

RWANDA

by Filip Reyntjens

1. INTRODUCTION

Two divergent trends can be seen in this year's political governance. On the one hand, the September parliamentary elections were in line with all national polls since 2003. Under the RPF's stewardship, there was no genuine competition, and the National Electoral Commission (NEC) allocated rather than counted votes. Cosmetic elections thus serve the purpose of consolidating a dictatorship. On the other hand, one opposition leader who was serving a 15-year jail sentence was released under a presidential act of mercy, while a second was acquitted of charges related to public incitement against the institutions. In both cases, their freedom of speech was upheld by the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights (ACtHPR) and the Rwandan High Court respectively. Although the prosecution announced an appeal in the second case, the outcome suggests that the judiciary is acting in a more independent fashion than in the past. This might open avenues for the exercise of political rights unseen before.

As shown by a number of international indicators, Rwanda continues to perform well in the area of technocratic governance, again showing the gap with political governance. However, doubts have increasingly arisen about the evidence base of progress in a number of fields, such as poverty reduction and agricultural policies. The situation of human rights has continued to raise international concerns, but increasingly well-documented mass crimes committed by the RPF in the past will probably remain unpunished.

Rwanda's relations with its regional neighbours have not improved. They remain poor with Burundi and Uganda, while weak state performance in the DRC and porous borders offer avenues for non-state armed groups to destabilise Rwanda and the region. Further afield, relations with South Africa have remained frosty. These tense relations have a negative impact on the functioning of the East African Community and have the potential to isolate Rwanda.

2. POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

2.1. Parliamentary elections

Just as with last year's presidential election, this chronicle will not devote much attention to the parliamentary elections held in early September 2018. Contrary to what can be found in most other countries, this was essentially a cosmetic exercise, as it has been since national polls were first organised in 2003. Of the 53 directly elected MPs, officially the RPF cartel won 40 seats (74% of the votes) against five for the PSD and four for the PL. With two seats each the DGPR and the PS-Imberakuri entered the lower house for the first time. 24 women, two young people and one disabled candidate were also indirectly elected by their respective constituencies. The inclusion of special interest MPs hides the RPF's dominance to some extent. While they are officially not affiliated to a political party, most if not all are actually RPF members.¹ This is strongly suggested by their Stalinist scores: all but four of the elected women obtained over 70% of the vote, and most got 90% or more, showing how controlled the process is.

Serious doubts have been raised in the past about the integrity of the electoral process in Rwanda², and this time was no different. Two facts again suggest that the NEC does not count votes but rather allocates them. With 70% of the votes counted, the DGPR and the PS-Imberakuri were both credited with 4.5%, just under the 5% threshold needed to enter parliament.³ However, in the final result, they each obtained 5%, giving them two seats each.⁴ This is a very unlikely result, as this would mean that both parties, having scored 4.5% over 70% of the votes, obtained 6.16% over the remaining 30% of the votes, a result that is statistically highly suspicious⁵, also in light of the second fact. While the NEC has not published results per district, an RTV screenshot shows strikingly similar results in four districts with 70% of the votes coun-

¹ This phenomenon was already visible in 2008 and 2013 (see REYNTJENS, F., "Chronique politique du Rwanda, 2013-2014", in REYNTJENS, F., VANDEGINSTE, S., VERPOORTEN, M. (Eds.), *L'Afrique des grands lacs. Annuaire 2013-2014*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2014, pp. 336-337) and has been confirmed by Gatti for the 2018 elections, when ten MPs elected on the RPF list were women or youth representatives in 2008 or 2013 (GATTI, L., *Gender Politics in Rwanda: Promoting Development or Stabilizing Autocratic Rule? Examining an Instrument of Power for the Regime's Developmental Agenda*, University of Bayreuth, Master Thesis in International Economics and Governance, December 2018, Annex).

² For instance, Andrea Purdeková shows how fraud concretely operates at the local level: PURDEKOVA, A., *Making Ubumwe. Power, State and Camps in Rwanda's Unity-Building Project*, New York, Berghahn, 2015, pp. 74-77.

³ "It's a landslide for RPF-Inkotanyi", *The New Times*, 4 September 2018.

⁴ "Political parties welcome poll results", *The New Times*, 6 September 2018.

⁵ It is also strange that both parties, with 70% and 100% of the votes counted, registered the same result.

ted. In Rubavu, Rusizi, Nyabihu and Ngororero, the RPF obtained everywhere between 73.73 and 73.93%, the PSD between 8.57 and 9.17, the PL between 7.21 and 7.48, the PS-Imberakuri between 4.39 and 4.71, and the DGPR between 4.31 and 4.69. Not only can such uniform results hardly express the will of the voters, but they also confirm that the DGPR and the PS-Imberakuri dramatically increased their electoral support across the board in the remaining 30% of the votes. It should be added that, while the DGPR can be considered an opposition party, that is not the case of the PS-Imberakuri whose officially recognised wing now represented in parliament was created by the RPF in 2010. Commenting on past experience, an international scholar generally quite supportive of the regime observed that “the RPF decided to use a range of heavy-handed tactics to guarantee its electoral success, an approach that has generated widespread resentment”.⁶ The 2018 parliamentary elections have again shown that Rwanda is a strong case of hegemonic authoritarianism⁷, where seemingly regular polls in a multiparty context do not perform any meaningful function other than consolidating a dictatorship.⁸

2.2. Cabinet reshuffles

On 6 April 2018, powerful Infrastructure Minister James Musoni, who had been in government since 2005, was dropped from the cabinet and replaced by Finance Minister Claver Gatete. This would not have caused any particular stir had Musoni not been considered a close confidant of Kagame in charge of the president’s business interests, and even his potential successor. Musoni could probably have seen his demise coming when *Igihe*, a news outlet considered close to Kagame, published a story on his alleged extramarital affairs in March, and he had been accused of murky deals during the previous years.⁹ Rumours had it that Musoni was put under house arrest under the surveillance of the presidential guard, but he was eventually appointed ambassador to Zimbabwe in October.

A more regular reshuffle occurred in October 2018. This is routine after parliamentary elections, but was this time also prompted by the election of Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo as the new head of the *Organisation*

⁶ CLARK, P., “Rwanda’s Recovery: When Remembrance is Official Policy”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 35, 2018, p. 41.

⁷ It doesn’t even meet Schedler’s requirements of electoral authoritarianism (SCHEDLER, A. (ed.), *Electoral Authoritarianism. The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, Boulder CO, Lynne Rienner, 2006, p. 3).

⁸ REYNTJENS, F., *Political Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 26-56.

⁹ See “Rwanda: James Musoni, The Embattled Minister Behind The New Times’ Boss Arrest”, *Rwandainfo*, 2010, exact date unknown; “Rwandan Minister Musoni Scandals Revealed Including Hiding Wealth in Uganda”, *256news*, 11 September 2011.

internationale de la francophonie (OIF, see below). The new cabinet was announced on 18 October. Dr. Richard Sezibera (RPF) was appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Relations. Among other high positions he was formerly Minister for Health and Secretary General of the East African Community. The most striking change occurred at the Defence Ministry where little known Maj. Gen. Albert Murasira replaced Gen. James Kabarebe, considered one of the most powerful heavyweights of the regime. Murasira was a bureaucrat who headed Zigama Credit and Savings Society, a microfinance institution of the army. He is the first Hutu and ex-FAR incumbent since Marcel Gatsinzi left office in 2010. Gatsinzi was succeeded at the time by Kabarebe who had been the overall commander of the Rwandan army operations in the DRC in the late 1990s, and he even briefly, in 1997-1998, served as Chief of Staff of the Congolese army after the overthrow of Mobutu. Kabarebe's appointment as Senior Defence and Security Advisor in the Office of the President was of course interpreted as a demotion by many, but it also took place in a broader reshuffling of the military and security apparatus. Indeed, at the same time changes of command were announced in the national police, military intelligence, external security and other entities. These were interpreted in the context of the shifting regional security situation (see below).¹⁰

