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States at War: Confronting Conflict in Africa

Catharine Newbury

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Abstract: In the early 1990s, democratization dominated discourse on African politics. However fraught with contradictions, processes of political liberalization held out hope for more responsive, accountable government—and some African countries achieved impressive gains. But in many parts of the continent the outlook at the beginning of the twenty-first century is decidedly more somber. An increase in violence and war has had devastating consequences for people and their communities. This presidential address examines several approaches to confronting these conflicts and highlights three lessons that emerge. In some situations international involvement is essential to end a war, and doing this successfully requires enormous resources. But external assistance cannot follow a single template; it must be adapted to different local dynamics and coordinated with efforts of peace-builders within. Finally, greater support is needed for efforts to alleviate the conditions that spawn wars and violence.

Résumé: Au début des années 1990, la problématique de la démocratisation a dominé le discours politique africain. Bien que lourds de contradictions, les processus de libéralisation politique ont laissé espérer une forme de gouvernement plus responsable et plus sensible à la critique—et quelques pays africains ont obtenu des résultats impressionnants. Cependant, dans bien des parties du continent, les perspectives en ce début de vingt-et-unième siècle sont décidément plus sombres.

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L'augmentation de la violence et des guerres a eu des conséquences désastreuses pour les civils et les communautés auxquelles ils appartiennent. Ce discours prononcé lors de la réunion annuelle de l'ASA en 2001 examine plusieurs approches possibles pour affronter ces conflits, dont on peut tirer trois leçons. Dans certaines situations, la participation internationale est essentielle pour mettre fin à une guerre, et d'énormes ressources sont nécessaires pour y parvenir. Mais l'aide extérieure ne peut pas appliquer un unique modèle, et doit s'adapter aux différentes dynamiques locales, en coordonnant leurs efforts avec ceux des acteurs locaux. Enfin, la suppression des conditions qui ouvrent la voie aux guerres et aux violences nécessitera l'apport d'un soutien plus grand encore.

Almost twenty years ago, in 1982, a courageous group of rural women in eastern Zaire decided to protest unfair taxes. Their protest was peaceful, but the women were angry. Fueling their protest was resentment over the low prices they were getting for the cassava they produced and took to sell in the local market. For almost a decade, beginning with the oil crisis of the early 1970s, traders from the city who came to buy cassava and peanuts from these women had been lowering the prices they paid. But meanwhile, traders were charging higher and higher prices for the things women needed to buy in the market.

The women found they could not do anything about these unfavorable terms of trade. But they could and did protest the proliferating taxes local officials were making the women pay on their way to market. As one woman explained,

“I joined the group because I realized that planting cassava, weeding it, and harvesting it involved a lot of hardship. And every market day they take cassava from these women, and this cassava totals five or six baskets, which they [the political authorities] go and sell. We asked ourselves what the money from this cassava was being used for. We’d like to know whether the money from this cassava is making any contribution to development, before we’ll agree to keep on giving that cassava. But when we put this question to the authorities, they did nothing to indicate what this cassava or the income from it is used for. So we were dissatisfied, telling ourselves that the country is going to ruin. We are living in a sort of bondage.” (Newbury 1984:42)

The tax revolt of these women in Buloho had a happy ending—sort of. No one was harmed (although the protesters feared they might be imprisoned for speaking out). The local *chef de collectivité* proved unresponsive to their demands, so the women went above his head. Their appeal to the governor detailing their grievances embarrassed the local authority. And in elections conducted soon after, the women and their supporters scored an

important victory. All the candidates for the local government council were men—but those who won seats on the council had expressed solidarity with the women and publicly opposed the taxes on women's produce. The first action taken by the newly elected council was to suspend the hated taxes. Later, the councillors abolished the taxes altogether (Newbury 1984; Newbury & Schoepf 1986:94–96).

This episode is but one of many in Zaire in the 1980s showing people's aspirations for accountability from those in power. Women in the tax protest, for example, were asserting the notion that public funds should be used for public purposes. Such views were widespread: Ordinary people desired and expected reciprocity from the powerful.

