

A NEW CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR POLITICAL TRANSITION: A CASE-STUDY ON RWANDA

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Résumé

Cet article évalue le bilan de la transition politique récente au Rwanda (19 juillet 1994 - 20 juillet 2003). L'évaluation en question se fait à la lumière d'un nouveau cadre conceptuel de la transition dans lequel la démocratie n'est plus présentée comme l'aboutissement automatique des processus de changement politique, mais dans lequel les régimes mi-autoritaires passent plutôt pour résultat le plus commun des transitions politiques.

Subsidiairement, cet article donne un aperçu sur les antécédents, faits et traits fondamentaux de la transition politique rwandaise. Enfin, il applique le nouveau cadre conceptuel au cas du Rwanda et conclut que le régime qui a émergé de la transition est autoritaire.

1. INTRODUCTION

The end of the political transition in Rwanda on 20 July, 2003¹ provides an opportune moment to attempt an analysis of the overall transition process and its outcome. Likewise, given the recent debate on the traditional doctrine of political transition and democratization, an exercise as such requires the outline of a new and updated conceptual framework encompassing the new scholarly developments. How does political transition originate? What are its modalities? Are there special factors that dramatically affect it? Who are its actors? What are its outcomes? And fundamentally: What is political transition?

Thus, I begin by outlining a new theoretical structure of political transition. I will first illustrate the main postulates of the traditional doctrine of political transition and then introduce the arguments of those scholars who have questioned it. I will put special emphasis on significant factors that impact political transition. I will then apply the new conceptual framework to Rwanda. After providing an overview of the transition there and its characteristic features, I will analyze the latter in light of the new conceptual framework. I will highlight what is happening politically in the country and observe that the political transition in Rwanda has not culminated in a democratic system of governance, but on the contrary, in an authoritarian regime.

2. THE TRADITIONAL 'DOCTRINE' OF POLITICAL TRANSITION AND THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW CONCEPTUAL

¹ The RPF set this date. See paragraph 4.1 of the present article.

FRAMEWORK

The Traditional Doctrine of political transition constitutes a foremost analytical endeavor conceived to systematize in a rigorous and well-defined conceptual framework of democratic transition the dramatic political developments occurred in the last quarter of the twentieth century, efficaciously portrayed by Huntington as the «Third Wave» of democracy².

The main assumption underling the political transition doctrine, also known as «transition paradigm», is that any country in which there is a shift away from an authoritarian regime is a country in transition to democracy³.

The doctrine also envisages the modes of a political transition and submits that they are the following: reform, compromise and overthrow⁴.

In the case of reform the old government is taking the lead in the transition to democracy. Given very weak opposition forces, the ruling elite has a total freedom of manoeuvre in driving the transition. In some instances the old government may go even further: it may not only trigger the transition but put an end to the authoritarian regime and establish a new democracy. In this scenario the old regime still retains political power and can influence choices the new democracy will have to make⁵.

The second modality arises from a special condition affecting both the old regime and the opposition groups. That is to say that the two actors are equally matched and come to the realization that they need each other to lead the political transition. Therefore, they reach a compromise, which may take the form of a Peace Agreement if the country is facing a civil war, and together initiate the transition. As pointed out, the level of power still retained by the old regime will be a critical factor in the political transition and will heavily condition it⁶.

The last modality is typical of authoritarian regimes that have opposed reforms. The opposition groups have grown stronger and stronger to the point that they have brought the old regime down. This has important implications for the

² HUNTINGTON, S., *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

³ CAROTHERS, T., «The End of the Transition Paradigm», *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 1, January 2002, pp.6-9.

⁴ This postulate has been inspired by HUNTINGTON S., *op. cit.*

⁵ SARKIN, J., «The Tension between Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda: Politics, Human Rights, Due Process and the Role of the Gacaca Courts in Dealing with the Genocide», *Journal of African Law*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2001, pp.143-172.

⁶ *Ibidem.*

political transition: it means that the new government has the widest discretion in directing it⁷.

Furthermore, the «transition paradigm» points to three sequential phases on which, more often than not, democratization appears to build: opening, break-through and consolidation⁸.

The opening is the modality through which the political transition itself begins and coincides, according to the above categorisation, with a reformist move usually promoted by the governmental authority.

The break-through phase coincides with the collapse of the old regime and the establishment of a new democratic government that acquires power following a precise political path. That is, the conduct of national elections, the enactment of a new constitution, the establishment of a new democratic institutional structure⁹.

The consolidation phase is then the climax of this ‘natural’ progression towards democracy. It is a stage during which democracy is shaped and materializes through the implementation of state reforms, the holding of periodic elections, the flourishing of civil society¹⁰, and «...the overall habituation of the society to the new democratic rules of the game»¹¹.

Finally, it needs to be highlighted that «transition paradigm’ denies the determinant impact of structural factors and conditions in the transitional countries. Structural factors and conditions include: the economic situation, the history, the institutional legacies, the ethnic characteristics of the population and the socio-cultural dimension. «Indeed, the idea that there are virtually no conditions that preclude the possibility of democratization has become an article of faith among democracy promoters»¹².

Although, the «...[transition paradigm] became ubiquitous in U.S. policy circles as a way of talking about, thinking about and designing interventions in processes of political change around the world»¹³, it has recently been subjected

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ These phases characterized political change affecting Latin American and Southern European countries and upon which the «transition paradigm» has been primarily fashioned.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p.12. The break-through phase is regarded as the proper transition.

¹⁰ O’DONNELL, G. and SCHMITTER, P. C., *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, pp.48-56.

¹¹ CAROTHERS, T., *op. cit.*, p.7.

¹² OTTAWAY, M., *Democracy Challenged. The Rise of Semi-Authoritarian Regimes*, Washington D.C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003, p.13.

¹³ CAROTHERS, T., *op. cit.*, p.6.

to significant criticism. The analysis of the current political situations of the Third Wave of Democracy countries has led eminent scholars and commentators to challenge and even question the validity of the «transition paradigm». Specifically, the fact that of the nearly one hundred countries considered as transitional less than twenty are truly embarking upon the democratic enterprise, has spurred critical re-thinking of the paradigm¹⁴.

