



NAVARRA CENTER
FOR **INTERNATIONAL**
DEVELOPMENT

RWANDA IS WATCHING YOU

DO NOT DISTURB

THE STORY OF A
POLITICAL MURDER
AND AN AFRICAN
REGIME GONE BAD

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In July it was leaked that Rwanda has been one of the countries that have used the Israeli Pegasus software to spy on political rivals, members of civil society, journalists and even heads of state. Since 2016, 3,500 people had been monitored, including the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, the former Head of Foreign Affairs of neighboring Uganda, Ruhakana Rugunda, the Prime Minister of Burundi, Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni, and the daughter of Paul Rusesabigna, the man who inspired the movie Hotel Rwanda.

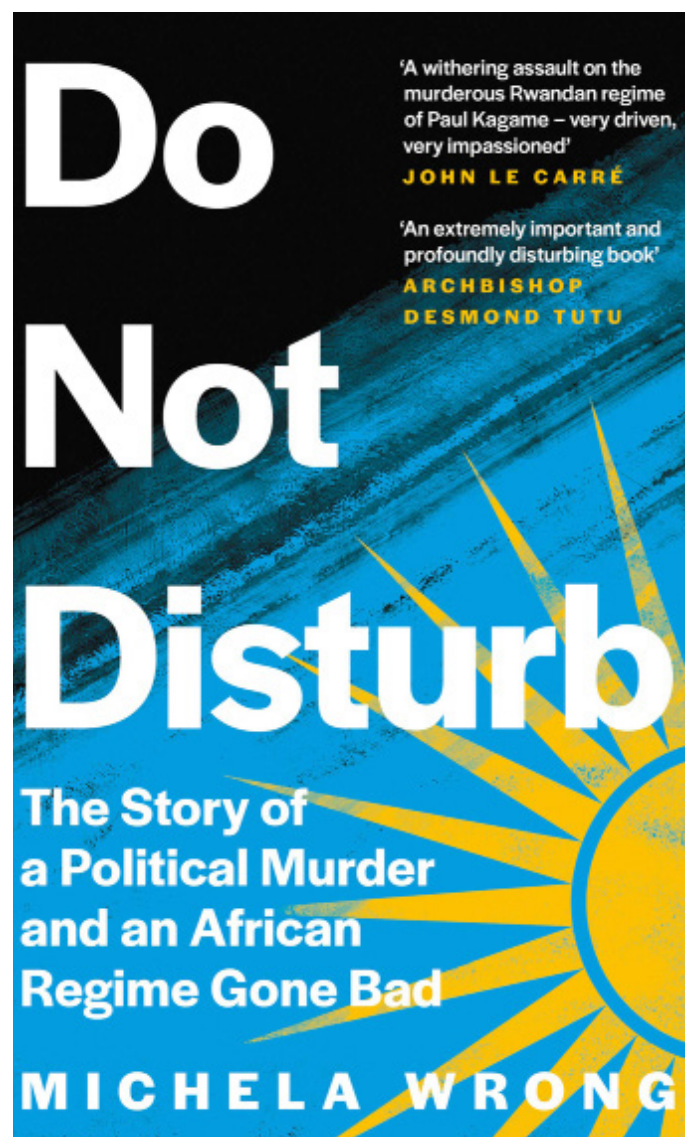
A few hours later, the government led for 21 years by Paul Kagame denied the most, accusing it of misinformation that seeks to damage the international image of the country. The news did not surprise those who follow current affairs in the country, but it did surprise those who only hear the stories of a post-genocide Rwanda of 1994 that re-emerged like a phoenix to be a unique example of development in Africa. For the latter, the book *Do Not Disturb: The Story of a Political Murder and an African Regime Gone Bad*, by British investigative journalist Michela Wrong, is a great read to learn on the country's dark side.

The book could well have been named "We are spying on you". In over 400 pages, Wrong paints a country where surveillance, fear and repression rule the field, inside and outside of its borders. An acquaintance on a work visit once told me that the city was pristine, everything was going well but you felt watched. It probably was.

As in her previous book on corruption in Kenya, where the protagonist is John Githongo, the British focuses her story on an individual to explain the functioning of an entire country. In Rwanda that man is Patrick Karegeya. Once head of foreign intelligence and President Kagame's right-hand man, he fell from grace and went into exile in South Africa, only to be assassinated on 2014's New Years Eve at the Michelangelo Hotel.

The irony of the story is that Karegeya was the architect of one of the most articulate espionage systems in the world,

at the height of the Israeli Mossad, and he ended up falling into his own network. In the book, Wrong presents him as a close, smiling and a man loved by all, but prey of the despotism of his boss. That description and closeness seems a bit too much as a reader, as one thinks that if Karegeya had not fallen from grace, he would be just as much as a villain as the author describes Kagame.