There was also anger at the predatory conduct of agents of the state. The women's tax revolt was not an isolated case. Rural and urban restiveness increased during the 1980s as people withdrew from the state, turned to the parallel economy for survival, and dared to express resentment against the Mobutu government. Political consciousness was heightened when, as people acted to improve their lives by promoting projects such as reforestation, producers' cooperatives, or fishpond development, they found themselves in confrontation with the state—confrontations that sometimes became violent when Mobutu's security forces cracked down.¹

In short, we have here an example of the kind of popular anger analyzed by Celestin Monga in *The Anthropology of Anger: Civil Society and Democracy in Africa* (1996). In Zaire, as elsewhere in Africa, authoritarian rulers found themselves embattled as ordinary people rejected the depredations, disappointments, and deprivations associated with unresponsive regimes. This type of consciousness underlay popular demands for change in Zaire and in other parts of the continent that were percolating in the 1980s but became more visible during the 1990s.²

Especially in the early 1990s, more political space opened up as the pace of change accelerated. The 1990s are referred to as the decade of democratization in Africa. More accurately, this period could be referred to as the decade of political liberalization, for consolidating democracy would prove more daunting than opening up authoritarian systems to multiparty competition and allowing more civil liberties (Young 1996). Nonetheless, during the early 1990s many countries in Africa experienced enormous ferment, expectation, and even optimism. Authoritarian rulers were on the defensive—and advocates of political change offered the hope that new governments chosen through multiparty elections would be more responsive and accountable. Some proponents of democratization proposed more wide-ranging reform, insisting that these transitions should bring not only democracy, but also development—efforts to combat poverty and inequality while providing improved living standards and life opportunities to all (Ake 1996).³

The transition to a democratic South Africa in 1994 was inspiring, and other countries also made real progress toward democracy—such as Sene-

gal, Mali, Ghana, Botswana, Benin, Malawi, Mauritius, and Namibia. Though few countries achieved “liberal democracy” as defined by Larry Diamond (1996), promising improvements were evident.

By mid-decade the euphoria of the early years of the 1990s had been replaced by more guarded assessments. The international environment was less supportive, citizens were impatient at the poor performance of newly elected governments, and incumbents in some countries had manipulated electoral processes to keep themselves in power (Young 1996:60–62). While acknowledging such setbacks, Crawford Young observed that

the interim balance sheet on democratization in Africa is mixed but mildly positive. Not all experiments will survive, yet many countries have experienced important changes beyond the most visible one of multiparty elections: a freer and more vocal press, better respect for human rights, some headway toward achieving the rule of law. The more visionary forms of integral populist democracy are unlikely to be attained. The democratizing reforms that have occurred so far fall far short of consolidated democracy by any reasonably rigorous criteria. . . . Nevertheless, slow, halting, uneven, yet continuing movement toward polyarchy is possible. There is no plausible and preferable alternative on the horizon. (1996:67)

Crawford Young’s overview remains convincing for many countries in Africa. Yet now, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the mood is decidedly more somber. The twin threats of war and HIV/AIDS are killing Africans at an alarming rate.

The spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa is a health emergency of enormous proportions. AIDS is a terrible scourge that is placing unimaginable burdens on the peoples of Africa. It is an issue that is getting attention, but much more needs to be done. Mobilization over the question of access to affordable drugs by poor countries has put the multinational drug companies on the defensive and compelled some promising concessions at the recent discussions of the World Trade Organization in Qatar.

My focus this evening is on violence and war in Africa, not on HIV/AIDS. However, I do want to note three ways in which these two phenomena are related:

- First, war in Africa is impoverishing millions of people. And war and poverty both contribute to the spread of Aids in Africa.
- Second, war and HIV/AIDS both have disastrous consequences for human life, disrupting communities and causing cruel hardship.
- Finally, there is a need for enormous resources to resolve the problems of war in Africa and of HIV/AIDS on the continent. It is imperative that the wealthy countries of the world accept responsibility to assist Africans who are attempting to combat these twin disasters.

Without lapsing into Afro-Pessimism, I would like to suggest that it is appropriate for Africanists to focus attention on the nature of the unfolding dynamics of war and violence in Africa.⁴ We need to consider not only the complex causes of these wars, but also the broader significance of these conditions for politics, society, and the survival of communities. I'm pleased to note that at this year's annual meeting, several panels and roundtables are addressing such issues.