As a result a «gray zone» has been identified as a new category of the analysis of political transition. The «gray zone» is a political limbo in between an authoritarian regime and a consolidate democracy. It comprises countries that present at the same time some features of democratic political life and authoritarian traits. That is to say that in these countries there is some, although limited, political space for the opposition parties, an independent civil society, regular elections alongside a low level of political participation beyond voting, elections of uncertain legitimacy, poor performance by the state, and frequent abuse of the law by governmental officials¹⁵.

While analysts have unanimously come to the recognition of the existence of the «gray zone», the main analytical challenge they face is the definition of the types of political regimes gravitating toward it.

One of the most topical and accurate categorisation of «gray zone» political regime is put forward by Marina Ottaway. Namely, the category of *semi-authoritarian states*. An analytical category which, it is worth stressing, does not merely indicate political regimes that are half or partially authoritarian but points to the quintessentially fluid and changeable political realities of the «gray zone» countries¹⁶.

2.1. The Category of Semi-Authoritarian States

¹⁴ OTTAWAY, M., *op. cit.*, p.90, and CAROTHERS, T., *op. cit.*, p.9; COLLIER, D., and LEVITSKY, S., “Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovations in Comparative Research”, *World Politics*, vol. 49, no. 3, April 1997, pp.430-451; YOUNG, C., “The Third Wave of Democracy in Africa: Ambiguities and Contradictions”, in *State Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Rienner, 1999; EISENSTADT, T., “Eddies in the Third Wave: Protracted Transitions and Theories of Democratization”, *Democratization*, vol. 7, no. 3, Autumn 2000, pp.3-24; SANDBROOK, R., “Transitions Without Consolidation: Democratization in Six African Cases”, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1996, pp.1998-223.

¹⁵ CAROTHERS, T., *op. cit.* pp.8-9.

¹⁶ This is especially exemplified by the three typologies of semi-authoritarian regimes Ottaway identifies: semi-authoritarian regimes in equilibrium, semi-authoritarian regimes undergoing dynamic political change, and decaying semi-authoritarian regimes. See next paragraph pp.7-9.

Semi-authoritarian states are political hybrids, that is political regimes which combine a 'façade' of acceptance of liberal democracy, the existence of some formal democratic institutions and respect for a limited sphere of civil and political liberties with «... essentially illiberal or even authoritarian traits»¹⁷.

Basically, this ambiguity is deliberate. «Semi-authoritarian regimes are not imperfect democracies struggling toward improvement and consolidation but regimes determined to maintain the appearance of democracy without exposing themselves to the political risks that free competition entails»¹⁸. Consequently, semi-authoritarian regimes allow little competition for power, reducing in this way the government's accountability. Still, «... they leave enough political space for political parties and organizations of the civil society to form, for an independent press to function to some extent, and for some political debate to take place»¹⁹.

Semi-authoritarian regimes are not new. Similar regimes already existed in the past, although their number decreased during the Cold War, the division of the world into two main ideological blocs permitting the rejection of liberal democracies. Following the crumbling of the Soviet Union, however, few governments regarded it as politically opportune to remain or become the heralds of non-democratic systems of government. «... [M]ost [felt] they ha[d] to at least pretend adherence to the concept of democracy»²⁰. But this should not mislead. These attitudes have not produced an increase in the number of democratic regimes, but, actually, the creation of semi-authoritarian states, the number of which as Ottaway puts it, has not only become numerous but it is about to further augment. Many of these regimes have been affected by the «Reverse Wave»²¹ of democratization: they have experienced political transition but did not safely «... ride the wave»²² and reach the dry and prosperous shore of democracy. The cumulative effect of structural factors such as weak political organization and democratic institutions, a persistent authoritarian tradition, socio-economic problems, ethnic and religious conflicts also plays a key role in this context. As a result, these countries are not failed democracies but a specific type of regime whose political elites have deliberately established. «...[They] rode the wave as

¹⁷ OTTAWAY, M., *op. cit.*, p.3.

¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p.4.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p.9.

²² *Ibidem.*

far as they wanted and managed to stop»²³. They are, therefore, «... successful semi-authoritarian regimes»²⁴ «... carefully constructed and maintained... If [the ruling elites of these regimes] had it their way the system will never change»²⁵.

Semi-authoritarian regimes present some distinguishing features. They relate to the way the political power is generated and transferred, the degree of institutionalization, and the nature of civil society.

The generation and transfer of power is the hallmark of semi-authoritarian regimes. At its core lies a mechanism that effectively prevents the transfer of power through elections from the incumbent leaders to a new elite or group. Indeed this is the feature that explains the wording semi-authoritarian²⁶. Besides, the transfer of power is not only blocked but there is no way to challenge the power of the ruling elite in spite of the existence of a relatively free press and civil society, and the holding of periodic elections. Semi-authoritarian regimes hold periodic elections, but to avoid losing them they condition their outcomes through fairly subtle but effective methods. Consequently, elections are not the generator of the government power. Instead, non-institutionalized relationships among individuals make up the source of power.

The low level of institutionalization is a direct consequence of the hiatus between the way in which the power is generated and allocated in practice and the way in which it ought to be generated and distributed according a formal institutional framework²⁷. Semi-authoritarian regimes have institutions but they constantly cut down the activity and role of the latter by generating the real power outside them. Moreover, semi-authoritarian regimes manipulate the institutions in order to guarantee their own stability and perpetuation of power²⁸.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p.7.

²⁶ «... [I]f power cannot be transferred by elections, there is little point in describing a country as democratic even with qualifiers», *Ibidem*, p.15.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p.16.

²⁸ Venezuela is a case in point. Hugo Chavez, the democratically elected president in 1999, started a campaign aimed at de-legitimizing the parliament by depicting it as unrepresentative and not mirroring the will of the people. He went further and replaced it with a pliable constitutional assembly. See CAMERON, M. A., and MAJOR, F., "Venezuela's Hugo Chavez: Savior or Threat to Democracy?", *Latin America Research Review*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2001, pp.255-65; CRISP, B., "Presidential Behaviour in a System with Strong Parties: Venezuela", in MAINWARING, S., and SOBERG SHUGART, M., *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*, Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Finally, it is worth remarking on the civil society of these regimes. Although, as mentioned, semi-authoritarian regimes do have a fairly active civil society²⁹, it has to be stressed that the latter is usually blocked or simply reflects social division. It is in no way a major contributor to democracy.

Semi-authoritarian states may limit civil society by using many devices. In this regard, restrictive laws and more or less explicit attempts to limit the activities of local organizations to political issues that will not question the regime are especially symptomatic³⁰.

