

**Kimonyo, Jean-Paul, *Transforming Rwanda. Challenges on the road to reconstruction*, Boulder-London, Lynne Rienner, 2019, 270 pages**

The author is a scholar who is a member of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and currently a policy advisor in the Office of the President. This position has an obvious impact on the research and its presentation. Although the book doesn't exhibit a blatant pro-RPF chauvinism, some darker aspects of the ruling party's governance are minimised or not addressed, for instance its human rights record, its role in the attack against the presidential plane that sparked the genocide, or the reliability of data on its socio-economic performance. The book also hardly engages with critical scholarship produced on Rwanda during the past 25 years.

That said, the fact that Kimonyo works within the system allows him to offer unique insights based on internal documents and information gathered from leading historical actors. By opening the RPF's "black box", he recounts sensitive moments of its evolution. At the centre of the book is "the crucial phase of the beginning of the process of change at the end of the post-genocide transition period" (p. 5).

Kimonyo's study of the creation of the RPF challenges many of the existing analyses. He describes the historical context of the movement's emergence, its ideological orientations, its military experience, and its ups-and-downs. Unique information is offered on internal disputes and dynamics, attempts at unification, the operation of the political schools, the inspiration drawn from the Ugandan NRM/A, and political and military mobilisation.

Part 2 ("In the Wake of Catastrophe") is particularly instructive. It describes the challenges of reconstructing a destroyed country, the security threats emanating from refugee settlements just across the border, and the passive attitude of the international community. This part also contains a section in which crimes committed by the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) are minimised and reports about them discredited (p. 112-117). A similar treatment is given later to the Kibeho massacre (p. 131), crimes committed in the DRC (p. 133) and during the insurgency in the northwest (p. 136). In a section titled "Between War and Peace", the author candidly describes the RPF's crisis of internal and external legitimacy in the second half of the 1990s. A unique look behind the curtain relates disagreements, antagonism with the outside world, political defections, and the revolt of party officials.

The section on "Change" analyses the way in which the RPF leadership tried to address the crisis. It is unique in that it quotes extensively from internal party documents that were hitherto unknown, thus providing insights into the core of the organisation. Party meetings tackled a number of issues that were seen as problematic: indebtedness of military officers to businesspeople, conflicts over the ownership of land and other property, and reprehensible be-

haviour such as corruption and nepotism. Broader issues included institutional change, national unity, democracy, justice, the economy and security.

These efforts led to a “new Rwanda”, one born not in 1994 but around 2000. Kimonyo paints an overall positive image of a number of developments, including the reform of the army and the police, the 2003 constitution, the *gacaca* tribunals, campaigns against “divisionism” and “genocide ideology”, and the 2003 and 2010 presidential elections. All this is generally addressed in a supportive fashion, without the critical footnotes an outside observer would include. This is understandable, however, and probably the price to be paid for “insider trading” and the benefits it offers the reader.

In the conclusion, Kimonyo seeks to explain the RPF’s trajectory. He argues that, contrary to widespread opinion, the desire to transform Rwanda did not primarily originate from the devastating effects of civil war and genocide. Rather it must be seen as a product of historical elements: the feelings of systematic vulnerability among the refugee communities, nationalism founded on the historical memory of a former “grand Rwanda” and the ensuing quest for self-worth (*agaciro*), and the anti-colonialism and pan-Africanism that went with this historical memory. In the author’s view, all this explains the RPF’s resilience in rapidly rebuilding the country after the genocide. Crucial in this was the fact that the RPF’s military victory allowed it to define the contours of the post-conflict future.

Despite my reservations about the author’s pro-regime bias expressed at the beginning of this review, this book is important. Since 1990, and more so after 1994, Rwanda’s history has been coterminous with that of the RPF. Therefore, Kimonyo’s look inside the organisation crucially helps us understand the last 30 years of the country’s evolution. It sheds light on the positive – vision and ambition, will to excel, patriotism, resilience, to name but a few – and the darker – heavy-handedness, arrogance, paternalism, authoritarianism, again just some examples – sides of the current regime.

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