The Increase of War and Violence in Africa

If the 1990s were a decade of democratization for Africa, they were also a decade of violence. One study shows that sixteen wars were fought in Africa during the period 1990 to 1997; two of these were interstate (Chad–Libya and Rwanda–Uganda), but the rest are categorized as intrastate.⁵ And a study by the African Centre for Development and Strategic Studies (ACDESS) noted a significant increase of war and violence in Africa during the latter part of the 1990s (Adedeji 1999b). This study attempted to categorize countries in Africa according to whether they enjoyed relative political stability, whether they were subject to prolonged political crises and turbulence, or whether they were engaged in armed conflict or civil strife. The study found that in the mid-1990s, half of the forty-eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa were characterized by relative political stability and generally peaceful conditions. Twelve countries were experiencing “prolonged political crises and turbulence,” and twelve others were “engaged in armed conflict or civil strife” (Adedeji 1999a:4).

Two years later, this situation had become worse. By the end of 1998 only nineteen countries had stable political conditions; at least eleven countries were encountering “political crisis and turbulence,” and eighteen countries “were engaged in armed conflict or civil strife.” This means that toward the end of the 1990s less than 40 percent of sub-Saharan African countries enjoyed relative political stability. Almost 25 percent faced serious political crisis, while a staggering 38 percent were wracked by violent conflict. (Adedeji 1999a:4–5).

Often in these wars unarmed civilians have become the main targets. An especially shocking case was that of Rwanda in 1994 where the state engaged in a genocide that killed more than half a million of the country's citizens—and the international community did nothing to stop it. The Democratic Republic of Congo is another dramatic case. Since 1998, at least nine other African countries have been involved in what some have called “Africa's First World War.” Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi assisted a rebel group within Congo (the Congolese Rally for Democracy, RCD) and in the process occupied a large swath of territory in the eastern part of the country. The Congo's government in Kinshasa has received support at various times during the war from Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Central

African Republic, and Chad (Lemarchand 1999; Nzongola forthcoming). Civilians have been the main victims; in three years this devastating conflict was responsible for almost three million deaths above expected mortality rates (International Refugee Committee 2001).

In such conflicts the armed contenders usually include a range of actors—including regular soldiers, child soldiers, militias, gangs, and sometimes mercenaries. Horrific acts of brutality are carried out on women, including rape, sexual torture, and murder (Turshen & Twagiramariya 1998). The Rwanda genocide and the war in Sierra Leone are perhaps best known for this, but recent reports from eastern Congo suggest a pattern of such brutal treatment of women there as well.

Confronting the Meaning of War and Violence

Four conceptual approaches assist us in understanding contemporary wars in Africa. All recognize the weakness of states that fail to behave like developed states of the West. But they take divergent approaches to interpreting and addressing such weakness.

One approach, exemplified in the work of Jeffrey Herbst (1990, 2000), suggests that a historical experience of war strengthens the state. Such a view is derived from studies of state-building in Europe by Charles Tilly and other scholars of European history. According to Tilly, over a period of several centuries states in Europe developed more efficient tax systems and a sense of national identity as a result of wars. During recurrent conflicts among states, weak states usually could not survive unless they were able to develop more effective means of extracting resources from citizens. Thus the threat of interstate war as well as the growth of standing armies to fight them had two important effects. The state moved to establish effective administrative structures and to develop flexible relations with its people so that citizens would acquiesce in paying taxes and develop a sense of nationalism.⁶ Proponents of this perspective do not explicitly advocate more war. But absent the state wars that Europe experienced, such arguments presume that states in Africa are likely to remain weak and unconsolidated.

This approach has been seen as problematic in a number of ways. African leaders interested in expanding their territory could use it to justify abrogating existing boundaries.⁷ On this basis, policymakers in the West who might prefer not to get involved in efforts to resolve unwieldy conflicts in Africa could use the argument about weak states to justify standing back and letting some African wars just “take their course”—regardless of the consequences in loss of life and destruction of societies. Herbst would reject such an extrapolation from his analysis (see Herbst 1997). Yet he acknowledges that we do not really know that wars in Africa would have the same result as they presumably did in Europe: “Whether war in Africa today would actually bring about the same kind of changes that it did in Europe

centuries ago is unclear, but the possibility that leaders might become so desperate that they try in some fundamental way to alter the political rules under which their nations function should not be ignored" (1990:135).

