

# BOOK REVIEW

**Kyrsten Sinema. *Who Must Die in Rwanda's Genocide? The State of Exception Realized*.** London: Lexington Books, 2015. xv + 176 pp. Appendices. Bibliography. \$95.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1498518642.

Twenty-five years after the 1994 Rwandan genocide, *Who Must Die in Rwanda's Genocide: The State of Exception Realized* by newly-elected Arizona senator Krysten Sinema is a timely reminder that state-backed killings do not erupt accidentally, but instead they are the predictable outcome of security logics that are increasingly the norm in contemporary liberal democracies. Sinema applied Giorgio Agamben's (1998, 2005) concept of sovereignty as the state of exception to the leadup to Rwanda's genocide through archival materials she gathered during the summers 2010 and 2011 at the Kigali Genocide Memorial, the National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide, and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda Arusha in Tanzania.

In a book targeted to a general readership wondering how such a thing could have happened, Sinema uses five chapters examining one hundred years of political history to argue that the state of exception "creates an atmosphere wherein a sovereign (government) strips its citizens of their sociopolitical being" so they are no longer people, but instead simply "a threat to the existing power structure," whereby elimination of a portion of the citizenry through genocide becomes a logical, not merely plausible, solution (132–33). However, the book misses an opportunity to advance our understanding about how the genocide occurred, or to retheorize governance and the state of exception in Rwanda or African states more widely, for two reasons. Sinema neglected to engage with the extensive scholarship within and outside of Rwanda on sovereignty, necropolitics, bare life, and the genocide that have been produced over the past twenty-five years, and she did not acknowledge how the one-sided perspective of the sources she uses—official documents from state-sanctioned archives managed by a regime that is notorious for control and dissemination of an official narrative, and harsh punishment of dissent—led her to fit facts into a pre-existing script.

Yet, for a member of the sitting U.S. Senate to have authored a book—researched and written in her role as a public official (*xii*)—pointing to the ways contemporary sovereignty is built on the state of exception invites two

crucial interventions for our senators. First, Sinema and her senate colleagues should apply her analysis to examine how Rwanda's current president Paul Kagame's regime governs through a state of exception—including using security frameworks to justify forcefully evicting marginalized residents, detaining opposition politicians and “undesirable” citizens in an island rehabilitation camp, and even altering the constitution to permit Kagame's current third term in office. Second, Sinema is uniquely placed to critique the United States' ongoing state of exception, and its haunting similarities to pre-genocide Rwanda, particularly under a president who is notorious for his tweets and his precarious relationship to the rule of law, visible most blatantly in the unilateral declaration of a state of emergency to justify building a border wall. Sinema's chapter on media propaganda, for example, invites her to speak out about the ways inflammatory newspapers and radio contributed centrally to the everyday acceptance of Tutsi as less than human, and how in an era of Fox News and Twitter and Facebook, many American officials are at risk of dehumanizing other people today, from undocumented migrants to the 2.3 million people incarcerated in the United States prison system.

Sinema argues that, in a society where the state of exception has become the norm, and where certain groups of people become seen as less-than-human, then genocide becomes an unsurprising solution to maintaining political power. “What is concerning,” she says, “is that we choose not to notice” (133). A senator with expertise in African history and politics can help those in positions of power notice what many scholars of Rwanda and African Studies know too well: devastating violence is already occurring to those who have been excluded from the political community, in contemporary Rwanda and in the United States, and for many, its escalation already feels inevitable.

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doi:10.1017/asr.2019.63

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### For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

- Jessee, Erin, and Sarah E. Watkins. 2014. “Good Kings, Bloody Tyrants, and Everything In Between: Representations of the Monarchy in Post-Genocide Rwanda.” *History in Africa* 41: 35–62. doi:10.1017/hia.2014.7.
- Lemarchand, René. 1998. “Genocide in the Great Lakes: Which Genocide? Whose Genocide?” *African Studies Review* 41 (1): 3–16. doi:10.2307/524678.
- Newbury, Catharine. 2005. “Suffering and Survival in Central Africa.” *African Studies Review* 48 (3): 121–32. doi:10.1353/arw.2006.0032.