However, Wrong does not focus only in his main character. She does a great historical review of the country, dating back to before the genocide, where the history books of Rwanda seem to be missing. In its pages you learn about the divide between the majority of the Hutu ethnic group and the Tutsis, who emigrated to Uganda and then planned their return home after learning to fight with Yoweri Museveni's Ugandan National Resistance Movement. Among the mountains of the neighboring country died a vital figure, Fred Rwigyema, a popular leader in the style of the guerrilla Che Guevara.

After his death, Kagame took command of the movement. Unlike Rwigyema, who is beloved and charming, the current president is described by the author as a feared leader, repressive, and insecure in the face of his lack of popularity. At the same time, she admits he was the only solution to keep the Rwandan Patriotic Front united at the time.

Kagame's past is vital to understand Rwanda today. He didn't shot bullets on the front lines, but rather was an intelligence officer for the Museveni guerrilla in Uganda. He lacked knowledge on how to handle weapons, but knew very well how to manipulate minds. As Wrong mentions, Rwanda resembles Israel, where whoever questions the official version of the genocide or the government line is branded as a revisionist. Likewise, the Rwandan president uses in his favor the feeling of guilt of the international community for not having done anything to prevent the genocide to prevent from reprisals from his continuous abuses of human rights.

After reading the book, one ends up surprised with the impunity with which the Rwandan government acts. The government not only spies on rivals, critical journalists and local NGOs operating in the country, but also on foreigners working in Rwanda and, worse still, Rwandan exiles. Karegeya was killed in South Africa, miles away, but Wrong also describes espionage and assassination attempts cases outside of the continent in cities like in London, Brussels or Copenhagen. The August 2020 imprisonment of Paul Rusesabagina is a recent example of this: a resident of the United

States, the Hutu man who saved the lives of hundreds of Tutsis during the genocide was abducted during an air connection in Dubai and put on a plane to Kigali. Once landed, he was arrested on terrorism charges accused of financing a rebel militia in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to finish off Kagame.

Cases like that of Rusesabagina and those described by the British journalist in the book make the reader wonder: how can it be that a Rwandan is persecuted on European territory and the local governments do nothing? And above all: what has to happen for that to stop, to put a hold on Rwanda's actions? For the moment, there is still *carte blanche*.

In spite of everything, the audacity that Kagame has shown and the success in the development of Rwanda is undeniable, something the author seems to underestimate. While mentioning that many people, including her, probably would have signed in 1994 to see the country in its current state, Wrong disdains the achievements made by assuring that after a severe conflict such as the genocide, in which between 500,000 and 1 million people were killed in a hundred days, the economy and social connection have hit rock bottom and can only improve. However, this does not explain many of the country's achievements, such as the capital, Kigali, hosting the first smartphone factory in Africa or that Volkswagen chose it as its destination for its first opening in the region. All in all, it is true that the intention of the book is not to repeat the well-known public story, but to show the less sympathetic part that does not take over the international media.

In any story, be it of a country, company or family, there is always a hidden not-so-nice part that underlies the good side. *Do Not Disturb* is a great book for the general public to get to know that side of Rwanda. Wrong manages to captivate the reader with a reliable and detailed journalistic work, with names and surnames, which is complemented by a prose that makes it read like a crime novel.

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MICHELA WRONG is a British journalist. Graduated in Philosophy and Social Sciences at Jesus College, Cambridge, she also has a diploma in journalism at Cardiff. She started working as a foreign correspondent in the 1980s at Reuters in Italy, France and Ivory Coast. After that she has worked in Africa as a freelance at Congo and Rwanda, covering the 1994 genocide for the BBC and Reuters, and finally four years after in Kenya covering from Nairobi East, West and Central Africa for the Financial Times. *Do Not Disturb: The Story of a Political Murder and an African Regime Gone Bad* is the fifth book she's written. She published her first book, *In the Footsteps of Kurtz*, in the year 2000 about the Zaire dictator Mobutu Sese Seko and won a PEN prize for non-fiction for it. Five years later she published *I Didn't Do It For You* on the Horn of Africa state of Eritrea. In 2010 she published *It's Our Turn to Eat: The Story of a Kenyan Whistleblower* and she was awarded the James Cameron prize for journalism. In 2015, she adventured and published her first novel *Borderlines*, a thriller that focuses on a border dispute between two fictional states in the Horn of Africa and that has a female lawyer as a protagonist. Currently she publishes opinion pieces and book reviews on a wide range of media outlets and also is interviewed by the BBC, Reuters and Al Jazeera on her areas of knowledge ●