Other changes in cabinet were less spectacular and included the Ministries of Local Government, ICT and Innovation, Trade and Industry, Gender and Family Protection, and Emergency Management. 18 out of 31 members of the government are RPF, two are PSD, while the PPC and the PDI each hold one portfolio. 14 ministers out of 21 belong to the RPF. Nine members of the government officially do not belong to a party, but this essentially serves to hide the RPF's dominance in the cabinet. Even if one were to accept this as a fact, article 62 of the constitution, which states that a political party cannot hold more than 50% of government positions, is violated – as it has been in the past. 14 ministers out of 21 and 19 members of the government out of 31 are Tutsi, a statistic that cannot be mentioned inside Rwanda, but that, as in the past, shows the reality of a strong ethnic bias in a country where Tutsi number less than 15% of the population.¹¹ In addition, 15 out of 19 Tutsi in government are former refugees, indicating the continued marginalisation of Tutsi genocide survivors. As in the past, women are strongly represented with 11 ministers (out of 21) and 15 members of the government (out of 31). Finally, it is noteworthy that, as in the past, each time a minister is either a Hutu or not an RPF member, the permanent secretary is always a Tutsi of the RPF.¹²

¹⁰ “Kagame Removes Defence Minister Kabarebe; Munuyza named new IGP”, *Chimpreports*, 18 October 2018.

¹¹ To avoid misunderstanding, this is not a plea for formal ethnic quota. However, what these data show is a system of informal “reverse” quota.

¹² The composition of the government can be found in Annex 2.

2.3. The fate of the opposition

Last year's chronicle detailed the crackdown on the opposition that followed the presidential election. The opposite seemed to be happening after the parliamentary polls. On 14 September, opposition leader Victoire Ingabire, who was serving a 15-year prison sentence since 2010, and singer Kizito Mihigo, sentenced to 10 years in jail in 2015, were granted mercy for the remainder of their sentence by Presidential Order. Over 2,000 common law convicts were released on parole. These measures were accompanied by a number of conditions. For Ingabire and Kizito Mihigo, these included the obligation to present themselves to the prosecutor every month and to seek the authorisation of the Justice Minister before travelling abroad.

In the case of Ingabire, the measure may well be linked to the impasse the government faced after the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights (ACtHPR) ruled in November 2017 that her rights under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights had been violated (see last year's chronicle). Rwanda initially made it clear that it would not abide by the court's ruling. Deputy Foreign Minister Olivier Nduhungirehe stated that it was "impossible for the government to accept that an African court was manipulated in order to nullify what sovereign national courts have decided".¹³ However, that would eventually bring this case to the African Union's table and could become an embarrassment for President Kagame, the current chair of the AU. In addition, this measure came at the time Kagame was trying to get his Foreign Minister elected as the head of the OIF, an organisation that, apart from the *francophonie*, promotes human rights and democracy.

It is unclear if and to what extent Ingabire will be allowed to resume her political activities. Upon her release, she stated that she would continue fighting for the release of members of her party and more generally for the opening of political space in Rwanda.¹⁴ She confirmed in an interview that "if you mean if I am afraid to go to prison again, I am not afraid".¹⁵ Just days after her release, Kagame told parliament that "if Ingabire carries on like that, she will find herself back in prison"¹⁶, while the semi-official daily issued similar threats.¹⁷ These became more concrete on 9 October when Ingabire was summoned by the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB) "to discuss factually incorrect statements (...) that may constitute violations of the Penal Code". The

¹³ "Le Rwanda refuse de rétablir Victoire Ingabire dans ses droits", *RFI*, 29 May 2018.

¹⁴ "Rwanda: 'Je vais continuer ma lutte', dit Victoire Ingabire à RFI", *RFI*, 15 September 2018.

¹⁵ "Rwanda: Opposition leader demands release of jailed political opponents", *DW*, 17 September 2018.

¹⁶ "Rwanda: L'avertissement de Paul Kagame à Victoire Ingabire", *RFI*, 20 September 2018.

¹⁷ "Fame won't save Ingabire and Mihigo", *The New Times*, 19 September 2018; "Victoire Ingabire – When denial is in the DNA", *The New Times*, 21 September 2018.

RIB referred specifically to characterisations of her conviction as “political” and references to others as “political prisoners”. She was reminded that “her conviction by the Supreme Court still stands” and that failure to “abide by the law (...) would trigger appropriate legal action”.¹⁸ As the RIB obviously did not accept that Ingabire was merely exercising her constitutional freedom of expression in line with the ACtHPR ruling, this makes clear that her space for political action may remain very constrained.

On 5 October, just days before the OIF summit, Diane Rwigara and her mother Adeline, who spent over a year in pre-trial detention (see last year’s chronicle), were released on bail. While their trial was still ongoing (see below), Diane Rwigara was even more outspoken than Ingabire. She stated that her time in jail “has given me more determination” and reiterated statements made before her arrest about rampant poverty and the need to hold the government accountable: “People are harassed, people disappear, people get killed, and all those things our government doesn’t want us to expose”.¹⁹ As will be seen later, Diane and Adeline Rwigara were eventually acquitted by the High Court.

In the meantime, members of Ingabire’s unrecognised opposition party FDU-Inkingi continued to be the victims of severe repression. Half a dozen of them, including the party’s vice-president and secretary general, have been in jail since September 2017 on charges of forming an armed group and seeking to overthrow the government. At the time of writing, their trial had not yet begun on substance. Other members of the party continued to be harassed, some “disappeared”, and one was found murdered. In October 2018, the FDU-Inkingi vice-president Boniface Twagirimana “disappeared”. The official version had it that he escaped from Mpanga prison where he had been transferred from Mageragere prison and separated from his co-accused just days earlier. As there were indications that he had been taken away in an official vehicle, both a cartel of opposition parties and Human Rights Watch demanded an inquiry into the circumstances of his disappearance and possible death.²⁰

2.4. Everyday governance

From 26 February to 1 March, the government held its annual National Leadership Retreat. As in previous years, Kagame expressed deep frustration about goals set in the past that were not met, and he started the meeting with

¹⁸ “Statement from Rwanda Investigation Bureau”, 9 October 2018.

¹⁹ “Awaiting trial, Rwandan opposition leader says she’s determined to hold government accountable”, *CNN*, 9 October 2018.

²⁰ P5, “Rwandan opposition shocked by the mysterious disappearance from maximum security prison of the 1st vice-president of FDU-Inkingi Boniface Twagirimana”, 16 October 2018; Human Rights Watch, “One Month Since Rwandan Opposition Leader ‘Disappeared’”, 8 November 2018.

a warning: “We are going to have a fight these days, get prepared for that. But before that, I will first have a fight with ministers. They are no stronger than me. I will fight them as well”. And fight he did, tackling and rudely interrupting local mayors, ministers, legislators and the Chief Justice, apparently unaware of the separation of powers. The way Kagame interacted with high-ranking officials confirmed the notion that even in the most senior circles of power in Rwanda, the president – and the president alone – knows best. It is not just Kagame’s behaviour, however, that is remarkable. As they were berated and endlessly interrupted, no official – many of them experienced, skilled, and eternally loyal individuals – dared to defend himself, stand up to the president, or walk out. It is hard to say to what extent this was due to a loss of self-worth or mere fear, but this event certainly showed how Kagame reigns supreme over the Rwandan state.²¹ This is underscored by an anecdotal fact that happened in November 2018. On instruction of the provincial governor, the Mayor of Huye district requested all municipal employees to start using Twitter and “especially that (...) all employees follow the Twitter account of His Excellency the President”.²² It is likely that this is a nation-wide instruction, thus forcing all civil servants to constantly have Kagame “in their pocket”.