In short, the argument that weak states result from too little interstate war is open to troubling interpretations. Such an approach makes it seem that leaders can expect to strengthen their states if they engage in interstate war. But as Richard Joseph (1997) has pointed out, the point of reference to such analysis appears to be the strength of state structures, rather than the well-being of the population. This perspective could be used, for example, to imply that the war in Democratic Republic of Congo is not so disastrous because, in the long run, one can expect that a stronger, more consolidated state will result.⁸

Herbst has suggested that as an alternative to war, and in order to overcome the perceived problem of weak states' jeopardizing development prospects, existing boundaries should not remain sacrosanct; the international community should look favorably upon certain types of contemporary or future secessionist movements in Africa, and it should be willing to support secessionist leaders who are able to establish political order in smaller units (within existing state boundaries) that respond to people's aspirations (1996, 2000). Herbst denies that he is encouraging violence or "inciting new breakaway units." Instead, he says, "I am proposing a way for the international community to deal with what is already happening on the ground" (1997:183). Citing the case of Eritrea's struggle for independence from Ethiopia, he defends his policy recommendations as a way to forestall armed struggle or stop it more quickly:

Certainly in Ethiopia, adoption of my proposal might have saved many thousands of lives by not requiring the Eritreans to win total victory. Similarly, my proposals for the international community to develop mechanisms to relate to subnational units that are already providing services is a way to give these areas some international recognition, so that they will not have to adopt an armed struggle to gain attention." (1997:184)

Yet who is to decide whom to support; and is there not a danger of encouraging yet more armed clashes? (see Joseph 1997).

A focus on the state, to be sure, has been the staple of much of political science analysis. But other approaches focus on the effects of state policy—in short, on governance, or the interrelations between the state and its people. Indeed, most Africanist scholars and practitioners striving to solve conflicts in Africa embrace various aspects of three approaches distinct from Herbst's arguments (though they need not be mutually exclusive). These other analyses emphasize the destructive effects of violence and war in Africa for states and people within a contemporary global context quite different from that of Europe when state-building occurred there.

The approach mentioned above, and the second analytical approach I

would like to discuss, both focus on the problem of state failure. But rather than citing an absence of war as the explanation for state failure, this second form of inquiry highlights the phenomenon of a “shadow” or “criminal” state that sometimes helps to engender war. In this perspective, although formal structures of a “collapsed” state may wither and fail to maintain order or deliver services, these state structures do not disappear entirely. Rather, in some parts of Africa leaders eager to preserve their prerogatives have adopted strategies to create parallel channels of power and thus “informalize” the state. Instead of a formal state structure acting to keep order, collect taxes, and provide services, a “shadow state” emerges, with structures parallel to or competing with those of the formal state. Leaders recruit followers and set up informal networks, often using violence, predation, and war to maintain their position.

The attention here is on material flows, not state service. Here the institutions associated with power are organized to expedite the extraction of material goods. Even though the shell of formal state structures may remain, the shadow state is the locus of action—allowing leaders (or rebels opposing these leaders) to control enclaves where valuable commodities such as diamonds, gold, timber, and coltan can be obtained. The shadow state structures maintain connections with commercial circuits for trading these commodities on the international market. Thus the commodities themselves provide an incentive for war, and their commercialization yields the resources that fund it (Reno 1995, 1998; Bayart, Ellis, & Hibou 1999). The situation in Sierra Leone is an example of this pattern, as is the current war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Although sovereignty and the international recognition associated with it remain important (Reno 2001), the conventional goals of warfare—state expansion or the ability to influence or destroy other state structures—are dispensed with. Instead, war itself is its own goal. For it is through continuing violence that extraction best takes place. It is, in short, a case of primitive accumulation institutionalized. Often, this scenario is associated with a pattern of targeting civilians and destroying communities. Recruitment of child soldiers is also typical. Such young people may be forced to join, or they gravitate “voluntarily” to one side or another in the conflict, seeking survival, security, companionship, or revenge (Richards 1996; Peters & Richards 1998; Skinner 1999).

The conflicts associated with different shadow states take diverse forms depending on local circumstances, which vary from place to place. Yet in each case, networks linked with the global political economy serve to prolong war and violence. The major markets for the high-value commodities are the wealthy countries of the North. And the major sources of arms are countries outside Africa.⁹ So in these cases, warfare does not strengthen the state, but is associated with a weakening of some state structures—those relating to civilians—and a strengthening only of the violence within.