There are three kinds of semi-authoritarian regimes.

The first type is the semi-authoritarian regime in equilibrium, that is, semi-authoritarianism in its «... purest form, a stable condition that has already persisted over a long period and is likely to continue in the absence of upheaval»³¹. These regimes can handle ordinary challenges, such as the activities of opposition parties or structural changes without modifying their structure of power. Interestingly enough, they persist even when the country is experiencing rapid economic growth³².

The second typology of semi-authoritarianism comprises regimes undergoing what may be called dynamic change³³. That is a change that may put at risk the government's ability to maintain the *status quo* by forcing it to introduce reforms and pave the way to democracy³⁴. The pressure for change comes from both the political leadership and autonomous forces operating outside the government. Importantly, it is the political leadership, which is usually

²⁹ In Egypt there is an array of civil society's organizations ranging from Islamic charities to modern professional NGOs; Azerbaijan also showed a vibrant civic organization in the period of political liberalization. See EDDINE IBRAHIM, S., "Reform and Frustration in Egypt", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 7, no. 4, October 1996, pp.125-135; ALSTADT, A. L., "Azerbaijan's Struggle towards Democracy", in DAWISHA, K., and PARROT, B., (Ed.), *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Cambridge, England, Cambridge University press, 1997, pp.110-115.

³⁰ Egypt has enacted a law that makes registration difficult for voluntary organizations and limits the range of activities they can undertake. See "Silencing Citizens in Egypt", *New York Times*, June, 7, 1999, p.22.

³¹ OTTAWAY, M., *op. cit.*, p.20.

³² It is worth recalling that Indonesia was one of the most promising Asian economies, and that Egypt experienced far reaching economic reforms since the 1970s and steady economic growth for sustained periods of time.

³³ OTTAWAY, M., *op. cit.*, p.23.

³⁴ Taiwan may be regarded as a pertinent example of semi-authoritarian regime undergoing dynamic change.

reformist, to drive the change. This leadership wants to promote economic growth, free trade and be fully integrated in the international community realm, and at the same time retain control of the process of change. It realizes that modernization is bound to lead to political change but, nonetheless, take the chance. Hence, semi-authoritarian regimes undergoing dynamic change are a form of 'enlightened' semi-authoritarian regime that modifies bluntly and poses the challenging question of the relationship between political and socio-economic change³⁵.

The third typology of regime is semi-authoritarianism in decay. This kind of regime is characterized by an increasingly strong authoritarian tendency and weakness of counter-balancing factors. It may, in the worst future scenario, regress to full authoritarianism. Typically, semi-authoritarian states in decay are countries declining economically and/or socially, in which the democratic structure was fragile since the beginning as it was «imposed» by the international community and not supported by domestic forces able to ensure «... continued government responsiveness and accountability»³⁶. In the regimes under examination, there has not yet been a return to a single-party system, political participation and civil society are allowed, and media are relatively free although there are frequent cases of journalists' harassment and arrests. Nevertheless, the balance of power is slowly but steadily shifting in favor of the ruling elite. Therefore, under regimes in decay semi-authoritarianism «...is probably as good as it gets»³⁷. In absence of some major new factors impacting the balance of power it is more likely that they will regress to authoritarianism than to evolve into democracies.

2.2. Decisive Variables of Political Transition

There is an important variable that influences political transition and must be integrated in the new conceptual framework. The emphasis on such a variable is warranted by a very powerful argument. That is to say that during political transition there is always an «element of choice»³⁸ which is one of the most critical determinants of the outcome of the transition. And this holds valid despite

³⁵ OTTAWAY, M., *op. cit.*, p.23.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p.21.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p.22.

³⁸ LEMARCHAND, R., "Managing Transition Anarchies: Rwanda, Burundi and South Africa in Comparative Perspective", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1994, p.590.

the existence of structural factors such as social and economic conditions. This is not to say that the mentioned factors do not come into play in the transition, as the «transition paradigm» assumes. Actually, as seen, these factors facilitate the rise of a semi-authoritarian regime. This means that in the analysis of political transition structural factors do not provide a complete picture of the process under scrutiny. Special attention has to be given to the «choice-factor» which always significantly impacts the transition and is not at all curtailed by the existence of structural factors.

In order to introduce this «choice-factor» in a clear and tangible fashion it is worth identifying, as suggested by René Lemarchand, some sub-variables which are its integral components³⁹. They are the nature of the transition bargain, the quality of leadership skills and the characteristics of opposition movements. Some explicative points vis-à-vis the above sub-variables are in order.

It is worth emphasizing that political transition is usually sparked by very violent occurrences such as warfare or internal social conflicts⁴⁰. Indeed, it is the structure of the conflict, whatever its nature, which determines the modality (i.e. reform, compromise or overthrow) through which political transition will develop⁴¹. In this context, the transition bargain, meant as the way of trading off conflicting claims of the actors of the transition, comes into play. These conflicting claims essentially regard power sharing and, more specifically, how much power will be shared by whom, at what level and for how long⁴².

The second variable may be defined as «...the ultimate test for leadership», «... the capacity to create a political will where none would otherwise materialize»⁴³. Undeniably, this capacity is crucial during political transition because the outcome of the latter will be contingent upon the ability of incumbents and opponents to shape a common consensus on fundamental issues that will affect the fate of the parties concerned and, more importantly, the

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ However, PT may be triggered by occurrences denoting absence of violence such as, for instance, economic development. See REYCHLER, L., *Democratic Peace-Building and Conflict prevention. The Devil is the Transition*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 1999, p.90.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² As some commentators put it, «...the choice is between zero sum, high conflicting contests along racial and ethnic lines...and open textured, fluid, low conflict contests mainly along racial and ethnic lines but with a mixture of inter-group co-operation». HOROWITZ, D. L., *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991, p.203.

⁴³ LEMARCHAND, R., *op. cit.*, p.594.

national community itself. Whether the latter will remain united or disintegrated will depend «... upon the choices made up by an handful of leaders»⁴⁴.

Finally, the role of opposition movements should be borne in mind. Opposition groups' unwillingness to negotiate may lead to violence. If violence is intentionally unleashed to create chaos the transition may be totally disrupted.

3. THE NEW CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF POLITICAL TRANSITION

At this stage of analysis it is possible to provide an answer to the questions posed in the introduction of this article. As a result a new conceptual framework of will emerge.