The RPF continues to disseminate its ideology through ever expanding means. After *ingando* and *Itorero*, a new programme claiming to be based on precolonial ways and values was launched in July 2018. *Indangamirwa* complements *itorero* and is designed for future leaders in the diaspora or those planning to study abroad. As with other such initiatives, it takes place in a military set up at the RDF Gabiro Combat Training Centre and the trainees are clad in military fatigues.²³ The “educator-in-chief”, Minister of Education Eugene Mutimura, made clear that the course aims to help young people “to have a common understanding of the Rwandan history, identity and values”.²⁴ *Itorero* was expanded further, with the stated aim to encompass every

²¹ For more on this astonishing meeting, see REYNTJENS, F., “‘I will also fight with you’: President Kagame, Rwanda’s Berater-in-Chief”, *African Arguments*, 13 March 2018. Also see “Rwanda’s Kagame reads the riot act to Cabinet”, *The East African*, 3 March 2018; “Inside Umwihero: Kagame Interrogates Government, Says System is Rotten”, *Taarifa*, 28 February 2018; “Who Will Be Fired After 15th National Leadership Retreat?”, *Taarifa*, 1 March 2018. It must be noted that *Taarifa* is an online news outlet considered very close to Kagame.

²² HIMBARA, D., “All Rwandan Public Servants Ordered To Follow Kagame On Twitter”, *Medium*, 27 November 2018.

²³ On the pervasiveness of military norms and values across the entire Rwandan society, see PURDEKOVA, A., REYNTJENS, F., WILEN, N., “Militarisation of governance after conflict: beyond the rebel-to-ruler frame – the case of Rwanda”, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 39, n° 1, 2018, pp. 158-174. The continuation from diaspora communities to current day Rwanda of a “belligerent nationalism” is thoroughly and finely analysed in RIOT, T., BANCEL, N., RUTAYISIRE, P., “Un art guerrier aux frontières des grands lacs. Aux racines dancées du Front Patriotique Rwandais”, *Politique Africaine*, n° 147, 2017, pp. 109-134.

²⁴ “Inside the programme shaping Rwanda’s future leaders”, *The New Times*, 29 July 2018.

Rwandan. Its reinforcement at the village level, “like a company in military terminology” commanded by cell officials, wants to capture everyone. Organised on the basis of age groups, it includes children five years or younger called *ibirezi* up to those 56 or older known as *inararibonye*, with four groups in between.²⁵ As seen in earlier research, the problem with *itorero* is that it doesn’t go with the grain, and this has now also been confirmed by Rwandan scholarship.²⁶ Nzahabwanayo’s research finds, for instance, that when trainees leave *itorero* with the understanding that Rwandans are one people, this view is challenged by family members telling them that *itorero* is a political tool to mislead them. One informant candidly stated that “it is about both sides. There are so many Rwandans across all categories who still perceive themselves as Hutu or Tutsi and live accordingly”.²⁷ The author concludes that despite the public discourse that people should understand themselves as “Rwandans” rather than along ethnic lines, the de-ethnicisation project encounters setbacks.²⁸ This observation joins similar ones made in the formal educational system, where teachers and students avoid or reframe discussions around ethnic diversity and sensitive topics related to human rights violations.²⁹ In other words, the public transcript does not erase the hidden transcript which continues to thrive in private, even clandestine settings.³⁰

Recently published research confirms this gap between transcripts. For instance, Guariso et al. found that ethnic ways of “seeing the world” continue to dominate over gendered interpretations of political representation, despite Rwanda’s ostensive promotion of women’s rights.³¹ Likewise, Purdeková observed that meta-conflict – the conflict over the meaning of conflict – expresses itself in the public memory of violence being state-framed and partial, remembering only certain aspects of violence. The strong emphasis of the dominant nationalist narrative on “unity” papers over divisions that linger under the surface.³²

²⁵ “Itorero programme gets new structure, to operate at village level”, *The New Times*, 28 August 2018.

²⁶ NZAHABWANAYO, S., “What works in citizenship and values education: attitudes of trainers towards the *Itorero* training program in post-genocide Rwanda”, *Rwandan Journal of Education*, vol. 4, n° 2, 2018, pp. 71-84. This article was published in slightly modified form in *South African Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 32, n° 5, 2018, pp. 190-210.

²⁷ Idem, p. 79.

²⁸ Idem, p. 81.

²⁹ A recent analysis can be found in GARNETT RUSSELL, S., “Global Discourses and Local Practices: Teaching Citizenship and Human Rights in Postgenocide Rwanda”, *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 62, n° 3, 2018, pp. 385-408.

³⁰ This opposition has recently again been shown on the basis of interesting anecdotal evidence: TERRY, S., “Postcards from Rwanda”, *africasacountry.com*, February 2018.

³¹ GUARISO, A., INGELAERE, B., VERPOORTEN, M., “When Ethnicity Beats Gender: Quotas and Political Representation in Rwanda and Burundi”, *Development and Change*, vol. 49, n° 6, 2018, pp. 1361-1391.

³² PURDEKOVA, A., “Itinerant nationalisms and fracturing narratives: Incorporating regional

The regime also continues its attempt to promote its “truth” internationally. Having used the services of a small US law firm that produced an accusatory report on the role of French officials in the genocide (see last year’s chronicle), the same firm is now working on a new report “that will inform people of what truly occurred”. In a letter to ambassadors who served in Rwanda (and most likely to others), it says it “has been retained by the government of Rwanda to conduct an investigation and gather documents relevant to the events before, during and after the genocide” and that “Rwanda is seeking to reclaim its history”.³³ So it now seems that Rwandan history is written at the government’s request by law firms rather than by historians. The use of PR firms such as Portland Communications, GPlus, BTP Advisors and Racepoint Group to promote that official narrative is well documented.³⁴

3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

The gap between flawed political governance and good technocratic governance continues to be striking. This is clearly expressed in the latest Mo Ibrahim index of African governance. While Rwanda’s overall governance is ranked 8th on the continent, the country is only 36th on “Participation” and 37th on “Rights”. Its worst scores are on “Political participation” (52nd) and on “Freedom of Expression” (45th).³⁵ Technocratic indicators are almost consistently good to excellent, but they are at the bottom of the table for items related to democracy and human rights.

On technocratic issues this has indeed been a good year for Rwanda. Highlights include the launch of an ambitious National Research and Innovation Fund and of a new agriculture development strategy (2018-2024), both in June; the launch by Volkswagen of an “integrated mobility concept” in June³⁶; Kagame’s intention to have Rwanda join the OECD announced in August; the roll-out of Africa’s first electronic procurement system in October; the country’s improved ranking in the World Bank Doing Business report (29th globally compared to 41st the previous year); the launch of Alibaba’s Jack Ma’s Africa’s first Electronic World Trade platform in Kigali at the end of October; Rwanda’s increasing attractiveness as an international conference venue³⁷; and the signing of a deal to develop the Kigali Innovation City pro-

dimensions of memory into peacebuilding”, forthcoming in *Memory Studies*.

³³ Email by Seana Holland of Cunningham Levy Muse dated 21 August 2018 (Subject: Interview Request re Rwanda).

³⁴ Corporate Europe Observatory, *Spin doctors to the autocrats: how European PR firms whitewash repressive regimes*, 2015, pp. 17-19.

³⁵ Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *2018 Ibrahim Index of African Governance*, October 2018.

³⁶ Although presented as a production plant, it does not actually build or even assemble cars. The 3,000 square metre complex contains a showroom, repair facilities and a hall where cars assembled in South Africa receive a finishing touch.

