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# CURRENT BOOKS

REVIEWS OF NEW AND NOTEWORTHY NONFICTION

## The Great African Hope

*Reviewed by G. Pascal Zachary*

EVEN THE MOST ARDENT ADVOCATE FOR democracy must admit that elections in Africa are messy, prone to fraud, and often merely a prelude to violence. In January, Kenya exploded after reports of vote tampering cast doubt on the results of a presidential election. Robert Mugabe, tyrant of Zimbabwe, has made a mockery of his country's elections. In Cameroon, Paul Biya, already in power for a quarter-century, wants the chance to rig one more election.

These are but three recent instances of electoral failure in sub-Saharan Africa. Though popular dissent and political mobilization are increasing in much of the region, national elections often embarrass liberal democrats. Most informed observers remain persuaded that Africa suffers from too little democracy. But on a continent where many people are poor, might other forms of government promote the kind of development that would lift more Africans out of poverty more quickly? Should international aid donors and well-wishers re-examine their insistence on liberal democracy?

Many African leaders, of course, already question the appropriateness of American-style democratic institutions for their

countries. They openly admire the "soft authoritarian" leaders of Asia for combining nationalist feeling and tight political controls with impressive national economic growth.

In Africa, Rwandan president Paul Kagame is widely regarded as the continent's foremost enlightened autocrat. A former rebel leader who helped to end the 1994 genocide against his minority Tutsi ethnic group, Kagame has, through equal measures of personal rectitude and political repression, brought stability to his mountainous country in central Africa. His rule provides the clearest test case in Africa of whether an enlightened authoritarianism can produce better results than liberal democracy.

That question animates an intelligent new book on Kagame and Rwanda, *A Thousand Hills*, by Stephen Kinzer, a former *New York Times* correspondent and distinguished writer on international affairs. Kinzer views Kagame as the embodiment of

### A THOUSAND HILLS:

Rwanda's Rebirth  
and the Man Who  
Dreamed It.

*By Stephen Kinzer.  
Wiley. 380 pp. \$25.95*

### WHEN THINGS FELL APART:

State Failure in  
Late-Century Africa.

*By Robert H. Bates.  
Cambridge Univ.  
Press. 216 pp.  
\$60, \$19.99 paper*

the new Rwanda, and his book is as much a biography of the president as an account of the country's trials. Kagame is in many ways easy to admire. He is hard on government ministers who commit improprieties, and he drives his own children to school and attends their sports events—unusual displays of attention by an African father.

But the inevitable weakness of Kinzer's approach is that Kagame is treated *too* sympathetically. Interspersed throughout the narrative are long quotes from Kinzer's interviews with Kagame, self-serving monologues that contain no revelations and scant candor, at best merely

repeating views

Kagame has expressed elsewhere over the past decade.

Kinzer depicts Kagame as a sober and effective political leader of unusual vision and discipline, but concedes that he is

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controversial. Impatient with critics and unwilling to listen even to his supporters, Kagame is effectively a dictator. He models himself after Lee Kwan Yew, the stern leader whose uncanny grasp of economic affairs catapulted Singapore into global prominence and prosperity after he helped the city-state achieve independence in 1959.

Kagame hopes to lead Rwanda on a similar path, though ethnic tensions remain a major obstacle to progress. Only 51 years old, the Rwandan president plans to stand for reelection in 2010 and is likely to rule until at least 2017. When I visited last year, I found Kagame—and the Tutsi elites who control the country's government machinery—devoted to a convenient and durable fiction. Ethnic groups, they say, no longer exist in Rwanda; to speak of ethnicity even in a constructive way is to invite government repression and accusations of disloyalty. Kinzer himself notes that ethnic consciousness is the "strongest" of the "taboos in today's Rwanda." Yet in private, Tutsi leaders implicitly keep alive their own eth-

nic identity by insisting, "Never again." Post-ethnicity is an effective tactic rather than a heartfelt ideal.

**T**he prime directive of the new Rwanda—and Kagame's strongman rule—is to avoid another genocide. Tutsi security is more important than justice or economic growth. In this sense, Rwanda is following the path of Israel, another nation founded in the aftermath of genocide. In Kagame's mind, Rwanda is a kind of African Israel that deserves the world's sympathy and support even while its political leaders repress critics at home—and tell carping outsiders to shove it as well. Because foreigners abandoned Rwanda's Tutsis in 1994, Kagame feels justified in tuning them out today whenever he sees fit (notwithstanding the generous foreign aid flowing to Rwanda). He is especially dismissive of human rights critics and democracy advocates who often accurately identify abuses in Rwandan society. Kagame's position is accepted, indeed admired in some quarters both at home and abroad, for the simple reason that genocide lends moral credibility—and an outsized sense of entitlement—to the guardians of the victims.

Kinzer is strangely reticent on whether Kagame, the chief African beneficiary of what might be called a "holocaust dividend," is investing the proceeds wisely. A lot rides on the question. If Kagame can foster rapid economic growth in Rwanda, then his brand of authoritarian politics may deserve wider support. But if he cannot, he risks becoming simply another geriatric African president willing to risk the ruin of his country rather than retire.