What is political transition? The complexity and extraordinary fluidity of the political realities of countries that have faced political change in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and the very existence of the political limbo of the «gray zone», suggest a broad definition. That is to say, political transition is an interval between one political regime and another. Or, if we prefer a 'spatial' approach, political transition is a movement from something into something else, the something being a political regime. Hence, in the definition of political transition a political regime is both the term *ad quo* of the transition and its outcome. In this sense political transition is also political transformation. It starts from a given political regime, usually an authoritarian one, which for many reasons becomes inadequate or unable to live up to its institutional tasks, and culminates in another constituting a break-through in the past political life of a country. The new regime may be instituted by enacting a new constitution enshrining its institutional design, or by introducing changes in the electoral laws and process of the country experiencing political transition⁴⁵.

This brings us to the first three questions concerning political transition, namely, its origins, modalities and factors that may influence it.

How does political transition arise, then? It typically arises from warfare or internal social conflict, the main ways through which discontent for a given political regime erupts or is channelled into. In this context, the modalities through which political transition arises are those envisaged by the «transition

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*. Mandela and De Clerck are often pointed out as leaders who decisively contributed to the success of the PT in South Africa. See SHAPIRO, I., "Democratic Innovation: South Africa in Comparative Context", *World Politics*, vol. 46, no. 1, October 1993, pp.138-139.

⁴⁵ See PINKNEY, R., *Democracy in the Third World*, Boulder, London, Lynne Rienner, 2003, p.162.

paradigm»: reform, compromise or overthrow.

Also, some *special factors* affecting political transition have to be borne in mind. They are structural factors and the «choice factor». Structural factors, in contrast with what the classical doctrine of political transition upholds, definitively influence political transition and even facilitate the rise of a certain type of political regime. In addition, the «choice factor» critically impacts political transition and it is predicated on the assumption that in political transition what individuals, namely the ruling elites and opposition groups, choose to do is what ultimately matters⁴⁶. As Lemarchand puts it, «... substantial choices are the common denominator of political transitions»⁴⁷.

Two more questions need to be answered at this point: *Who are the actors of political transition and what are its outcomes?*

The answer to the former is straightforward: the actors of political transition are the ruling group and the opposition forces, although others, such as the international community or opposition groups residing abroad may play a significant role.

The latter requires some observations. As mentioned, the outcome of a political transition is a political regime. In this regard it is worth recalling that the experience of the «Third Wave» countries has unequivocally shown that more often than not the political system setting off from political transition is not *necessarily a democracy* but a political hybrid, to be precise, something in between an authoritarian regime and a fully democratic system which is stuck in that political limbo that commentators call «gray zone». Indeed, the rise of the «gray zone» regimes testifies that political transition is a disordered and unpredictable process which does not follow the track indicated by the «transition paradigm», namely, opening, break-through and consolidation. Moreover, this last phase does not occur for the «gray zone» states. Thus, political opening and elections may be the end of political transition and lead to the establishment of a hybrid political regime able to stay stable and hamper any change toward democracy⁴⁸. Moreover, elections may be employed as tools to perpetuate the power of undemocratic regimes.

Taking inspiration from Ottaway's analysis, this paper singles out a main category of «gray zone» regimes resulting from political transition. That of *semi-*

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p.604.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ OTTAWAY, M., *op. cit.*, p.13. Also, Ottaway argues that in absence of a true substratum of democratic ideas and organizations liberalization may lead to ethnic nationalism or religious fundamentalism. *Ibidem*, p.9.

authoritarian states, a political categorization that brightly captures the mutability of the «gray zone» and the regimes gravitating in it.

The most typical connotation of semi-authoritarian states lies in the existence within their political and institutional framework of a mechanism that effectively hinders the transfer of power through elections from the ruling elite to a new political group. As seen, there are three types of semi-authoritarian regimes: *regimes in equilibrium*, the most stable form of the semi-authoritarianism; *dynamic regimes*, a sort of 'enlightened' semi-authoritarianism; *decaying regimes*, the sick and worst version of semi-authoritarian regimes.

Nevertheless, the above arguments do not totally refute the first postulate of the classical doctrine of democratisation, as they do not say that democracy is not an outcome of political transition. In some cases it has been achieved⁴⁹ and it is indeed the most desirable result a political transition might produce

4. THE RWANDAN POLITICAL TRANSITION: A CASE IN POINT

The following two paragraphs focus on the recent Rwandan political transition (19 July, 1994 – 20 July, 2003). Specifically they describe the background and main facts of the Rwandan transition and its distinctive features.

4.1. Background and Basic Facts

The recent Rwandan political transition was heralded in by a previous transition that began in summer 1990 and ended in summer 1994. A brief analysis of this preceding transition (hereafter the first political transition) is in order to better understand the dynamics of the subsequent political change (hereafter the second political transition) the African country experienced through the summer of 2003.

The term *ad quo* of the first political transition, which importantly was to remain the same for the second transition, has been the single party rule of President Habyarimana and his Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND)⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ Carothers mentions that twenty out of one hundred 'transitional' countries achieved democracy. They include Central European and Baltic States, i.e. Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovenia, and few Latin American countries such as Chile and Uruguay. CAROTHERS, T., *op. cit.*, p.12.

⁵⁰ Habyarimana came to power in July 1973. See PRUNIER, G., *The Rwanda Crisis. History of a Genocide*, London, Hurst and Company, 1995, p.121. See also pp.74-92.

In July 1990, this regime, under pressure from the international community opened up to multipartitism⁵¹. Clearly, this reformist move by the Rwandan government set the beginning of the first political transition. However, this process of liberalisation did not positively impact the serious political and economical situation that the regime was facing since the second half of the 1980s⁵². Moreover, in October 1990 the situation was to be exacerbated by a violent development, that is, the invasion of the «Refugees Warriors»⁵³, sons of those Tutsi who had to flee Rwanda after the Hutu revolution of 1959-1961 and who re-organized themselves into the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Thus, in October 1990 Rwanda became the scene of a civil war, a civil war which under strong international pressure supposedly ended with the adoption of the Arusha Agreements of 4 August, 1993, signed by the RPF and the Rwandan government under the auspices of the OAU, Tanzania, France, the U.S.A. and Belgium.

