

Introduction

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This special issue of *African Studies Quarterly* is devoted to human rights and governance in Africa. The articles that follow were presented in July 1998 at the 14th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (ICAES), Williamsburg, Virginia, in a session entitled "Towards Justice, Peace, and Human Rights: Anthropological Perspectives." I had the pleasure and honor of organizing and chairing the session.

The issues of human rights and governance are of central concern to all Africans and to all those who wish Africa well. The contributors to this special publication fall into the latter category.

In her provocative contribution, Diana Fox, an anthropologist at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, addresses women's rights issues within the African context. She argues that efforts to make human rights programs sympathetic to women's concerns, such as violence and gender discrimination, inevitably present a challenge to the traditional view that rights are rooted in a specific cultural context. Her article offers a multi-disciplinary perspective on the universality/relativity debate, exploring the implications for rethinking the anthropological position on human rights, by reporting on a collection of essays, entitled "Women's Rights as Human Rights: Activism and Social Change in Africa." Fox selects the example of Somali women refugees in Kenya to demonstrate the problems of implementing the rights of women refugees and examines some solutions to the dilemma. Fox maintains that the myriad of concerns spawned by the recent prominence of women's rights issues in diverse African societies contributes to a theoretical analysis of human rights that pushes anthropology past the long-standing universality/relativity deadlock.

Elliot Skinner, Professor Emeritus of Columbia University and former U.S. Ambassador to Upper Volta, argues that African countries will continue to be racked by conflict unless they develop political cultures consonant with their own traditions and accept the norm of distributing their resources equitably. Dictates about "liberal democracy" only lead to disemia, a process by which African leaders pay lip service to hegemonies, manipulate elections, or worse. Skinner encourages anthropologists to challenge the prescriptions of political scientists and the biases of many others. He also encourages them to use their greater knowledge of African societies to join the debate about how these societies can best deal with what are becoming global realities.

Henri J.M. Claessen, Professor Emeritus of Leiden University and Vice-President of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, addresses the problem of legislation and adjudication in early states, offering examples from Africa and other parts of the

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world. He discusses the problems of legitimacy and governance, especially in the context of multi-ethnic populations. For some of his generalizations, he draws upon a previous study of twenty-one early states.

My own modest contribution deals with Rwanda and the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). That Tribunal has recently made significant progress in apprehending and prosecuting high ranking persons responsible for the 1994 genocide of Tutsi and moderate Hutu in Rwanda. The ICTR's first complete case, the case against Rwandan ex-premier Jean Kambanda, is extremely important for learning the truth about what happened in Rwanda during those fateful 100 days in 1994. Kambanda's extensive confession should dispel forever any doubts about the occurrence of an intentionally orchestrated genocide in Rwanda. Kambanda, the first person in history to accept responsibility for genocide before an international court, did so fifty years after the UN adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948).

The contributors to this special issue of *African Studies Quarterly* collectively dedicate our work to the people of Africa.