Related to this notion of the shadow state is a third, complementary

approach. This looks internally: at the causes and effects of state-connected violence. It emphasizes the intertwined nature of the many interrelated processes of change that have shaped the context in which violent conflicts are occurring. Especially prominent among proponents of this view is Achille Mbembe. In particular, he notes four phenomena that provide the context for failed democratization and the escalation of violence and war.

With a scarcity of money and the means of livelihood, says Mbembe, people in many parts of Africa for more than a decade now have found themselves facing unpredictability in almost every sphere of life: “Money, power and life came to be seen as being governed by chance since nothing is certain and everything is possible; people take risks with money as they take risks with power and with life” (2000:8). In addition, the simultaneous spread of democratization and neoliberal economic reform programs (Structural Adjustment Programs, or SAPs) have eroded the formal economy and state structures in Africa. Both SAPs and political liberalization have heightened insecurities and conflicts over citizenship, property, and criteria of inclusion and exclusion.

Meanwhile, the strictures of SAPs have undermined the capacities of states to manage such tensions, and often undermined possibilities for sustaining democratization. As a result, efforts to transform authoritarianism have taken place in “a context of social violence and a general dispersion of power” (2000:8). This has contributed to the dramatic failure of democratization in some areas of Africa—and, as we know, failed democratization has been a factor in several of Africa’s most intractable conflicts.

Finally, Mbembe criticizes the instrumental uses some leaders make of the idiom of democracy in Africa—simply to gain power. Without a coherent philosophy of how and why democracy is important to social peace and living together, struggles to “democratize” sometimes seemed to be based on the same kind of authoritarian assumptions as the regimes such leaders were attempting to replace. Mbembe encourages leaders and African intellectuals to develop a principled intellectual rationale for democratic practice as a necessary path to promote social peace.¹⁰

I have noted three perspectives that attempt to make sense of war and violence in contemporary Africa. The first of these attributes weak states to a lack of war. This approach contrasts (or perhaps connects) with two others—the notion of the shadow state linked to international circuits, and Mbembe’s vision of intersecting processes of change that weaken institutions and create conditions conducive to violence.

A fourth line of inquiry seeks to understand the causes of conflict in order to propose possible solutions. Studies adopting this pragmatic approach highlight initiatives to resolve conflicts by the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, and other multilateral and bilateral actors. Some emphasize the destructive impact of a type of leadership that promotes violence and war. All insist on the importance of what they refer to as good governance—to combat poverty and inequality, institute policies

of inclusion, and provide services that moderate social tensions (Adedeji 1999b; Ali & Matthews 1999b; Deng & Zartman 1991). With regard to civil wars in Africa, Taisier Ali and Robert Matthews conclude that

prevention and resolution of domestic conflict must be linked to the underlying causes of those conflicts. Failure to address the root causes of any conflict, whether it is potential or real, can result only in the eruption or continuation of civil strife. Finally, the policies that a country pursues to prevent conflict from erupting into violence . . . are not too different from those designed to build an enduring peace after a conflict has ended. Conflict prevention and peacebuilding are not at opposite ends of a straight-line continuum but are adjoining points in a circle of policy options. (1999a)

In the search for models of conflict management and peace-building, this fourth approach explores successful cases and analyzes failures. It stresses the enormous challenges of rebuilding a polity and society after a war is stopped. And those who analyze African conflicts from this perspective recognize a sobering reality: Ending wars in Africa often requires forms of intervention from outside—because the warring parties have little interest in stopping the violence. Unfortunately, the international community does not usually provide sufficient resources to do this well.

Three important themes emerge from the insights of this fourth perspective.

First, building peace is possible, but fraught with pitfalls. Establishing sustainable peace requires a multipronged approach with multiple actors collaborating—internal and external actors, local, regional, and international actors, and government as well as multilateral and nongovernmental organs.

Second, successful peace-building requires huge resources; it is expensive (Mozambique is a case in point).

Finally, to promote durable peace, postconflict initiatives should endeavor to establish institutions that foster good governance, encourage policies that make governments inclusive and responsive, and provide resources to relieve inequality and poverty, while enhancing security.