Although the Accords were meant to endorse a compromise between the government, the opposition parties⁵⁴ and the RPF, they turned out to be a ‘pro forma agreement’ which did not provide for a ‘realistic’ redistribution of power between the actors concerned, that is a distribution of power which took into account the sensitivities of the political phase Rwanda was going through. In retrospect, it may be argued that the Agreements contained too many concessions to the RPF which were unacceptable to many Hutu extremists⁵⁵, precisely those belonging to the MRND itself, the Coalition pour la Défense de la République (CDR), the Interhamwe militias and the Presidential Guard⁵⁶. Hence, the provisions of the Arusha Agreements provoked violent dissatisfaction by the latter, led to the marginalization of the moderates, induced the splitting up of the

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p.89.

⁵² *Ibidem*, pp.84-90.

⁵³ LEMARCHAND, R., *op. cit.*, p.583.

⁵⁴ They were the Mouvement Démocratique Républicain (MDR), the Parti Social Démocrate (PSD), the Parti Libéral (PL).

⁵⁵ The RPF obtained as many ministerial seats as the MNRD including the Vice-Prime Minister seat and the Ministry of the Interior.

⁵⁶ LEMARCHAND, R., *op. cit.*, p.597; HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, New York, 1999, pp.125-126; PRUNIER, G., *The Rwanda Crisis. History of a Genocide*, *op. cit.*, p.166-174.

oppositions parties⁵⁷ and delivered the first Rwandan transition to the extremists⁵⁸. In addition, the murder of Burundi's President Ndadaye by a group of Tutsi soldiers on 21 October 1993 further worsened the explosive political climate. It sent a clear message to radical Hutus: the Tutsi would have never accepted Hutu rule within a government of national unity⁵⁹.

As is well known, Hutu extremists began to organize random killings of Tutsi civilians with the objective of disrupting the political transition and throwing Rwanda in an anarchist condition⁶⁰. In fact, «... they succeed(ed) beyond all expectations»⁶¹. They did not simply precipitate the country's descent into chaos: they were those responsible for its devastation. The spark that ignited the tragedy was the shooting down of president Habyarimana's plane on April 6, 1994. The genocide of Tutsi civilians and the killings of moderate Hutu politicians in the capital city followed.

The genocide impacted the first political transition profoundly. It marked its collapse and a dramatic change in the position of one of the actors of the compromise enshrined in the Arusha Agreements: the RPF turned from a negotiating party into a military victor. Structural factors contributed to the RPF's success: corruption, political assassinations and ethno-regional favoritism in the army and administration⁶².

The second political transition in Rwanda began on 19 July 1994, with the overthrow of the MRND regime by the RPF. It was proclaimed by the RPF itself when it took power and meant to last through 1999⁶³. Such duration of the political transition, also agreed upon by the other political parties⁶⁴ and incorporated in the Loi Fondamentale of 1995⁶⁵, constituted an expansion of the

⁵⁷ The opposition parties split up between moderates who supported power sharing with the RPF and those who firmly opposed that. Ethnic quarrels also contributed to the opposition's division. See LEMARCHAND, *op. cit.*, p.592. For a thorough overview on Rwanda opposition parties see PRUNIER, *op. cit.*, Chapters 4 and 5.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p.585.

⁶⁰ de WAAL, A., "The Genocidal State", in *The Times Literary Supplement*, London, 1 July 1994, pp.3-4, and PRUNIER, G., *The Rwanda Crisis. History of a Genocide*, *op. cit.*, p.169.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p.597.

⁶² LEMARCHAND, R., *op. cit.*, p.596. Military logistic support from Uganda was decisive as well.

⁶³ Déclaration du RPF du 17 juillet 1994, relative à la mise en place des institutions.

⁶⁴ They were the former opposition forces of the Habyarimana regime.

⁶⁵ Article 1 of the Law.

twenty-two months period provided by the Arusha Agreements. In this respect it is important to note that although in the initial phase of the transition driven by the RPF there was a return to the Agreements⁶⁶, this was not to foreshadow a continuation of the first political transition. Reference to the Agreements was merely formal: the RPF would have gradually deprived them of any validity. In 1999 the second political transition was further extended to July 20, 2003⁶⁷.

4.2. Features and Outcome of the Rwandan Political Transition

The second Rwandan political transition has presented some features that need to be analyzed in order to grasp what has happened and is happening politically in the country. They correspond to the distinguishing traits of a semi-authoritarian state within Ottaway's definition.

First and foremost, the Rwandan transition highlights the principal connotation of a semi-authoritarian regime, that is a blocked generation and transfer of political power. Stated differently, the political transition in Rwanda has not paved the way for the establishment of a governmental system in which there is a veritable alternation of power between the incumbent rulers and the opposition forces. Elections have been indeed held periodically but they have not heralded the setting up of a democracy. They have been systematically manipulated and heavily conditioned by the RPF in order to ensure its political victory. They have been instrumental to the perpetuation of the RPF's political monopoly and have made almost impossible to challenge it.

This is shown by the 2001 local elections, the 2003 presidential and parliamentary elections and the 2003 referendum on the draft Constitution. Although a thorough account of them is provided in the political chronicles of previous issues of the *Annuaire*, it is nonetheless worth, in order to corroborate the above points, bringing up, briefly, their flawed nature.

Thus, it has to be remarked that 2001 local elections, greeted by President Kagame as a significant step towards democratization, have presented highly thorny aspects that question the integrity of the vote itself. Namely, the fact that some candidates were 'persuaded' to withdraw from the elections while others were 'strongly encouraged' to run for them; that 45% of the ballot has had a

⁶⁶ Actually, it has to be stressed that during the early stages of the second PT the repartition of the National Assembly seats did conform to Article 62 of the Arusha Agreements.

⁶⁷ REYNTJENS, F., "La «Transition Politique» au Rwanda", *L'Afrique des Grands Lacs. Annuaire 2003-2004*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004, p.1.

single candidate; that voting procedures were cumbersome and the vote not secret⁶⁸.

On the other hand, the presidential elections of 2003 were characterized by intimidations, arrests and disappearances of individuals campaigning for opposition leaders. Moreover, some individuals were not able to run for the elections because the government had rejected their applications⁶⁹. Similarly to the local elections, the presidential vote was characterized by irregularities, frauds, and manipulations of electoral lists⁷⁰. They sanctioned President Kagame's re-election with 96% of the votes.

