

than one generation to overcome it. In Burundi the situation was different. The Rwandans tried to address the ethnic problem by denying its existence and annulling any reference to ethnicity in all official documents; probably they had no other choice, even if denying the existence of a problem does not mean solving it. The Burundians had a choice, and were able to negotiate and conclude an agreement clearly on an ethnic basis. The idea was to assume the role of ethnicity in order to surmount it later. This formula proved to be wise, and the ethnic issue, which was fundamental during the transition period, was put aside at the time of elections. Today Burundi has an elected president and parliament and a multiethnic army, and the memory of the ethnic conflicts seems to be far away.

This does not mean that all the Burundian problems have been solved. The political situation is still volatile, even though by early 2009 negotiations with the Forces nationales de libération (FNL) appeared promising. Meanwhile the structural problems concerning the imbalance between population density and the availability of resources continue to exacerbate the interethnic relationship, even if the positive results of the International Conference on Peace Security and Development in the Great Lakes Region could provide a useful frame for addressing this crucial issue.

But despite all these problems the results already achieved can give us good reason to be optimistic for the future. This book provides a background understanding to a pivotal period in that long process.

Aldo Ajello

*Former European Union Representative to  
the African Great Lakes Region*

**Stephen Kinzer. *A Thousand Hills: Rwanda's Rebirth and the Man Who Dreamed It*.** New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2008. xiii + 380 pp. Map. Bibliography. Index. \$28.99. Cloth.

The journalist Stephen Kinzer has written a disappointing book about the man who rules Rwanda, President Paul Kagame. Kinzer presents Kagame as a model for other African leaders to emulate and Western ones to admire. Although not a contribution to Rwanda scholarly literature, *A Thousand Hills* will be widely read by Western audiences; from this partial portrait many will be willing to accept Kinzer's unsubstantiated conclusion that Kagame is a leader who cares deeply about his people and their development.

The book appears on the surface to be a balanced account of the man who has brought peace and security to a once-troubled country. In fact, it is a naïve portrait of Kagame as a leader who, the author claims, "could inspire and even transform the wider world" (8). Kinzer's account of Kagame's life and the influences on his leadership style starts with the flight of Kagame's family to neighboring Uganda during a "practice genocide" in 1959 (11). Kagame's difficult upbringing in the refugee camps of south-

ern Uganda and his role in the 1980s civil war that brought his former friend Yoweri Museveni to power there are recounted to show the roots of Kagame's indefatigable work ethic and commitment to self-reliance. Kinzer praises Kagame's return to Rwanda in 1990 as the head of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF—then a rebel group, now Rwanda's ruling party) in a failed attempt to overthrow militarily the authoritarian regime of President Juvénal Habyarimana. Eventually, Kagame and his RPF successfully stopped the 1994 genocide, saving innumerable Tutsi lives.

Still, much is left out. For example, in detailing Kagame's family's exile at the time of Rwanda's independence, Kinzer describes these events as solely a product of ethnic hatred; but he ignores the history of the kingdom, the politics of ethnicity under colonial rule, and the class-based nature of the violence at that time. In explaining why the RPF returned to Rwanda when it did, Kinzer ignores the fact that the Ugandan government encouraged the departure of the Rwandan refugees, Kagame among them, because they had become a political liability.

In this selective presentation, Kinzer relies almost exclusively on themes identified and elucidated by Kagame in their "more than thirty hours of interviews" (xi). We learn little of the man himself; instead, readers are treated to Kinzer's uncritical interpretation of Kagame's reflections on Rwandan history and its legacy of ethnic violence and authoritarian rule. Relying on Kagame's perspective produces a one-sided account that ignores the careful analysis of the sizeable literature on Rwandan society—despite the inclusion of some important texts in his English-only bibliography, including Danielle de Lame's *A Hill among a Thousand* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), René Lemarchand's *Rwanda and Burundi* (Pall Mall, 1970), Catharine Newbury's *The Cohesion of Oppression* (Columbia University Press, 1988), and Jan Vansina's *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2004). Instead, Kinzer encourages readers to accept the image of Kagame as a benevolent and thoughtful leader, quoting comments from foreign diplomats and aid workers—among them Bill Clinton, Bill Gates, and Howard Schultz of Starbucks. Indeed Kinzer seems star-struck by foreign dignitaries with no experience or expertise in the country, its history, or its social complexities.

Kinzer also offers a ruling-party perspective in speaking with Rwandans. Most of his interlocutors are appointed local government officials, who parrot Kagame's language of state security and national reconciliation. By ascribing the views of urban political and economic elites to the Rwandan population at large, Kinzer mirrors the mistake of many outsiders when analyzing postgenocide Rwanda (an issue explored in Johan Pottier's *Re-imagining Rwanda* [Cambridge University Press, 2002]). Yet any authoritarian élite presents itself as benevolent. In his commentary on Kagame's authoritarian rule, Kinzer writes guilelessly that ordinary peasant Rwandans "have little interest in politics or ideology. Most sense their lives are slowly improving. They are happy that President Kagame has centralized so much power

in his own hands and are not fearful that he is becoming a dictator" (331). Those familiar with the conditions of rural Rwanda today would find each of those sentences problematic. In speaking for ordinary Rwandans rather than with them, Kinzer misses an opportunity to include the perspectives of those subject to Kagame's authoritarian rule and policies. Had Kinzer spoken with ordinary Rwandans, the 90 percent of the population who rely on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood, he would have found that few admire Kagame's leadership and even fewer have benefited from the country's relatively high rates of economic growth as measured in national statistics alone. Kinzer also fails to grasp that Kagame's postgenocide policies favor the urban elite, many of whom were exiles who returned to live in Rwanda only after the genocide.

*A Thousand Hills* falls far short of its stated goal of explaining Paul Kagame's road to power; it simply reports the assertions of those in power. It is a pity that many people seeking to understand Rwanda will read this book without realizing that it is little more than government propaganda.

Susan M. Thomson  
 Dalhousie University  
 Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

**Carina Tertsakian. *Le Château: The Lives of Prisoners in Rwanda*.** London: Arves Books, 2008. 499 pp. Photographs. Maps. Notes. Appendixes. Bibliography. Index. £20. Paper.

*Le Château* is a brave book, providing a rare and astonishingly detailed glimpse inside Rwandan prisons. Each chapter covers a specific aspect of prison life, such as religion, leisure, justice, and prisoner families. Throughout, Tertsakian provides excerpts from the two hundred interviews she and her team conducted in five prisons. The voices of prisoners evince a range of emotions, personalities, and coping strategies.

The book does not rely on statistics to tell its story, though the numbers are bleak. Following the Rwandan Patriotic Front's takeover of the country in 1994, the prisons filled quickly, exceeding their capacity many times over. Because the civil war and genocide had decimated the judicial system, the new government had no way to "sift" the guilty from the innocent (351). The result was not only an explosion in the prison population, but also a humanitarian disaster. Soldiers, who regularly beat prisoners and visitors alike, ran the prisons until civilians took over in 1995–96. So harsh were the conditions in the first years after the war that many prisoners remembered the exact day when the Red Cross arrived to provide soap and other essentials, which it continued to do until 2004.

Tertsakian's observations of relational life are equally illuminating. Prisoners have meticulously re-created the same hierarchies of power and status that condition life on the outside. Prisoners quite literally run the pris-