It is notable that such analyses focus mostly on formal institutional power; they presume that governance is administrative and passes from central authority outward. Yet good governance can also be seen as coming from pressure from below—responsible state behavior is often insured by the involvement of nonstate actors. The apparently novel and complex configurations of politics and violence in contemporary Africa have led to renewed questions about a state-centered framework of analysis. Such work explores the reciprocal, intertwined, and often unpredictable effects of international linkages with local networks of negotiation and authority, as well as central state power.¹¹

War and Devastation in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Before closing, I would like to return briefly to the community in eastern Congo with which I opened my remarks this evening—and to ask: What do these analytic approaches have to do with the lives of the women (and men) of Buloho? The war that began in Democratic Republic of Congo in 1996, and whose second phase started in August 1998, has had disastrous consequences for the citizens of every community of the Congo, but especially for the people of Buloho. In fact, the area in which their community is located has been an epicenter of violence in Kivu Region of Congo.

As a result of the war, residents had to flee when their homes were burned down by soldiers linked with the Congolese Rally for Democracy, the rebel group opposing the rule of the Kinshasa government. People were forced to stay near the major road that goes through the area. For months they had to live far from their homes, in flimsy temporary structures that provided inadequate protection from the torrential rains characteristic of this area on the edge of Congo's tropical forest. Worst of all, these rural producers were far from their fields; food was hard to come by, and so was income. The Catholic church that had been not only a place of worship but also a community center and a source of solace to many was desecrated by the soldiers—smeared with human feces. The priests were forced to flee.

Like hundreds of thousands of other Congolese victimized by the war, the proud women of Buloho (and their families), who twenty years ago believed they could engage in negotiation and exert pressure on their government, became displaced persons, bereft of almost everything needed to sustain life.

Buloho is not an isolated case. In most areas of eastern Congo, the economy has collapsed, health care is virtually nonexistent, and many children lack access to schools. At least two million people have been displaced by the war. Given these disastrous conditions, the findings of a recent study by the International Rescue Committee are shocking, but not surprising. In a report issued in May 2001, the IRC found that in six provinces of eastern Congo, over a three-year period, almost three million people died as a result of war. It is estimated that about 350,000 were killed by direct violence, while others, the vast majority, perished from conditions associated with the war: hunger, disease, and lack of adequate shelter. In some areas the situation was so bad that 1 percent of the population was dying every month.¹²

By the end of 2001, efforts involving the OAU, the UN, key Western powers, regional belligerents and other actors, as well as Congolese protagonists and government and nongovernmental organs, were attempting to end the war and stop the violence. The CDR and MLC rebel organizations lack popular support and have little power outside major towns. They are tarnished by their treatment of the people, by the widespread suspicion that they are front men for Rwanda and Uganda, and by their association

with the foreign troops occupying eastern Congo. Complicating the situation are armed bands of Rwandan dissidents, some of them past members of the Interahamwe militias or former FAR (Rwandan army before the genocide) who carried out the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Rwanda, insisting that these groups pose a security threat, refuses to leave Congo until they are disarmed.

Nationalist sentiments are strong in Congo, for two reasons: the legacy of the Mobutu era, and the war, which is seen as externally instigated. The war, however, is not engendering state consolidation. Instead, in eastern Congo the soldiers of the CDR and the MLC and the troops from Rwanda and Uganda terrorize unarmed civilians, plunder the region's resources, and create a *raison d'être* for armed opposition by the *Mayi Mayi*, a network of Congolese militia that vigorously defies foreign occupation. Other armed militias have also proliferated; these militias, the *Mayi Mayi*, and the Interahamwe prey on the population as well, adding to the generalized insecurity (Baldo 2001). The government of Kabila, far away to the west in Kinshasa, relies on military support from Angola and Zimbabwe, which have their own interests in the riches of Congo. The major protagonists seem to have little interest in ending the war—as long as they can keep profiting from its continuation. Meanwhile, ordinary citizens suffer, as the sinews of their society disintegrate.

A few years ago, Father André Sibomana, a human rights activist and newspaper editor in Rwanda, concluded an account of his life and the tragedy of the Rwandan genocide with a hopeful plea for the future. Noting that one of his journalists had once asked him, "When will Rwandans ever be able to hope to die of old age?" Father Sibomana responded with his wish for the future: "Let us give Rwandans time to live and let us give children time to bury their parents. Of old age."¹³

That is also my wish for the people in war-torn parts of Africa. May the research, intellectual work, and political activism of Africanists complement the efforts of all who are striving to end these conflicts and promote peace.