³⁷ “Kenya loses out to Rwanda on conference hosting”, *The East African*, 19 September 2018.

ject in November. Also in November, the government and the World Bank outlined a growth path towards *Vision 2050*, aimed at achieving upper-middle income status by 2035 and high income status by 2050. However, it was not clear whether and to what extent the aims of *Vision 2020* had been achieved.³⁸ While the growth trajectory in the report outlined successes, it also lucidly included some caveats. Inequality increased, child stunting remained high, the quality of education continued to be a challenge, the export base, domestic savings and private sector investment remained low. The report also acknowledged that the growth required to meet the objectives is twice the current rate, recognised as “not an easy task”.³⁹ One indicator in which the country regressed was the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Index, where it dropped from 58th to 108th place. This significant decline is difficult to understand, and might suggest that previous rankings were not accurate.

Doubts have indeed continued to be raised about the evidence base of the Rwandan “success story”. For instance, Ansoms highlighted contradictions between different agricultural productivity data and at “deeply embedded systemic problems” with “a perverse impact on farmers’ capacity to feed their families”. Getting things right is impeded by the problem of “fake reporting by local leaders, blurring the true image of local realities”. During the February National Leadership retreat the Prime Minister himself highlighted “the bad habit of falsifying statistics”.⁴⁰ In addition to agricultural policies, data on poverty and GDP growth have come under increasing scrutiny. Anonymous authors⁴¹ concluded that “there is overwhelming and publicly verifiable evidence that poverty increased by a substantial amount between 2010 and 2014 in Rwanda, and that NISR’s (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda) poverty statistics were grossly misleading”. They saw increasing evidence that “this and other statistical errors were intentional and aimed at misleading the public and covering up serious policy failures”. They also claimed that discrepancies between the National Agricultural Survey (NAS) and the household

However, at the same time, Rwandan hotels’ occupancy rates were too low to be profitable, and several hotels were auctioned off over outstanding loans to commercial banks (“Year of mixed fortunes for Rwandan hotels as some face the axe”, *The East African*, 21 December 2018).

³⁸ During the National Leadership Retreat (see above), Prime Minister Ngirente stated that among the 52 goals set by *Vision 2020*, eight (15%) had been fully achieved, 19 (37%) had reached an achievement rate of 75%, 19 (36%) were at 50% or more, six (12%) at less than 50%. Compared to the aim of reaching a GDP/capita of USD 1,240 by 2020, it stood at USD 729. Assuming these figures to be correct, this would indicate a good success rate, although it may prove difficult to meet all goals during the less than three remaining years.

³⁹ “Highlights of Rwanda’s growth agenda 2035 and 2050”, *The New Times*, 10 December 2018.

⁴⁰ ANSOMS, A., “Hunger in the Name of Development: Rwandan Farmers Under Stress”, *Roape.net*, 8 March 2018.

⁴¹ This is not the first time authors don’t sign by their name when writing about Rwanda, an indication of a very constrained research environment.

survey data (HHS) growth figures remain unexplained, thus reinforcing the doubts about the reality of Rwanda's GDP growth.⁴²

In September, the World Bank attempted to come to Rwanda's rescue on the issue of poverty reduction. The authors referred to the debate that has been going on since 2015, stating that "unfounded claims about stagnation in poverty were published in online blogpost and media websites, creating confusion and muddying the primary purpose of welfare estimation and poverty monitoring, limiting timely and relevant policy making".⁴³ Not surprisingly, their analysis supported the official trend published by NISR and showed "a declining poverty trend if the international measure properly adjusts for spatial and temporal price variations during survey data collection".⁴⁴ The anonymous ROAPE authors were not impressed. They pointed to the evident fact that if one accepts all of NISR's assumptions and data choices, then NISR's conclusions regarding poverty do hold, but they go on arguing that the evidence presented by the World Bank actually strongly supports the claim that poverty increased in Rwanda between 2010 and 2014. Their conclusion challenges World Bank practices: "The selective and even misleading presentation of supporting empirical evidence (...), as well as their failure to carry out basic robustness checks or even to state the obvious caveats (...), is, to say the least, disturbing".⁴⁵ This state of affairs is by no means limited to Rwanda. Indeed cooked-up socio-economic statistics are quite common in dictatorships that use them to deflect attention from political concerns, a phenomenon enhanced by the difficulties of collecting verifiable data inside closed societies. Unreliable statistics flow directly from authoritarian governments to international gatekeepers like the World Bank, UN agencies and the World Economic Forum. There is virtually no on-the-ground verification of such overoptimistic figures that convey a semblance of reality.⁴⁶

Whatever statistical quantitative data may say, over the last 10-15 years qualitative on-the-ground research shows that the rural poor in particular have seen a decline in their living conditions. Recently, Dawson showed that standard poverty indices are a mirage detracting attention from important changes in key resources for rural populations, which have been redistributed away from the poorest and most marginal towards the wealthiest and most powerful. For instance, redistribution of land away from poorer households appears to

⁴² Anonymous, "Rwanda's House of Sands: Brutality, Lies and Complicity", *Roape.net*, 26 July 2018.

⁴³ FATIMA, F., YOSHIDA, N., *Revisiting the Poverty Trends in Rwanda, 2010/11 to 2013/14*, Washington D.C., The World Bank Group, Policy Research Working Paper #8585, September 2018, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Idem*, p. 20.

⁴⁵ Anonymous, "The Cover Up: Complicity in Rwanda's Lies", *Roape.net*, 21 November 2018.

⁴⁶ GLADSTEIN, A., "Why Dictators Love Development Statistics", *The New Republic*, 26 April 2018.

have been exacerbated by government policies, and only 12% of households were able to sustain or increase their livestock holdings. Reduction in material wellbeing for many rural inhabitants explains why 41% of those interviewed were unable to afford health insurance and access health care. Generally speaking, the research showed trends of increasing inequality of land and livestock holdings and decreasing access to resources for the poor.⁴⁷

4. JUSTICE

The only cases with a political connotation Rwandan courts have dealt with concern the Rwigara affair, the prosecution of FDU-Inkingi members, and the trial of Léopold Munyakazi. To the surprise of many observers, the Rwigaras were acquitted by the High Court on 6 December. The court found that the prosecution had failed to prove that private WhatsApp conversations and declarations made at a news conference incited the public against the institutions. On the accusation that Diane Rwigara used fake signatures to support her candidacy at the 2017 presidential election, the court ruled that there was no conclusive evidence that she had personally committed forgery. More important for political freedoms generally, the court found that Diane Rwigara had only exercised her right to speech when criticising the government.⁴⁸ The impact of this judgment will be discussed later.

In the meantime, the trial of nine leading members of Ingabire's unrecognised FDU-Inkingi opposition party has dragged on, leading from one postponement to the next. No hearing on substance had been announced at the time of writing. The repression against leaders and members of the FDU-Inkingi will be addressed later.

Léopold Munyakazi, who was extradited from the US in 2016, was initially convicted for direct involvement in the genocide and jailed for life in July 2017. The appeals court heard contradictory testimonies from local witnesses on the alleged crimes and cleared Munyakazi of the genocide charge in July 2018. However, he was sentenced to nine years in jail for using his academic work to downplay the genocide. This conviction for a speech crime was an embarrassment for the US, who had extradited him because of his alleged participation in the genocide. While this saga shows that Rwandan justice can be free and fair, it also suggests that states should be very careful when dealing with extradition requests from Kigali. Munyakazi's former colleagues

⁴⁷ DAWSON, N.M., "Leaving no-one behind? Social inequalities and contrasting development impacts in rural Rwanda", *Development Studies Research*, vol. 5, n° 1, 2018, pp. 1-14.

