had weak instruments for entering into the social and cultural realm over which they presided, but they stood astride the intersection of the colonial territory and the outside world. Their main source of revenue was duties on goods that entered and left its ports; they could decide who could leave for education and what kinds of educational institutions could come in; they established rules and licenses that defined who could engage in internal and external commerce. Africans tried to build networks that not only made use of but also got around the colonial state's control over access to the outside world. They built economic and social networks inside the territory that were beyond the state's reach. In the 1940s and 1950s access to officially recognized economic institutions and networks seemed to be opening wider to Africans. Social, political, and cultural associational life within African territories became richer and links with outside organizations more diverse. The gate was becoming wider, but only so far.

The development effort of late colonial regimes did not provide the basis for strong national economies after independence. African economies remained externally oriented, and the state's economic power remained concentrated at the gate between inside and outside. Meanwhile, African leaders' own experience of mobilization *against* the state gave them an acute sense of how vulnerable the power they had inherited was. The mixed success of colonial and post-colonial development efforts did not give leaders the confidence that economic development would lead to a generalized prosperity for which they could get credit and flourishing domestic activity that would provide government revenue. To differing degrees governments in the years immediately following independence tried to encourage economic development, but they also realized that their own interests would benefit from something like the strategy of gatekeeping that had served the colonial state before World War II: limited channels for advancement that officials controlled were less risky than broad ones that could become a platform for opposition.

The post-colonial state, lacking the external coercive capacity of its predecessor, was a vulnerable state. The stakes of controlling the gate were so high that various groups might try to grab it: officers or non-commissioned officers in the army, regional power brokers. A regime not so dependent on gatekeeping benefits from the fact that its opponents can afford to lose; they have other avenues for wealth and other loci for power. Gatekeeper states are in danger for the same reason that rulers provisionally in control of the gate have strong incentives to stay there. Hence ruling elites tended to use patronage, coercion, scapegoating of opponents, and other resources to reinforce their position, narrowing the channels of access even further.

As long as export prices for African products remained high, states could have things both ways – promoting economic growth while protecting the interests of the ruling elite – but the world recession in the mid-1970s inaugurated a period of some decades in which ruling elites (except in oil-exporting regions) had great difficulty in putting together the resources for either patronage or the services that citizens demanded. By looking at the post-war era as a whole one can begin to explain the succession of crises that colonial and post-colonial states faced, without getting into a sterile debate over whether a colonial "legacy" or the incompetence of African governments is to blame. Africa's present did not emerge from an abrupt proclamation of independence, but from a long, convoluted, and still ongoing process. Understanding the trajectories of different parts of Africa – and the variations within the continent are considerable – also poses challenges.

Some observers were ready in the 1990s to consign Africa to its fate as the world's poorest, least educated, most disease-ridden continent. But in the 2000s journalists and economists adopted the slogan "Africa rising," pointing to high rates of economic growth in some countries. In the late 2010s both narratives are looking short-sighted, simple extrapolations of what might be temporary trends. The ups and downs of economic growth and social progress and above all their uneven distribution within and among African countries form a complex and elusive pattern.

Trajectories

When we look back from a longer time perspective, the two stories of April 1994 illustrate the openings and possibilities and the closures

and dangers of politics in Africa during the last half-century. Let us start to look backward at the history behind the more painful of the two, Rwanda. The murderous violence that erupted on April 6 was not a spontaneous outburst of ancient hatreds. It was prepared by a modern institution, a government with its bureaucratic and military apparatus, using modern means of communications and modern forms of propaganda. The hatred in Rwanda was real enough, but it was hatred with a history, not a natural attribute of cultural difference. Indeed, cultural difference in Rwanda was relatively small: Hutu and Tutsi speak the same language; most are Christian. Rwandans and Westerners often think that there are ideal physical features of each group – Tutsi tall and slender, Hutu short and broad. In fact, appearance poorly distinguishes them.

Indeed, one of the horrifying features of the genocide was that militias, unable to tell a Tutsi when they saw one, demanded that people produce identification cards that listed their ethnic group, and then killed people who were labeled Tutsi or who refused to produce a card. In the years before the mass killings, a shadowy organization of elite Hutu, connected to the government leaders, had systematically organized a propaganda campaign – especially over the radio – against Tutsi. Apparently, many Hutu still had to be convinced that there was a Tutsi conspiracy against them, and social pressure had to be carefully organized, village by village, to bring people into line. Thousands of Hutu did not accede to this pressure, and when the genocide began Hutu judged to be overly sympathetic to Tutsi were themselves frequently killed; many Hutu acted with courage to save Tutsi neighbors.

One has to push back further. There was a "Tutsi" threat – to the government, at least. It had its origins in earlier violence. In 1959, and again in the early 1970s, there were pogroms against Tutsi that caused thousands of them to flee to Uganda. The government strove thereafter to consolidate its position at what its leaders considered both a social revolution – against the supposedly feudal order dominated by the people who controlled land and cattle – and a Hutu revolution against Tutsi. Some of the Tutsi refugees became allies of the Ugandan rebel leader Yoweri Museveni, as he worked in the 1980s to take over a state submerged in the chaos left by the dictatorship of Idi Amin Dada and his brutal successors. President Museveni was grateful for their assistance, but eager that they go home. The Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), trained in Uganda, attacked Rwanda in 1990, and attacked again more vigorously in 1993. Whether their objective was

to take over Rwanda or to be reintegrated into "their" country was in dispute. In 1994 mediators from inside and outside Africa tried to devise a power-sharing arrangement that would provide security to both Hutu and Tutsi. President Habyarimana took his fatal flight in April to attend a conference aimed at resolving the conflict. He may or may not have been killed by "Hutu Power" extremists for fear that he would compromise, and in order to provoke an already-planned slaughter. Some think his plane was shot down by the RPA, but it is not clear that they had the weaponry, the position, or the incentive to do so. Within hours of the crash, in any case, the hunt for Tutsi engulfed the capital, and it soon spread. Whenever local people and local officials weren't enthusiastic enough in their bloody endeavor, the Rwandan army stepped in to run the killing machine.

We need to push back further. The radio campaign did not build up hatred from nothing. Rwanda had originally been colonized by Germany at the end of the nineteenth century, then turned over to Belgium after Germany lost World War I. Belgian officials conceived of Tutsi as natural aristocrats, as less "African" than the Hutu. Only Tutsi were accepted as chiefs under colonial supervision; missionaries were more likely to welcome them into schools and convert them to Catholicism. Belgian officials decided that they needed to know who *was* Tutsi and Hutu, and so they classified people into one or the other and made them carry identification cards. It took work to turn difference and inequality into group boundaries, into ethnicity.

We can push back still further. German and Belgian understanding of Rwandan history was inaccurate, but it was not made up out of whole cloth. Rwanda, like other kingdoms in the Great Lakes of East Africa, was highly differentiated. There was much movement of peoples in Rwanda's fertile hills and a blending of people who lived by hunting and gathering, by keeping cattle, and by agriculture. Some – largely European – versions of Rwandan history have Tutsi pastoralists migrating as a people from the north and conquering agricultural peoples, but there is little evidence to support such a story. More likely, a variety of migratory streams intersected and overlapped, and, as particular kinship groups claimed power, they developed their myths of origin and historical narratives to justify their power.

Rather than a history of conflict following from the fact of distinction, social distinctions were a product of a history. Several kingdoms developed in the area. Most royal families were considered Tutsi, although most Tutsi were not rulers. Royal men married both