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Notes

1. Examples are found in C. Newbury (1986). See also Fatton (1992); Young and Turner (1985); Lemarchand (1988); MacGaffey (1994); D. Newbury (1986); Rukangira and Schoepf (1991); Schatzberg (1989). A similar moral economy ethos spawned the popular image during Zaire's democratization struggles of a virtuous civil society brutalized by a callous, corrupt state. Such discourse was

apparent in Zaire of the early 1990s (see Jewsiewicki et al. 1995). In an analysis of identities and resilience amidst Zaire's collapsing state several years later, Filip De Boeck (1996) depicted a less dichotomous vision of political relations.

2. The struggles for change in the 1990s are often described as efforts by Africans to gain a "second independence" to replace the first experience of independence that went awry. Calls for a second independence actually appeared much earlier, as part of a "failed" revolution in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1960s. See Fox et al. (1965); Coquery-Vidrovitch et al. (1987).
3. Two decades ago, Richard Sklar, in his presidential address to the ASA, issued an eloquent defense of democracy's importance for Africa (Sklar 1983). Later in the 1980s, an increasing number of studies focused on issues of democracy and regime change on the continent. For some examples, see Anyang Nyong'o (1987); Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1988); Mamdani (1986, 1989); Joseph (1987); and Wiseman (1990). During the 1990s the literature on political transitions and democracy in Africa grew exponentially. Overviews of key issues are found in Agbango (1997); Ake (1996); Diamond (1996); Joseph (1999a, 1999b); Robinson (1994a); and Young (1996, 1999). For a sampling of different perspectives on the character and meaning of these political transitions, see (from a vast literature) Ake (1991, 1996); Bayart, Mbembe, and Toulabor (1992); Bates (1999); Bratton (1994); Bratton and Van de Walle (1997); Chazan (1992); Cohen and Goulbourne (1991); Coulon and Martin (1991); Diamond and Plattner (1999); Diop and Diouf (1999); Fatton (1992, 1995); Harbeson, Rothchild, and Chazan (1994); Herbst (2001); Holmquist, Weaver, and Ford (1994); Hyden and Bratton (1992); Ibrahim and Chole (1995); Ihonvbere (2000); Joseph (1999b); Lemarchand (1992); Mamdani (1996); Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba (1995); Mbaku and Ihonvbere (1998); Mkandawire (1999); Monga (1996); Ndegwa (1996); Newbury (1994); Nyang'oro (1994, 1996); Nzongola-Ntalaja and Lee (1998); Olukoshi (1998); Robinson (1994b); Schatzberg (1993); Shaw (1990, 1993); Tripp (1994, 2000); Van de Walle (1999); Widner (1994a, 1994b); Wiseman (1990, 1996); Young (1994, 1999).
4. After the tragic events of September 11, I found myself hoping that in the aftermath of this horror, more Americans might be able to empathize with the daily violence, trauma, and insecurity that define the lives of so many people in other parts of the world today, and particularly in Africa. It is in the spirit of such concerns, to highlight the plight of unarmed civilians caught up in cyclones of violence they cannot stop, that I offer these comments here tonight.
5. According to a study by Michael Dziedzic, the intrastate wars included Algeria, Angola, Chad, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Western Sahara, and Zaire (cited in Laremont 2002a:3). The war in Democratic Republic of Congo (the former Zaire) is more than an intrastate conflict, however. Certainly from August 1998, and arguably even from 1996, it has involved elements of both an intrastate and an interstate conflict.
6. In *States and Power in Africa* (2000), Herbst argues that
Standard narratives of European state development highlight the crucial contribution of war. . . . At the most basic level, war in Europe acted as a filter whereby weak states were eliminated and political

arrangements that were not viable either were reformed or disappeared. . . . More specifically, war in Europe played an important role in the consolidation of many now-developed states in ways that are particularly important to an understanding of how power is broadcast: war caused the state to become more efficient in revenue collection by forcing leaders to dramatically improve administrative capabilities (thereby allowing states to fund nationwide administrative and economic systems), and war created a climate and important symbols around which a disparate population could unify and bond with the state in a manner that legitimized the capital's authority. That African countries have, to date, largely failed to solve these problems has important implications for their ability to consolidate power and has had a significant impact on the evolution of their political economies. (112–16)