⁴⁸ As the judgment was not available at the time of writing, this summary is based on press reports. See e.g. "Why the Rwigaras were acquitted", *The New Times*, 6 December 2018; "Rwandan court acquits government critic Diane Rwigara", *DW*, 6 December 2018; "Rwandan government critic acquitted of 'baseless' insurrection charges", *The Guardian*, 6 December 2018.

at Goucher College noted the irony: “How could a man be brought to Goucher by a program to protect scholars, but end up imprisoned for his political beliefs?”⁴⁹

Just like with the ICTR during its operation, the Rwandan government has stormy relations with its successor, the Mechanism for International Tribunals (MICT). In particular its President, US judge Meron, came under repeated fire for the early release of prisoners or the reduction of sentences.⁵⁰ MICT Chief Prosecutor Brammertz agreed that “strict conditions (for early release) should be put in place and Rwanda should be given an opportunity to determine which conditions these are”⁵¹, whereby he seemed to suggest that the Rwandan state represents the victims, which is a dubious proposition. Later on Brammertz again showed a great deal of understanding for the government position when stating that “we will not accept that people corrupt witnesses, trying to change history and giving denial of genocide a chance”.⁵² He said this at the occasion of the arrest and transfer to Arusha of five individuals who allegedly tried to coerce witnesses to retract testimonies of a suspect seeking a retrial. There is nothing wrong with sanctioning witness tampering, were it not that Brammertz seemed not to realise that the Rwandan government itself had been manipulating testimonies during the ICTR’s entire operation. If his reference to “history” and “denial of genocide” tallies with the Rwandan government’s narrative on these issues, he is treading on dangerous political ground.

The other international level where Rwanda is involved is in the ACtHPR which, as seen earlier, found Rwanda in breach of its international obligations and ordered the government to compensate the harm done to Ingabire within six months following the judgment, which was rendered on 24 November 2017. On 28 May 2018, Ingabire’s lawyer wrote to Justice Minister Busingye expressing regret that the Rwandan government “has not yet responded to our request for reparations, nor shown any sign it intends to abide by the African Court’s ruling”. She therefore urged the government to release her client at once, “as we consider such a measure the only remedy available at this stage”. This letter remained without response, but the next day Deputy Foreign Minister Nduhungirehe tweeted: “The rule of law is not to allow genociders or their accomplices to manipulate a human rights court to their profit”. Pressed to clarify his view, in a new tweet he said that “this is the official position

⁴⁹ “Cleared of murders, convicted for speech: Towson family finds bittersweet end to case of accused Goucher professor”, *Baltimore Sun*, 3 September 2018.

⁵⁰ “When a judge undermines the legacy of international justice”, *The New Times*, 4 June 2018; “Rwanda says UN court can still salvage its credibility”, *The New Times*, 8 June 2018.

⁵¹ “UN prosecutor wants Rwanda involved in the early release of genocide convicts”, *The New Times*, 27 June 2018.

⁵² “Genocide prosecutor warns against bribery of witnesses”, *The New Times*, 16 November 2018.

of Rwanda”. In July, the annual conference of the African Bar Association adopted a resolution “to urge the Government of Rwanda to respect the orders of the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights in the following cases”, including those of Ingabire and Mugesera. It added that “Rwanda bears full responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of these detainees who are by law now under illegal detention since competent legal proceedings have resulted in an order for their release”.⁵³ As the measure of mercy taken in September discussed earlier involves a number of restrictive conditions, it is not certain that it effectively resolves the issues raised by the court, which on 7 December ordered Rwanda to pay Ingabire 65 million Rwandan francs in damages.

Judicial activity in third countries has been limited. In France, the life sentence of two former mayors was confirmed on appeal in July 2018. For its part, the investigation of the 6 April 1994 attack against the presidential plane, an event that triggered the genocide, is nearing its end. The investigating judges closed the file and transmitted it to the Paris prosecutor, who recommended on 10 October that the RPF suspects not be referred to court for lack of sufficient evidence.⁵⁴ This decision came just a day after the *Globe and Mail* published information, based on serial numbers of SA-16 missiles in Ugandan army stocks, that strongly suggested that the RPF had indeed committed the attack.⁵⁵ On 21 December, the judges decided not to prosecute the suspects, stating that “the testimonies collected (...) are largely contradictory and cannot be verified. Their accumulation cannot constitute the grave and concordant charges needed to defer the suspects to the assize court”. They did, however, order the file to be kept at the registry “to be seized again in case new charges arise”.⁵⁶ As civil parties announced that they would appeal the ruling, it is unlikely that this is the end of the 20-year-long saga. In Belgium, five more Rwandans were referred to the assize court, where they will face charges of genocide and war crimes in 2019. The Brussels Court of Appeal ruled that the Belgian state was not responsible for the 11 April 1994 killing of thousands of Tutsi after a Belgian company abandoned the school where they were protected from their killers. According to the judgment, the decision to withdraw the troops was taken by the UN mission UNAMIR and not by Belgium. The Rwandan National Commission for the Fight against Genocide (CNLG) called the decision “politically motivated”.⁵⁷

⁵³ African Bar Association, Letter to President Paul Kagame, 6 September 2018.

⁵⁴ For an analysis of this decision, see REYNTJENS, F., “Attentat contre l’avion présidentiel au Rwanda: analyse du réquisitoire définitif”, *Mediapart*, 18 October 2018.

⁵⁵ “New information supports claims Kagame forces were involved in assassination that sparked Rwandan genocide”, *The Globe and Mail*, 9 October 2018.

⁵⁶ Cour d’Appel de Paris, Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris, *Ordonnance de non-lieu*, James Kabarebe et al., 21 December 2018.

⁵⁷ “ETO massacres: CNLG condemns Belgian court ruling on withdrawal of peacekeepers”, *The New Times*, 17 June 2018.

5. HUMAN RIGHTS

This is how the US State Department summarised its concerns about the human rights situation: “The most significant human rights issues included: arbitrary killings and politically motivated disappearances by security forces; torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by security forces; harsh and life-threatening prison and detention center conditions; arbitrary arrest; security forces’ disregard for the rule of law; prolonged pretrial detention; infringement on citizens’ privacy rights and on freedoms of speech, assembly, and association; restrictions on and harassment of media and some local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); restrictions on freedom to participate in the political process and the ability to change government through free and fair elections; harassment, arrest, and abuse of political opponents, human rights advocates, and individuals perceived to pose a threat to government control of social order; trafficking in persons; and restrictions on labor rights”.⁵⁸ Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch expressed similar concerns about a wide range of violations: the clampdown on political opponents, disrespect for freedoms of association, assembly and expression, extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, and arbitrary detention and torture.⁵⁹

Rwanda is ranked 156th out of 180 countries in the 2018 World Press Freedom Index.⁶⁰ In 2018, Article 19 found that Rwanda’s law governing information and communication technologies fails to comply with international human rights standards. It was particularly concerned by content-based criminal penalties, requirements to facilitate government surveillance, and restrictions of online content based on illegitimate grounds such as causing “annoyance” or “anxiety”. The regulatory authority is not independent but subject to government control, yet it is granted significant powers.⁶¹ In September 2018, a provision was introduced in the penal code that made it an offence to “humiliate” state officials in speech, writing or cartoons. This is now punishable by up to two years in prison or a heavy fine, and these penalties are doubled if those targeted are “top-ranking authorities”. RSF interpreted this new legislation as a sign of “the regime’s desire to continue its predatory stance towards journalists”.⁶² In November, BBC freelance journalist Phocas Ndayizera first “disappeared” for a week before being paraded in front of the media by the

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017*, April 2018.

⁵⁹ Amnesty International, *Report 2017/18: The state of the world’s human rights*, February 2018; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2018*.

⁶⁰ Reporters without borders, *2018 World Press Freedom Index*.

⁶¹ Article 19, *Rwanda: 2016 Law Governing Information and Communication Technologies*, May 2018.