Kinzer seems unfamiliar with the main economic currents in sub-Saharan Africa, confining most of his book to politicking. After decades of promoting industrialization as the means of economic salvation, most forward-looking Africans today recognize that agriculture holds the key to poverty reduction and national wealth. Countries as diverse as Kenya and Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia, depend heavily for their prosperity on the growth of commercial agriculture, including



President Paul Kagame used a strong hand to unite Rwanda after the 1994 genocide. Can that same hand guide Rwanda to economic success?

both export-oriented agribusiness and energized subsistence farmers who are growing additional crops for the markets.

Kagame, unfortunately, remains relatively uninterested in farming. He prefers the delicious dream of jump-starting a world-class Rwandan knowledge industry built on services such as consulting, telephone call centers, and information technology. Working against him are Rwanda's lack of skilled labor, a weak educational system, and paltry investment by world-class corporations. Kagame also enthuses about processing and packaging local farm products for shipment to Europe and the Middle East. The problem is that Rwanda doesn't have adequate production volumes to compete with much larger African neighbors that grow the same crops, hold better geographic positions, and have a substantial lead in the marketplace. If you factor out large aid flows and remittances by Rwandans living outside Africa, it's arguable whether the country's economy is even growing.

In need of a breakthrough, Kagame might do better to embrace biotechnology in order to

quickly and dramatically increase the productivity of Rwanda's farmers. As political scientist Robert Paarlberg recently argued in *Starved for Science* (2008), African governments are losing big by not doing so. They have caved in to pressure, exerted chiefly by European environmentalists, to ban genetically modified organisms—plants that are engineered to produce higher yields or to resist pests and diseases.

Kagame's near-total authority in Rwanda makes possible radical shifts in policy—the sort of stuff made legendary in Mahathir Mohamad's Malaysia and Lee's Singapore. Rwanda's small farmers—80 percent of the population—would benefit enormously. His failure to pursue biotech casts doubt on his flair for economic improvisation.

Robert Bates's *When Things Fell Apart* raises more serious doubts. Bates, a professor of government at Harvard, reviews the failures of African governments over the past few decades, demonstrating a strong link between the push for democratization and the failure of governments to deliver the goods. "Electoral competition and state failure go together," he

shrewdly observes, noting that in numerous African countries—Rwanda among them—where democratic reforms threatened established regimes, political disorder resulted. Certainly in Kagame's view, three and a half decades of majority rule appear to have led inexorably to genocide. Bates's argument, however, is nuanced. He suggests that repression may prevent disorder—and thus deliver Africans physical security—but without delivering prosperity. "Poverty," he concludes, "becomes the price of security."

Kinzer breathlessly presents Kagame as capable of leading an economic transformation, and of being the one great hope of Africa. Pulling Rwanda out of poverty, he says, is Kagame's "obsession." But good intentions are not enough.

Kinzer writes: "The reason Africa remains so far behind the developed world is not simply bad leadership. It is also because the challenges facing African countries are overwhelming. Uniting deeply divided societies and radically changing the mentality of entire populations are immensely difficult. Rwanda is an indigent society, crippled by generations of misrule. Turning it into a happy, stable, prosperous place is a task of Herculean dimensions."

That task is not Kagame's alone. The saga of his country—and of Africa—is a staggering work in progress.

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## Married to the Muse

*Reviewed by Kate Christensen*

THE LIBRARY OF ART HISTORY IS RIFE WITH biographies of The Artist—whomever he might be—as a young, middle-aged, old, and immortal man. But rarely does a book deal primarily with the woman he painted over and over, the ordinary model-wife whose face an artist immortalized in paint or bronze. Rarer still is the book that focuses on three such women and reveals them as biographical subjects in their own right.

*Hidden in the Shadow of the Master* is Ruth Butler's masterfully researched examination of the lives of Hortense Fiquet, Camille Doncieux, and Rose Beuret, the three women who modeled for, bore sons to, lived in poverty with, and eventually married three of the towering artistic geniuses of their time: Paul Cézanne, Claude Monet, and Auguste Rodin, respectively. All were ordinary girls plucked from the streets of Paris by their future husbands, hand-picked, apparently, with an eye toward muse-dom. Though they figure prominently in their

husbands' paintings and sculptures, beyond these evocations of their changing expressions, modes of dress, settings, and periods of life, little of substance was known about any of them before now.

Butler argues convincingly that her subjects are important to the history of art, and not for their faces and figures alone. At the turn of the 20th century, traditional artistic subjects, taken from myth, the Bible, and history, were giving way to a more quotidian, social, realistic mode. That Cézanne, Monet, and Rodin chose as their models the women they lived with was a revolutionary shift: The domestic and aesthetic became connected in an entirely new way. "These women," Butler writes, "weren't just models; they brought a whole spectrum of feelings with them, giving their husbands' art emo-

### HIDDEN IN THE SHADOW OF THE MASTER:

The Model-Wives of Cézanne, Monet, and Rodin.

By Ruth Butler.  
Yale Univ. Press.  
354 pp. \$35