7. See, for example, Joseph (1997). Challenging Herbst's analysis and conclusions, Joseph has argued that "each of [Herbst's] key recommendations is likely to make a bad situation catastrophic. His Darwinist philosophy is quite straight-forward and consistent. Africa has not had enough interstate wars, and the potentially expansionist states have not been allowed to gobble up parts or all of the weaker ones and simultaneously reap the internal state-building benefits of militarism" (179). One of the limitations to Herbst's analysis, Joseph continues, is his failure to give adequate attention to "the devastating effects that the resort to violence by both state and nonstate actors is having not only on economic and other material infrastructures but also on the very moral character of African societies" (179).

Herbst himself has suggested that African leaders may have incentives to pursue war in the future in order to overcome the problem of weak states. Some ten years ago, having noted growing differences in military capabilities among African states, he observed that

So far, the assurance of stability that is the central advantage of the current African state system has almost always been more attractive than whatever reasons African leaders may have had to begin conflict with their neighbors. However, as President Nyerere of Tanzania showed when he invaded Uganda to depose Idi Amin, even strong proponents of African norms can be driven to interstate conflict if they believe that the costs of not acting are high enough. In the future, African leaders may find that, despite all their efforts, economic reform cannot progress and they cannot get their citizenry to unite around national symbols; it is conceivable that then the deterrent value of the norms of sovereignty may seem much less powerful than they do now. If these norms no longer provided protection to a large number of states, they would lose all meaning throughout the African continent. While the timing of these wars is not predictable, it should be obvious that the incentives that African leaders have to incite wars for the purposes of state-making are significant and may become much stronger in the future when the futility of domestic reform during times of business as usual, that is, peace, becomes clear. (1990:136)

8. Yet the last "strong" state in the Congo was under Mobutu.

9. On the role of such exchanges in fueling war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, see Nzongola-Ntalaja forthcoming (ch. 7). Nzongola aptly terms these structures “transnational networks of pillage and corruption.”
10. Mbembe (2000). See also Mbembe (2001) and Jewsiewicki (1998).
11. See, for example, Callaghy, Kassimir, and Latham (2001). Filip De Boeck calls for a new approach to problematizing the state in Africa. Describing Zaire of the 1990s as “an increasingly ‘exotic,’ complex and chaotic world that seems to announce the end of social life and the societal fabric as most of us understand it,” he asks:

What, for example, is the usefulness or adequacy of such concepts as “state,” or “democracy” for an improved understanding of the manifold processes of collapse and change that have given shape to the Zairean reality as it presents itself today? . . . I believe that analysis of the central issues foregrounded in the Zairean crisis—issues concerning representation, identity, ethnicity, nationalism, violence, strategies of survival and resilience, the role of the media, the notion of citizenship and civil society—no longer benefits from an explanatory frame that presupposes the ‘state.’ Rather, we should focus . . . on the interaction between local and global spheres of socio-political, economic and cultural interaction, and on the hinge-joints between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ worlds, concepts, beliefs and practices. This implies an explanation of such processes of interaction, through an analysis of cultural entities as forms, not only of hegemony and resistance, but also of adaptation, accommodation and collaboration (1996: 93–94).
12. International Rescue Committee (2001). The IRC issued an earlier report in 2000 which found that between January 1999 and May 2000, at least 1.7 million “excess deaths” had occurred in the Congo as a result of the war (IRC 2000). “Excess deaths” refer to deaths over and above the mortality that would normally be expected; in addition to deaths caused directly by the violence of the war, they include deaths from displacement, and the hunger and disease association with lack of shelter, disruption of food production, and the collapse of health clinics, local markets, and employment opportunities.
13. Father Sibomana was a founding member of the Rwandan Association for the Defence of Human Rights and Public Liberties (ADL). He served as vice president of this organization from 1991 to 1993 and as president from 1993 to October 1997. From 1993 to 1995 he was vice president of the Collective of Human Rights Leagues and Associations (CLADHO). He died of illness on March 9, 1998, at the age of 42 (Tertsakian 1999). On the circumstances of Father Sibomana’s death, see Deguine and Guichaoua (1998).