⁶² RSF, “Rwanda’s new penal code it still tough on journalists”, 10 October 2018.

RIB. He was claimed to have been caught red-handed receiving explosives and to be linked to terrorist groups. He could face a 20-year jail sentence if found guilty under the country's anti-terrorism laws.⁶³

From late February 2018, hundreds of mainly Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Kigali were closed by decision of the Rwanda Governance Board. There was indeed a proliferation of places of worship that caused neighbourhood nuisance and were found to lack basic infrastructure and to fall short on hygiene and safety standards.⁶⁴ The RGB also pointed to internal conflicts in these churches that for some religious leaders had become a business to generate income.⁶⁵ All this seemed reasonable, but some interpreted the move as a way for the government to control faith-based institutions. For instance Phil Clark saw a continuity with earlier policies to contain civil society, political parties and humanitarian organisations. He observed that “pastors of these churches often oppose the ideology of the government”.⁶⁶ This may have been confirmed later in the year, when the NURC warned Pentecostal churches against ethnic divisionism in their ranks.⁶⁷ In July, the government tabled a bill on the organisation of faith based groups, including the requirements to obtain legal personality, meet minimum qualifications for preachers⁶⁸ and establish facilities meeting minimum standards.⁶⁹

Diana Rwigara's political troubles were mentioned earlier, but they were followed by judicial ones. After a hotel owned by her family was destroyed in 2015, allegedly because it did not respect planning permits, more family assets were auctioned off in March 2018 to settle a tax claim said by the Rwanda Revenue Authority to amount to almost 6 million USD. The auction raised just about half of the assets' fair market value. As the trial mentioned earlier started, Amnesty International called on the government to ensure that the rights of Diane Rwigara and her mother be fully guaranteed and that they would not be convicted for the legitimate exercise of their right to freedom of expression. This concern was understandable in light of the prosecutor stating in a pre-trial hearing in November 2017 that her words “clearly showed that she intended to smear the country and its leadership with lies”. Some of the charges indeed appeared to be entirely based on leaked WhatsApp messages that were critical of state policies.⁷⁰ The persecution of Rwigara soon caused mobilisation outside Rwanda, in particular elsewhere in East Africa. In the

⁶³ “Rwandan journalist investigated for ‘terrorism’”, *The East African*, 30 November 2018.

⁶⁴ “700 churches closed in Kigali over standards”, *The New Times*, 28 February 2018.

⁶⁵ “RGB: Closure of substandard churches is in public interest”, *The New Times*, 5 March 2018.

⁶⁶ “Le Rwanda souhaite mieux contrôler les églises pentecôtistes”, *DW*, 2 March 2018.

⁶⁷ “NURC calls out Pentecostal clerics over divisionism”, *The New Times*, 22 November 2018.

⁶⁸ No such qualifications exist for the President, government ministers and MPs.

⁶⁹ “New law to restore order in religious affairs”, *The New Times*, 3 July 2018.

⁷⁰ Amnesty International, “Rwanda: Ensure fair trial for former presidential aspirant”, 22 May 2018.

slipstream of the campaign #FreeBobiWine, the Ugandan singer-cum-politician who was arrested and tortured, Kenyan and Ugandan bloggers came out in support of the Rwigaras, and the hashtag #FreeDianeRwigara went viral in August 2018. Kenyan Panafrikan activist Abraham Mutai called on the Rwandan youth to claim their right to freely exercise their political rights. In September, the US based NGO Freedom Now filed a petition to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions, asking it to find that Diane's and Adeline's detention constitutes an arbitrary deprivation of liberty. After the prosecution sought a 22 years jail sentence for the two women in November, Amnesty International again called on the Rwandan authorities to drop freedom of expression charges.⁷¹ The pressure increased when US lawmakers joined the campaign in favour of the Rwigaras, a move deeply resented by the Rwandan government.⁷²

Although the prosecution announced on 12 December that it would appeal the Rwigaras' acquittal, the judgment of the High Court has a potentially important impact on political freedoms, for two reasons. First, along with the Munyakazi ruling, it seems to suggest that the judiciary is now acting more independently from political interference, which could herald a break with the past. Second, the ruling that criticising the government is an exercise of the constitutional freedom of speech is a precedent that could, and probably will, incite other opposition forces to use that right. Following the logic of the High Court, this should extend to other freedoms, such as opinion, assembly and association, which could lead to the opening up of political space.

People have continued to be killed or "disappear". Particularly since August 2018, several unidentified bodies were found in different places, including in Lake Rweru at the border with Burundi where similar discoveries occurred in 2014. No investigations took place at the time. The *Observatoire des droits de l'homme au Rwanda* (ODHR) announced that two attorneys disappeared in March and April.⁷³ Foreigners are no safer. In February 2018, South African advertising businessman Leon Orsmond, who had been living in Kigali for eight years, went "missing" and has not been heard from since. He was an outspoken government critic who also ran a social media campaign for Diane Rwigara.⁷⁴ In August, a Belgian prosecutor opened an investigation into the death of two Belgians in South Africa. Thomas Ngeze, the son of an ICTR convict who came up for early release, a prospect that was strongly contested by the Rwandan government (see earlier), was found assassinated in a Johannesburg hotel room in June. After his friend Pieter-Jan Staelens,

⁷¹ Amnesty International, "Drop freedom of expression charges against political activist Diane Rwigara", 7 November 2018.

⁷² "Rwanda tells US to keep off Rwigara trial", *The East African*, 2 December 2018.

⁷³ ODHR, "Alerte sur la disparition de deux avocats rwandais", 21 April 2018.

⁷⁴ "SA businessman goes missing in Rwanda", *News24*, 27 March 2018; "Five months later, South African still missing in Rwanda", *Daily Maverick*, 27 July 2018.

a former attorney also living in South Africa, started investigating Ngeze's death, he was found dead in a burnt out car at the end of July. The South African authorities considered both deaths suspicious and some have pointed fingers at Rwanda, but the investigations have yet to lead to a conclusion.⁷⁵

Despite or perhaps rather because of ongoing abuses, human rights observation was made even more difficult in March, when the government decided not to renew an agreement with Human Rights Watch. This came as a late response to a report published in 2017 by HRW on summary executions of petty criminals (see last year's chronicle). The organisation's work was labelled as "politically motivated, well beyond the realms of defending human rights".⁷⁶

As in previous years, the RPF's past human rights record is catching up with it. The most damaging and thorough exposure has come from Judi Rever, a Canadian investigative journalist whose 20 years of intensive work led to a book which exposed widespread abuse in great detail.⁷⁷ Crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Rwanda and the DRC were well documented in the past by many sources, but Rever accessed hitherto confidential reports of the ICTR's special investigations unit and numerous testimonies recorded by the ICTR's prosecutor, and she herself collected a large number of accounts from witnesses, including many former members of the RPF/RPA. This allowed her to describe massacres in great and gruelling detail, to lay bare their systematic nature and extent, and to show the central role played by the RPF's Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI). On a number of occasions, the crimes correspond to the definition set out in the genocide convention, namely "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such". This is particularly clear in a number of cases where Hutu and Tutsi were separated, after which the former were indiscriminately killed and the latter brought to safety.

While many analysts, including this author, had found major violations of international humanitarian law, they were of the opinion that there was not sufficient proof of the RPF having committed genocide. Rever's book has changed that and leads to the recognition that two genocides took place in Rwanda in 1994, one committed against the Tutsi by Hutu extremists, and a second one perpetrated against the Hutu by the RPF. In addition, the RPA committed genocide against Hutu refugees in the DRC in late 1996 and early 1997. Of course, this is a historical, not a judicial observation. It is unlikely that these crimes will still be judicially prosecuted and established. The ICTR has closed its doors without prosecuting RPF suspects, leaving a pathetic heri-

⁷⁵ "Enquête sur la mort de deux Belges en Afrique du Sud, en lien avec le génocide rwandais", *Le Monde*, 24 August 2018.