Besides, following the direct election of 53 representatives of the Parliament in September 2003 the RPF succeeded in controlling the legislative organ of Rwanda by obtaining 74% of the votes⁷¹. Such a striking result is explained by the fact that the majority of the parties in the parliament were somehow affiliated to the RPF. Precisely, some were RPF's electoral allies⁷², whereas others supported of President Kagame for the 2003 presidential elections. Also, the women representatives⁷³ were all RPF supporters⁷⁴.

Finally, the May 2003 referendum on the draft Constitution is a further example of the manipulative use the RPF has made of classical tools of democratic practice and performance. Suffice it to note that the referendum campaign supported the Constitution project 100%⁷⁵, and that there were, again, irregularities during the voting⁷⁶. Furthermore the percentage of votes that approved the project, amounting to 93%, looks, as in the case of the presidential

⁶⁸ See Human Rights Watch, *No Contest in Rwandan Elections. Many Officials Run Unopposed*, New York, March 2001.

⁶⁹ See REYNTJENS, F., "Rwanda, Ten Years On: from Genocide to Dictatorship", in *African Affairs*, vol. 103, 2004, p.186.

⁷⁰ MISSION D'OBSERVATION ÉLECTORALE DE L'UNION EUROPEENE, *Rwanda. Election présidentielle 25 août 2003. Elections législatives 29 et 30 septembre, 2 octobre 2003. Rapport final*.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p.186.

⁷² They were on the RPF's electoral list.

⁷³ They are half of the representatives. For further details surf the following website: http://yubanet.com/artman/publish/article_19089.shtml. (visited on 11 April, 2005).

⁷⁴ REYNTJENS F., "La «Transition Politique» au Rwanda", *op. cit.*, p.5.

⁷⁵ See International Crisis Group, *Fin de Transition au Rwanda: une libéralisation politique nécessaire*, Nairobi-Bruxelles, 13 novembre 2002.

⁷⁶ MISSION D'OBSERVATION ÉLECTORALE DE L'UNION EUROPEENE, *Referendum constitutionnel, Rwanda, 2003, Kigali*.

elections, strikingly high.

The second integral element of a semi-authoritarian state emphasised by the second political transition in Rwanda is the low level of institutionalisation and the very fact that state institutions are manipulated and deprived of their legitimacy and autonomy.

The manipulation and lack of legitimacy and independence of Rwandan institutions have resulted from the RPF's ability to exercise a capillary control of Rwandan institutions bringing about a tutsisation of the State.

The tutsisation of the Rwandan institutions started on the first day of the second political transition, (19 July 1994), when a new government was set up and presented as revert to the 1993 Arusha Agreements. The RPF's amendments⁷⁷ to the Accords, as reflected in the government structure, were its first indicative traits. The amendments provided for the attribution to the RPF of the ministerial seats that the Agreements had assigned to the MRND as well as the presidency of the country; the creation of a vice-president post taken on by Paul Kagame⁷⁸, the then RPF military commander and current President of Rwanda; the RPF's control on the Civil Service Ministry which, strategically, would have enabled it to influence all the appointments of the state administration⁷⁹. Thus, since the beginning of the political transition the government composition as set forth in the Arusha Agreements was not to be complied with. This breach continued, albeit gradually, in the years 1995-1998 and culminated in the February 1999 government reshuffle, which definitively sanctioned the end of the Accords' implementation and paved the way to a growingly monopolization of the executive body by the RPF⁸⁰. However, already before 1999 government staffing numbers proved the ongoing tutsisation of the African state. These figures are, alongside the data on the elections, extensively reported in the political chronicles of past issues of the *Annuaire*. Reference to some of them is nonetheless appropriate in this place as it will serve the purpose of giving a concrete and tangible dimension to the said tutsisation.

In this respect it is symptomatic for instance, that in 1998, 80% of the mayors were Tutsi, that among the high-ranking officials of the army and gendarmerie there was only one Hutu, that out of 18 permanent secretaries 14

⁷⁷ REYNTJENS, F., "Constitution-Making in Situations of Extreme Crises: the Case of Rwanda and Burundi", in *Journal of African Law*, 1996, pp.329-239.

⁷⁸ Kagame became President in April 2000. He is the first Tutsi president of the country.

⁷⁹ PRUNIER, *op. cit.*, p.329.

⁸⁰ REYNTJENS, F., "Rwanda, Ten Years on: From Genocide to Dictatorship", *op. cit.*, p.188.

were Tutsi while out of 18 prefects only 2 were Hutu⁸¹.

The RPF's consolidation of power continued into early 2000: it led the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, of Territorial Administration and Information. In the years 2002-2003 out of 17 Ministers of government 9 were Tutsi, and 6 were Hutu newcomers of the RPF⁸².

The tutsisation has also affected the Ministry of Justice this being testified by the fact that at the end of the 1990s the six Hutu counsellors of the Cour de Cassation and the Conseil d'Etat were dismissed, while the majority of the members of the Conseil Supérieur and the presidents of both the Court of Appeal and the Tribunal of First Instance were Tutsi⁸³.

Another worrisome feature of the political transition in Rwanda has been the systematic destruction of the real opposition party, the Mouvement Démocratique Républicain (MDR). This party has been accused of dividing the Rwandan society and as a result some of its members have been arrested or disappeared. Subsequently, the RPF has heavily influenced the composition of the party by replacing its leadership with personalities supportive of the government. The RPF's destructive strategy reached its climax in early 2000, when the party split up into two parties, one close to the RPF and the other very critical of its policies⁸⁴. In this regard, it is noteworthy that there is an external opposition to the Rwandan government composed of exiled Hutus and, significantly, Tutsi⁸⁵. Despite the fact that these groups are essentially bi-ethnic⁸⁶ and could not, therefore, constitute a threat for the national unity of Rwanda, (the accusation

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² *Ibidem*.

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁴ REYNTJENS, F., "Chronique politique du Rwanda et du Burundi, 2002-2003", *L'Afrique des Grands Lacs. Annuaire 2002-2003*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2003, p.3.

⁸⁵ The external opposition is made up by several groups such as the Forces de la Résistance pour la Démocratie, the Groupe d'Initiative pour le Dialogue, the Rassemblement pour le Retour des Réfugiés et de la Démocratie au Rwanda. For further details see RAFTI, M., "The Rwandan Political Opposition in Exile: a valid interlocutor vis-à-vis Kigali?", Discussion paper 2004-1, Institute of Development Policy and Management, University of Antwerp, available at http://www.ua.ac.be/main.asp?c=*IOBE&n=13150&ct=008770&e=t31123; RAFTI, M., "The Dismantling of the Rwandan Political Opposition in Exile", *L'Afrique des Grands Lacs. Annuaire 2003-2004*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2003, pp.23-43. See also Rafti's article in this issue of the Annuaire.

