

BOOKS

• OUR REVIEWERS •

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There is a darkness gathering

Paul Kagame is the most ruthless politician operating in Africa today

JAMES ROBERTS

Do Not Disturb: The Story of a Political Murder and an African Regime Gone Bad

MICHELA WRONG

(FOURTH ESTATE, 512 PP, £20)

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THE TITLE of Michela Wrong's riveting and deeply disturbing account of the rise to power of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and its leader, Paul Kagame – Rwandan president since 2000 and de facto national leader since 1994, is taken from the notice hung on the door of a South African hotel room. Inside was the body of Kagame's former intelligence chief, Patrick Karegeya, murdered by agents of his government on 1 January 2014. There is another dimension to this title, which unfolds over the course of the narrative.

Wrong, long-established as one of the most authoritative writers on Africa, takes us on a journey that starts in Uganda with the Tutsi refugee community in the 1980s. These exiles joined with Yoweri Museveni's rebels on his route to the presidency in 1986. The strength of their ambition to return to their unfamiliar homeland and reclaim power from the Hutu administration took Museveni by surprise in 1990, when they mounted an abortive invasion under the charismatic Fred Rwigyema. By 1994, the year of the genocide, he was less surprised.

Most observers' familiarity with Rwandan history probably begins and ends with the genocide in which 800,000 Tutsis and "moderate" Hutus were slain by Hutus, many turning their garden hoes, or *kafuni*, into brutal murder weapons. But Wrong's focus on the Tutsi exiles in the first half of the book is an essential preliminary for our understanding of how and why the genocide happened and, equally importantly, of its aftermath.

APPLYING meticulous scrutiny to seminal moments, she then examines who was responsible for the event that triggered the genocide and changed the history of the Great Lakes: the shooting down over Kigali on 6 April 1994 of the plane carrying Hutu president, Juvénal Habyarimana. Wrong points the finger decisively and, for many, uncomfortably, at Paul Kagame's RPF.

In the following weeks, the world stood by



PHOTO: MICHAEL BROCHSTEIN, ZUMA/ALAMY

Paul Kagame

as indescribable slaughter ensued. Then the RPF marched in and ended the genocide, driving hundreds of thousands of *genocidaires* into camps in neighbouring Zaire. The international community, riddled with guilt for its failure to intervene, abased itself in gratitude before Paul Kagame.

What the world first of all didn't know, and then steadfastly refused to acknowledge, was that Rwanda was now being ruled by a man vividly depicted by Wrong as a psychopathic murderer.

Kagame has ended the lives not only of Hutus in their thousands, but also of fellow Tutsis who might represent any kind of challenge to his supremacy. One of Wrong's intelligence sources said his methods recalled those of Lavrentiy Beria, Stalin's secret police chief.

Apart from the seeming relish with which Kagame reads out the names of those he has decided must die, he is not disinclined to deliver physical assaults himself, described by Wrong in stupefying detail. Despite their protestations of "innocence", for example, Kagame decided that his finance director and an army captain must be punished for purchasing curtains from a shop without financial links to the RPF. He called five soldiers into the room, carrying sticks. Ordering the finance director and captain to lie on the floor, he proceeded to beat them with the sticks till he

was tired, then told the soldiers to continue, which they did for another half an hour. The former finance director, Kalisa Mupende, died in jail in September 2019. The captain became a peasant farmer.

In the village of Kibeho in the early 1980s, a schoolgirl called Alphonsine and two of her fellow pupils reported apparitions of the Virgin Mary and visions of rotting corpses, rivers of blood, and men chopping off heads and hacking at bodies. A decade later, after the 1994 genocide, 350,000 Hutus were held in a stretch of south-western Rwanda known as the safe humanitarian zone. On 18 April 1995, when international adulation of the RPF was at its height, Rwandan soldiers surrounded 150,000 people in one of the camps at Kibeho and started firing at them, first with rifles, then with machine guns and mortars. Between 4,000 and 8,000 men, women and children were massacred, according to the Australian Medical Corps. Wrong itemises numerous similar atrocities for which there was zero accountability, along with habitual interventions in neighbouring Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo that left thousands of innocent people dead. Reliable estimates of post-genocide deaths at the hands of the RPF number some 500,000 people.

FORMER intelligence chief Patrick Karegeya's familiarity with murder and bloodshed eventually wore him down. In April 2006, Wrong introduced him to John le Carré, who was in the Great Lakes to research his book, *The Mission Song*. Le Carré remarked afterwards: "Your friend ... I fear he will be rubbed out. There's a darkness gathering over him." On 1 January 2014, behind a door with a Do Not Disturb sign on the handle, le Carré was proved right.

Meanwhile, for decades, Rwanda has been propped up by aid injections from successive US and UK administrations, with outsiders including Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Jeffrey Sachs, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the World Bank and the IMF all persuaded to collaborate financially with Kagame. Their benign view of the Rwandan president declares to the world, "Do Not Disturb".

According to Johnnie Carson, US ambassador to Uganda in the 1980s, "Paul Kagame is without doubt the most ruthless politician operating in Africa today", who lashes out "in the way of a green mamba" when challenged.

Kagame has legally established his right to rule Rwanda until 2034.