⁷⁶ "Editorial: There is this urge to tell HRW: 'Good riddance'", *The New Times*, 7 March 2018.

⁷⁷ REVER, J., *In Praise of Blood. The Crimes of the Rwandan Patriotic Front*, Toronto, Random House Canada, 2018.

tage of victors' justice, and the UN MICT is not competent to open new cases. Theoretically, the only instances where this legacy can be addressed are the courts of Rwanda and the DRC, where the crimes were committed, and courts in third countries on the basis of the principle of universal jurisdiction for these types of crimes. As these perspectives do not seem realistic, in all likelihood impunity will continue. However, besides judicial approaches there is the court of history. Rever's book and recently disclosed findings of a special investigations unit of the ICTR's Office of the Prosecutor again open up the sensitive issue of the "double genocide". This thesis has been considered politically incorrect in the past and even assimilated with genocide denial, but historians may have to confront it in light of the new data.

6. REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In line with Rwanda's resumption of precolonial ways in many areas⁷⁸, the belligerent nationalism mentioned above continues to be seen in the country's relations with its neighbours. While these had been generally peaceful before 1994, barely two years later Rwanda invaded Zaire/DRC, and it has since gone from one conflict to the next. Realising that the country faces a potentially hostile environment, Kagame, exceptionally clad in military attire, told his troops during the RDF combined arms field training exercise in Gabiro that "the army's current capability and discipline can never allow Rwanda to be defeated by its enemies".⁷⁹ This was reminiscent of the old saying that "Rwanda attacks, it cannot be attacked" (*Urwanda rutarera, ntiruterwa*) attributed to King Rujugira (late eighteenth century).

Relations with its former close ally Uganda soured at the end of the 1990s, and despite occasional improvements, they have never fully recovered. The degradation that had become very visible in 2017 (see last year's chronicle) continued throughout 2018. A brief sample of incidents must suffice to show this development. In early January, a former operative of Uganda's Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI) wrote to President Museveni that he had been offered 100,000 USD by Rwandan agents to assassinate him.⁸⁰ In March, Kigali again accused Kampala of illegal detention and torture of its citizens and harbouring dissidents intent on destabilising Rwanda. This came in the wake of the sacking and subsequent arrest of Uganda's Inspector General of Police, Gen. Kale Kayihura, and other officials suspected of having close ties

⁷⁸ REYNTJENS, F., "Understanding Rwandan politics through the *longue durée*: from the precolonial to the post-genocide era", *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, vol. 12, n° 3, 2018, pp. 514-532.

⁷⁹ "Kagame honours RDF, says no enemy can defeat Rwanda", *The New Times*, 12 December 2018.

⁸⁰ "I was paid USD100,000 to kill Museveni", *Grapevine News*, 16 January 2018.

with Kigali.⁸¹ Later that month, Museveni cancelled a visit to Rwanda over apparent security concerns.⁸² Despite a meeting between Museveni and Kagame at State House in Entebbe on 25 March to iron out their differences, the situation did not improve. Ugandan nationals claimed to have been arbitrarily sacked in Rwandan media, schools and banks, while suspected Rwandan agents fled Kampala as a result of a crackdown by Ugandan security forces.⁸³ In early July, so-called *intore* distributed hand written leaflets among Rwandans living in South-Western Uganda threatening to kill them if they supported the RNC opposition movement. Things further escalated when a Ugandan minister referred to Rwanda as “a cup of porridge that is cold on top but too hot inside”. Another minister stated that Rwandans fleeing to Uganda “are running away from the system that is in Kigali now”. The Rwandan deputy Foreign Minister called such statements “unacceptable”.⁸⁴ Incidents also affect regional trade, for instance when in October, two Rwandan trucks were impounded at the Gatuna border crossing. Ugandan officials claimed they were transporting minerals using forged documents, a claim denied by the Rwandan Mining Association.⁸⁵

Relations with Burundi have been poor since 2015 and they have further deteriorated since. Both countries have been trading accusations of engaging in operations aimed at destabilising the other. This threat came to the fore again in June 2018, when several attacks took place in the area of Rwanda’s Nyaruguru’s district, close to the Burundian and Congolese borders. A further demonstration of the bad relations between the two countries was a letter sent on 4 December by Burundian President Nkurunziza to President Museveni in which he asked to convene a special summit of the region’s heads of state in order to address what he called the “open conflict” with Rwanda, which he called an “enemy”.⁸⁶ In July, the Rwandan army engaged armed assailants in Nyungwe forest and the Kitabi area. Around the same period, the *Mouvement rwandais pour le changement démocratique* (MRCD), created in exile in mid-2017, claimed it conducted these attacks through its military wing, the *Forces de libération nationale* (FLN), headed by “Major” Callixte Nsabimana a.k.a. Sankara. In a region with porous borders, the area where Burundi, Rwan-

⁸¹ “Rwanda-Uganda row: Kigali says it will not retaliate”, *The East African*, 14 March 2018;

“Why Museveni sacked senior immigration officials”, *New Vision* (Kampala), 26 March 2018.

⁸² “Why Museveni called off his trip to Rwanda”, *Daily Monitor* (Kampala), 21 March 2018.

⁸³ “More Ugandans fired from Rwandan jobs”, *Chimpreports*, 30 March 2018; “Suspected Rwandan Agents Flee Kampala As Military Intensifies Crackdown at Ugandan Borders”, *Spyreports*, 22 June 2018.

⁸⁴ “Unacceptable! Rwanda angry over Uganda’s claims its citizens are fleeing from Kagame regime”, *PML Daily*, 26 November 2018.

⁸⁵ “Seized minerals may further chill Rwanda-Uganda ties”, *The East African*, 27 October 2018.

⁸⁶ “Burundi: Nkurunziza exige un sommet régional sur le ‘conflit ouvert’ avec son ‘ennemi’ rwandais”, *Jeune Afrique*, 8 December 2018.

da and the DRC meet remains unstable. In May 2018, a Congolese military source claimed that Kigali was involved in a plot to overthrow the institutions, a suspicion immediately denied by the Rwandan government.⁸⁷ A few months later, Rwanda was accused of training so-called *intore* to destabilise the entire region.⁸⁸ Cross-border regional dynamics were again confirmed by the UN Group of Experts, which found that an armed group with Rwandan and Congolese Banyamulenge combatants, allegedly linked to the Rwanda National Congress, operated in the border area assisted by a recruitment network directed from Bujumbura.⁸⁹

Further afield, relations with South Africa have remained frosty. A major bone of contention for years has been the presence of Rwandan dissidents in South Africa and suspicions that Rwandan intelligence operatives were threatening their lives. This issue emerged again when South African prosecutors called an inquest into the murder of Patrick Karegeya in Johannesburg at the end of 2013. The Chief Prosecutor told the Randburg magistrate that he had lined up more than 30 witnesses for the inquest scheduled for January 2019.⁹⁰ Observers saw the prospect of an independent inquiry leading to State House in Kigali.⁹¹ Things certainly did not improve after South African Minister for International Relations and Co-operation Lindiwe Sisulu suggested that Rwanda should negotiate with its opponents, a plea angrily dismissed by the Rwandan government.⁹² After the website *Rushyashya*, which is considered close to Rwanda's intelligence services, called Sisulu "Kayumba's prostitute" and Deputy Foreign Minister Olivier Nduhungirehe tweeted messages considered offensive by Pretoria, South Africa protested officially to Kigali and recalled its high commissioner.⁹³ The Rwandan Foreign Ministry reacted in a strongly worded statement, regretting "unfounded allegations made against Rwanda" and South African suggestions of "negotiations with subversive and criminal movements".⁹⁴

⁸⁷ "RDC: les accusations de 'complot' contre le Rwanda des services de sécurité congolais sont-elles crédibles?", *Jeune Afrique*, 19 May 2018.