⁸⁶ They may have different perceptions about the political regime to be established in their country though. While some of them support the republican regime, others advocate the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. REYNTJENS, F., "Rwanda, Ten Years on: From Genocide to Dictatorship", *op. cit.*, pp.191-194.

made against the MDR), the government has never so far engaged in any kind of dialogue with them⁸⁷.

The government has adopted a destructive strategy not only against the main opposition party, but also against the independent press. Government authorities have blocked the release of certain issues of independent newspapers, while some members of their staff have been arrested or threatened with death⁸⁸. What is more, members of newspapers close to the RPF who have disapproved of Rwanda's involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been subjected to threats.

The RPF's attitude vis-à-vis the MDR and the independent press is symptomatic of the third distinguishing feature of semi-authoritarianism. Namely, the fact that the Rwandan civil society is jammed: either civil society organizations abide by government policy or they are out of the political arena⁸⁹. The case of local human rights NGOs that have denounced the gross violations of human rights committed by the RPF⁹⁰ is a further example in this respect: some of their members were compelled to leave the country⁹¹.

The case of the Rwandan League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LIPRODHOR) is emblematic, too. During the year 2003 the organisation withstood considerable pressure from the Rwandan authorities following the accusation of collaborating with the MDR in spreading a «divisionniste» ideology and being financed from abroad⁹². Moreover, on 24 June 2004 the Rwandan

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁸ The newspapers subject to the government interference are: *Umuseso*, *Indorerwamo* and *Le Tribun du Peuple*.

⁸⁹ International Crisis Group, *Fin de Transition au Rwanda: une libéralisation politique nécessaire*; *op. cit.*, pp.11-17; WIERZYNSKA, A., "Consolidating Democracy Through Transitional Justice: Rwanda's Gacaca Courts", *New York University Law Review*, vol. 79.5, November 2004, pp.1951-1954.

⁹⁰ It is alleged that the RPF committed gross violations of human rights prior to, during and after the civil war of April-July 1994. Also, it is alleged that the RPF is responsible for serious violations of human rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo. For further details see Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2002, Rwanda*, available at <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k2/africa9.html> (visited on 12 April 2005), and *World Report 2003, Rwanda*, <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k3/africa9.html> (visited on 12 April 2005).

⁹¹ REYNTJENS, F., "Rwanda, Ten Years on: From Genocide to Dictatorship", *op. cit.*, pp.184-185.

⁹² The accusation against LIPRODHOR was made by an *ad hoc* parliamentary commission charged with the investigation of the situation of the MDR. See LIPRODHOR, *La Liprodhor proteste...*, Kigali, 16 avril 2003.

Parliament voted a resolution asking for LIPRODHOR's dissolution⁹³. Subsequently, in September 2004 the RPF convened a «special General Assembly» of LIPRODHOR which approved the creation of a «... Conseil d'Administration» parallel to that which usually runs the organisation and excluded LIPRODHOR founding members from the new body⁹⁴. What is further disconcerting, following the above developments, LIPRODHOR's activists operating in Kampala have disappeared⁹⁵.

4.3. From Decaying Semi-Authoritarianism to Full Authoritarianism

The above analysis does not merely point to the semi-authoritarian traits of the Rwandan state. It tells more than that. It also allows the inference that during the second political transition the Rwandan regime has presented elements that characterise it as a decaying semi-authoritarian state that eventually, by the end of the transition period, has reverted to full authoritarianism.

It is extremely difficult to place the institutional evolution the Rwanda state during the decade summer 1994-summer 2003 in a chronological framework, mainly because the building up of the semi-authoritarian and authoritarian regimes has occurred gradually during the political transition.

Tentatively, the three distinguishing features of a semi-authoritarian state may be regarded as 'qualitative indicators' of the shift from semi-authoritarianism in decay to full authoritarianism. It may be argued then, on the basis of the data and numbers provided above, that the semi-authoritarian traits of the Rwanda regime emerged with the 2001 local elections. The latter actually made plain that the transfer of political power was jammed and that the RPF was able to heavily manipulate the electoral process in order to ensure its victory. This trend has been confirmed and consolidated during the 2003 presidential elections as well as the referendum on the draft constitution. These electoral processes have shown that the RPF's hold to power is not only very strong but unchallengeable.

In addition to that, the systematic and more and more explicit manipulation of state institutions and shutting down of the Rwandan civil society have turned the African state in a decaying semi-authoritarian regime. They are symptomatic of a growing authoritarian trend, of a rising shift of political power in favour of

⁹³ RESEAU INTERNATIONAL POUR LA PROMOTION ET LA DEFENCE DES DROITS DES L'HOMME AU RWANDA, Déclaration sur l'Evolution de la Situation de la LIPRODHOR, Lyon, 19 septembre 2004.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*. Also, some LIPRODHOR members went into exile.

the ruling elites which has become unequivocal since the beginning of the year 2000.

By the end of the transition, the *incremental effect* of the above trend has produced an authoritarian state and more specifically state in which there is a *de facto* one-party ruling. This is testified by the dramatic accentuation of the distinguishing features of semi-authoritarianism: the coercive and intimidator character of the presidential elections, which has grown more blatant than in the case of the local elections and placed the RPF's power beyond any challenge; the striking results of the most recent electoral competitions Rwanda has held which have sanctioned the absolute dimension of the RPF political power; the all-encompassing manipulation of state institutions; the more and more explicitly violent and repressive way in which the RPF has succeeded in neutralising the civil society.

5. CONCLUSIONS

An understanding of what is actually happening in Rwanda from a political point of view is aided with the application of the new conceptual framework of political transition to the transition recently undergone by the African country.

According to the new theoretical structure put forward in this paper political transition is a temporal phase of extraordinary political change during which a given political regime is replaced by a new one. Typically, political transition is set in motion by violent occurrences like warfare and social conflict. The latter determine the way in which political change will proceed assuming the shape either of reform, compromise or overthrow.