⁸⁸ "Kagame Accused of Massive Training of Intore Militias to Destabilise the Region", *Spyreports*, 7 August 2018.

⁸⁹ United Nations Security Council, *Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/2018/1133, 31 December 2018, pp. 9-10.

⁹⁰ "South Africa calls inquest into murder of Rwandan dissident", *The Globe and Mail*, 1 November 2018; "Karegeya murder: SA opens inquest, issuance of visas still in abeyance", *The East African*, 3 November 2018.

⁹¹ "Rwanda and South Africa's rocky road to reconciliation", *The Daily Maverick*, 8 November 2018.

⁹² "Rwanda bristles over Lindiwe Sisulu's apparent support for dissidents", *The Daily Maverick*, 18 November 2018.

⁹³ "SA recalls envoy to Rwanda over 'insulting' comments", *The East African*, 10 December 2018; "Normalisation of SA-Rwanda relations has been suspended after insults to Sisulu, sources say", *The Daily Maverick*, 10 December 2018.

⁹⁴ "Statement on Rwanda-South Africa Relations", Kigali, 12 December 2018.

For the last 20 years, relations with France have been dominated by two main bones of contention. On the one hand, the judicial investigation into the downing of President Habyarimana's plane in April 1994 (see above). On the other hand, the alleged role of France in the genocide has given rise to accusations from Rwanda and to bitter debates in France. Two diametrically opposed positions have continued to confront each other in France: one claims France's active involvement on the side of the previous regime, while the other defends the honour of France and its army, including in the *Turquoise* operation, on which new "revelations" were made public.⁹⁵ This debate has again been fuelled by President Macron's support for Mushikiwabo's successful candidacy at the head of the OIF.⁹⁶

After a similar event in 2011, in March 2018 the UK police again warned a British citizen of Rwandan origin that he faced an imminent danger to his life from Rwandan government agents. This came in the wake of the Skripal incident and led to calls to treat Rwanda in the same way as Russia.⁹⁷ In May, a sleeve sponsorship deal signed between the Rwandan Development Board and Arsenal FC at a cost of 39 million USD over a three-year period put the country briefly in the limelight again. That one of the poorest countries in the world should sponsor one of the richest soccer clubs met with indignation. An MP described the deal as "an own goal for foreign aid".⁹⁸ The news was also a new occasion to question the democratic credentials of a major beneficiary of UK aid.⁹⁹

In Belgium, the Rwandan government and its supporters twice intervened in the political arena. In February, when the Rwandan association Jambo announced the organisation of a conference to discuss a bill on genocide denial, pressure from Kigali caused the Belgian parliament, which had previously agreed to host the meeting, to cancel the event. Later in the year, the Rwandan government again intervened by attempting to have some Belgians of Rwandan origin who were candidates for the October municipal elections removed from the lists. Similar pressure was exercised in The Netherlands to prevent the publication of a Dutch translation of Judi Rever's previously-mentioned book.¹⁰⁰ As the campaign intervened near the end of the production process,

⁹⁵ See for instance "Génocide rwandais. Enquête sur les derniers secrets de la France", *Le Monde*, 16 March 2018.

⁹⁶ Reporters sans frontières, "RSF s'inquiète de la candidature rwandaise à la tête de l'OIF", 10 July 2018.

⁹⁷ BIRRELL, I., "Rwanda deserves to be condemned as much as Russia", *The Times*, 14 March 2018.

⁹⁸ "Foreign aid farce – Rwanda gets £64m UK aid – and gives £30m to Arsenal", *Daily Express*, 28 May 2018.

⁹⁹ For instance "Why has Britain given £1bn foreign aid to a brutal African regime?", *Daily Mail*, 19 June 2018.

¹⁰⁰ "Genocide: Open letter to Amsterdam University Press", *The New Times*, 18 September 2018.

the book was eventually published, but Amsterdam University Press felt intimidated enough to refrain from actively promoting its own book. In France, such a campaign of intimidation came in time, as the Paris publisher Fayard decided not to publish a French translation of Rever's book, despite the fact that a contract had been signed.

As also seen elsewhere in Africa, the Rwandan government has sought closer ties with China and Russia. In June 2018, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and a high Chinese military delegation visited Kigali. Lavrov discussed the supply of air defence systems and co-operation in nuclear energy, mining, agriculture and medicine. China is reported to have procured medium-range surface-to-air missile systems to Rwanda in a deal whose details were not revealed.¹⁰¹

7. CONCLUSION

Possibly the most important event of the year was the acquittal of Diane Rwigara. Beyond this individual case and provided the judgment is upheld on appeal, this could signal two breaks with the past. On the one hand, together with the partial acquittal of Léopold Munyakazi, it could mean that the Rwandan judiciary is becoming more independent than it was until recently. This would, of course, suppose that the High Court was not instructed by the President's office to adjudicate in the way it did, and only the future will tell whether this development is genuine and lasting. On the other hand, now that Rwandan case law, in line with the ACtHPR's judgment in the Ingabire case, has affirmed that speech, including opinions expressing critical views of the government, is protected by the constitution, this should open up opportunities for the media, civil society and the political opposition. Beyond freedom of expression, the logic followed by the High Court should extend also to other rights such as association and assembly. If these rights are respected and not unduly restricted by legislation on divisionism, genocide ideology and defamation, this would open up political space in a way unheard of during the past twenty years.

Of course, as past elections and the most recent parliamentary polls have shown, there is still a long way to go for there to be a political level playing field in Rwanda. Opposition leaders continue to be harassed, "disappeared" and jailed. The way in which the RPF organises elections shows its lack of confidence in case it were to face an open contest. It takes no risks, and de-

¹⁰¹ "Rwanda courts Russia and China as ties with America deteriorate", *The East African*, 9 June 2018. On the evolution of Rwanda-China relations see HACKENESCH, C., *The EU and China in African Authoritarian Regimes. Domestic Politics and Governance Reforms*, s.l., Palgrave MacMillan, 2018, pp. 49-97. More generally on China-Africa relations, see GRIMM, S., "China-Africa Cooperation: promises, practice and prospects", *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 23, 2014, pp. 993-1011.

mocracy remains a façade, but the ruling party might in the coming years be faced with a more robust and outspoken opposition, as recently shown by challenging statements of Victoire Ingabire and Diane Rwigara. The RPF's narrative is not only contested in the elite political arena, but also more broadly among the population. Despite the regime's top-down de-ethnicisation project, research shows the continuing prevalence of ethnicity and the private rejection of policies aimed at "unity" and "reconciliation". Frustration and resentment over ethnic domination and heavy-handed measures at all levels of the state, but also over land and agricultural policies, as well as over poverty and inequality continue to fuel widespread structural violence.¹⁰²

In addition, the regime is confronted with a difficult regional environment. Due in part to the regime's "belligerent nationalism", relations with Uganda and Burundi are hostile and the porous border with a weak and unstable state in the DRC keeps alive the threat of cross-border insurgent activities. Combined with an increasing deterioration of relations with South Africa, a major regional political, military and economic player, these dynamics may further isolate Rwanda, the more so when Kagame's chairing of the AU comes to an end in early 2019. This tendency towards isolation is strengthened by the perception of Rwandan assertiveness and even arrogance in the region and beyond.

Antwerp, December 2018

¹⁰² On the role of structural violence in the run-up to the 1994 genocide, see UVIN, P., *Aiding Violence. The Development Enterprise in Rwanda*, West Hartford CT, Kumarian Press, 1998.