The second Rwandan political transition does fit into the above conceptual framework. The regime that was to be removed in its aftermath was the MRND rule. A regime, it is important to recall, that in 1990 engaged in a process of liberalization entailing the introduction of multi-party politics and freedom of the press. Thus, a regime that was opening up to democratisation is the term *ad quo* of the Rwandan political transition.

The spark of Rwanda's transition has been a violent occurrence, one of the most dreadful and tragic occurrences a country may cope with. The genocide of 1994 marked the failure and end of the first political transition and simultaneously set the beginning of the second. It induced the transformation of the RPF from one of the negotiating parties of the Arusha «marathon»⁹⁶ into an armed

⁹⁶ PRUNIER, *op. cit.*, p.159.

opposition that was able to assume control of the country. As a consequence, an overthrow is at the origin of the second political transition in Rwanda. This is a very important point: it means that the RPF would have had the widest discretion in leading the second political transition.

The theoretical framework of political transition has also emphasised the existence of some very important factors that impact political change. Structural factors facilitate the establishment of certain regimes. Indeed, in the case of Rwanda the RPF would have not succeeded in seizing Kigali had structural factors such as corruption, political assassination and ethno-regional favoritism in the army and administration been absent.

The choice-factor, namely the substantial choices made during a period of dramatic political change, on the other hand, decisively influences the direction a political transition may take. It may be argued that the fact that the RPF turned its back on the Arusha Agreements and opted for military action completely disrupted the course of the first Rwandan PT and determined the path of the second.

The new analytical framework includes a further component of political transition: its main actors. These are the ruling party, the opposition groups, the international community, and the external opposition. In the Rwandan case, it is, indeed, fair to maintain that the main actors of the transition have been the RPF and the MRND.

The outcome of the political transition of Rwanda is not, consistently enough with the new conceptual framework, a democratic regime. It is a regime that during the transition itself has gravitated in the «gray zone» and which may be safely defined as a semi-authoritarian regime in decay. There are three main distinguishing characteristics that identify an authoritarian regime: the impossibility of a real alternation of power between political groups due to a mechanism that effectively obstructs transfer of political power, the low degree of institutionalization and manipulation of state institutions, and a blocked civil society. As shown in the previous paragraph, these three elements are all present in the political regime originated during the Rwanda political transition. Moreover, the fact that they have highlighted a strong authoritarian tendency has allowed the qualification of the Rwandan state as a decaying semi-authoritarian regime. It is thus safe to maintain that the RPF has so far succeeded in preventing the transfer of political power to other political actors. In fact, in Rwanda political power is not generated by genuine elections but through non-institutionalized dynamics developing outside the framework of political bodies and procedures. The RPF has systematically manipulated and conditioned elections, as well as the

referendum on the Constitution project, to prevent its power being challenged and transferred to other political groups. It has done that by using all available means: pressurizing and intimidating the candidates of the opposition, strongly imposing the direction of the campaigns, impairing the voting procedure and the legitimacy of its results. Also, it has gained an almost absolute control of state institutions through tutisisation, and indeed *RPF-isation*. Moreover, it has weakened and divided the sole real opposition party and deprived it of its most prominent leaders. Last but not least, the RPF has managed to block the civil society and in doing that it has used quite explicit methods such as arrests, intimidations, and disappearances of those individuals who dared to criticize the government.

Rwanda is not only a decaying semi-authoritarian regime, but it has turned, by the end of its transition, into an authoritarian regime following a significant accentuation of the above semi-authoritarian traits. The more and more coercive campaigns which have paved the way to the electoral processes held in the country, especially the presidential elections, the striking results of these elections and constitution referendum, the explicitly violent and repressive way in which the RPF is dealing with the opposition and the civil society has indeed brought about the establishment of a *de facto* one party-rule system⁹⁷. Furthermore, structural factors such as the fragile economic situation of the country⁹⁸ and a society «... maimed beyond recognition»⁹⁹ in the aftermath of the genocide facilitate the regime's consolidation. The counter-balancing factors that may come into play are external to the country. One would be a more incisive and firmer role of the international community, and another, arguably, a more propulsive action by the external bi-ethnic opposition.

The international community might actually introduce a new course in the political reality of Rwanda and pave the way to a sustainable democratic system. This would entail a change in its current way of dealing with the country which, apart from providing economic aid and technical assistance, is merely dictated by concerns for Rwanda's military involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo and which in the long term may result too short-sighted¹⁰⁰. In other words, the international community might foster major political change in the African

⁹⁷ This is held also by Reyntjens, in REYNTJENS, F., "La «Transition Politique» au Rwanda", *op. cit.*, p.5.

⁹⁸ International Monetary Fund, *Rwanda: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Annual Progress Report*, IMF Country report No.05/127, April 2005.

⁹⁹ LEMARCHAND, R., *op. cit.*, p.585.

¹⁰⁰ HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, *Democratic Republic of Congo: Eastern Congo Ravaged*, available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/drc/Drc005.htm>, (visited on 23 May 2005).

country by seriously pressurising the Rwandan government to allow true multipartitism and political freedoms, adopt a more liberal attitude toward the civil society and commit itself to respect for human rights. Importantly, the international community should couple these request with a constant and strict monitoring of Rwanda's compliance with them and sanctions for possible infringements and discrepancies.

The external opposition, or better one of its members, has recently shown the will to foster a new political phase in the country and to breach its authoritarian features. The March 2005 Rome Statement by the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR)¹⁰¹ goes in this very direction. By pledging to give up «... la lutte armée»¹⁰², disarm and come back to Rwanda in order to contribute constructively to its political life, the FDLR has posed to the Rwandan government the great challenge of opening the political space in the country.

Thus, by beginning with the crisis of a regime that was initiating liberalisation and culminating in the establishment of an authoritarian state, the Rwandan political transition points to a new element to be introduced to the new conceptual framework of political transition. That is, political shift *may originate from a regime other than an authoritarian one*, indeed a political regime that has been experiencing a process of opening towards democratisation¹⁰³, and subsequently regress to full authoritarianism.

Antwerp, June 2005

¹⁰¹ The Declaration is available at http://fdlr.online.info/comm/Declaration_des_FRDL_Rome_Mars2005.htm (visited on 20 May 2005).

¹⁰² *Ibidem*.

¹⁰³ For an analysis of the MRND's opening toward democratization see HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, *op. cit.*, pp.47-64 and PRUNIER, *op. cit.*, p.169.