



Dateline Africa

Looking back on the past 30 years in ten countries beyond SA

South Africans have been sorely disappointed by the first 30 years of democracy – unemployment has increased, inequalities have deepened, corruption is rampant, there are water crises, electricity blackouts, potholed roads, awful education, creaking hospitals, lots of crime, gender-based violence, xenophobia, discordant politics ... but no civil war, no genocide, no famine, no military coups, no mass kidnapping, no insurgencies, no unfair elections, no censorship, no capital punishment, no arbitrary arrests, no run-away inflation.

Yes, the Mbeki government denied South Africans free HIV treatment, resulting in over 300,000 deaths (HSPH, 2009). And yes, there was Marikana, which left 34 miners dead, and one (short) insurrection in which more than 300 people died. But South Africa has free trade unions, vibrant civil society organisations, legal protection for LGBTI+ and a strong constitution protected by checks and balances. South Africa has been trying to find a way to make democracy work.

In this Special Issue of New Agenda on 30 Years of Democracy in South Africa, IFAA's regular quarterly Dateline Africa column looks beyond the country's borders to see how democracy has fared in other countries in Africa over the last three decades. We look at the ten African countries with the highest populations to provide a comparative perspective – and we have added Rwanda.

Each brief country profile cites a novel published since 1994 because, as acclaimed Egyptian writer, Naguib Mahfouz, said in 1988 on receiving his Nobel Prize in Literature, "...literary writers... spread the fragrance of joy and wisdom in this grief-ridden world of ours."

Top ten countries, and Rwanda, (by population size)

| Rank | 2020 Population | | Regime Type (EIU, 2024) | |
|------|------------------|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| | Africa | 1,338,488,228 | | Comparison |
| 1 | Nigeria | 206,139,587 | Hybrid regime | like Turkiye |
| 2 | Ethiopia | 114,963,583 | Authoritarian regime | like Pakistan |
| 3 | Egypt, Arab Rep. | 102,334,403 | Authoritarian regime | like China and Russia |
| 4 | Congo, Dem. Rep. | 89,561,404 | Authoritarian regime | like Iran |
| 5 | Tanzania | 59,734,213 | Hybrid regime | like Mexico |
| 6 | South Africa | 59,308,690 | Flawed democracy | like India - and USA |
| 7 | Kenya | 53,771,300 | Hybrid regime | like Mexico |
| 8 | Uganda | 45,741,000 | Hybrid regime | like Turkiye |
| 9 | Algeria | 43,851,043 | Authoritarian regime | like Pakistan |
| 10 | Sudan | 43,849,269 | Authoritarian regime | like Iran |
| | Rwanda | 12,952,209 | Authoritarian regime | like Pakistan |
| | The Rest | 506,281,527 | | |
| | Total | 1,338,488,228 | | |

Sources: World Development Indicators (2023) and EIU (2024)

■ NIGERIA

In brief – democratised in 1999, but has experienced insurgency, kidnapping, poor election management, weak judiciary. Can boast of a vibrant economy, although there is a deep divide between the poor and the millionaires.

Population 206 million (highest in Africa); hybrid regime

Thirty years ago Nigeria was being subjected to terror and persecutions under the rule of the looting military dictator, Soni Abacha. He died, suddenly, in 1998 and since then Nigerian leaders have all been elected.

Olusegun Obasanjo (by far the best of all Nigeria’s leaders) took the presidential oath in the presence of Nelson Mandela and other heads of state on 29 May 1999 – which he named Democracy Day. But Nigeria has never been a stable multi-party democracy. Corruption and incompetence have marked both central and state governments. When Obasanjo left office in 2007, at the age of 70, he was subjected to a “torrent of abuse” (Ilfie, 2011:183). The country’s leading constitutional lawyer described the departing regime as “a bad dream, a nightmare for the Nigerian people and a disaster for the rule of law, democracy and good governance”.

Despite its huge wealth as an oil exporter, Nigeria has to import petrol and diesel as its refineries have collapsed. People face water shortages, outages of electrical power and deteriorating security. The banditry of the extreme Islamist Boko Haram has been combined with powerful criminal gangs who rob, kidnap and extort bribes.

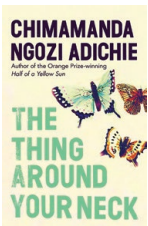


Bronze, ivory and wooden artworks, known as the Benin Bronzes, were plundered from Benin City in the 1897 British Colonial Military Campaign

Nigeria is a huge, complex country with over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own agenda and many harbouring deep resentments. Ethnic clashes and disorder, with uncontrolled police and military forces, disrupt ‘normal’ life.

Elections are held, usually with severe flaws, but allowing some element of the will of the people to influence their government. The abysmal conduct of the judiciary and the poor management of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) marred the 2023 presidential elections. Commentators pointed to “endemic problems. These include the nature of Nigeria’s politics, its elite, a lack of political will, lack of rule of law and constitutionalism, unpopular government policies, and a distrust of the system, particularly INEC” (Thompson *et al.*, 2023).

A novel published since 1994



The Thing Around Your Neck by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Fourth Estate, 2009. Kindle \$10.10.

ETHIOPIA

In brief – civil war ends, but what remains is a flawed democracy with discord, censorship, strife, despite remarkable economic growth.



Abiy Ahmed at the controversial Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

Population: 115 million; authoritarian regime – host to the headquarters of the African Union

In 1994, Ethiopia approved a new constitution, providing for a parliamentary system. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) won the first multi-party election in Ethiopian history in 1995 and Meles Zenawi, its charismatic leader, became prime minister of the new Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.¹ Zenawi introduced economic reforms that led to Ethiopia becoming one of Africa's fastest-growing economies. However, he followed a policy of ethnic federalism and ruled with a heavy hand, with Tigrayan interests dominant.

When Zenawi died suddenly in 2012 many observers predicted that Ethiopia would be wracked by destructive internal power struggles. These came – with disastrous effects – in 2021 when Abiy Ahmed provoked a civil war targeting Tigray in the north. Abiy had been welcomed widely as a new democratic leader. He was awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in ending the intense border dispute with Eritrea between 1998 and 2000 in which 100,000 people died,² as well as for releasing political prisoners and adopting liberal governance within Ethiopia.



The civil war was marked by extreme brutality and the use of mass starvation as a weapon. In 2022, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of the World Health Organisation, said the ongoing war in Ethiopia was worse than any other humanitarian crisis in the world. An estimated 600,000 people died and several million were displaced. Journalists were banned from reporting on the conflict and there were internet and phone blackouts. A peace deal was negotiated at the end of 2022 but the effects of the war – not least from the destruction of economic infrastructure – will linger for generations.

A novel published since 1994



The Shadow King: A Novel by Maaza Mengiste. W.W Norton, 2019.
Kindle \$12.01

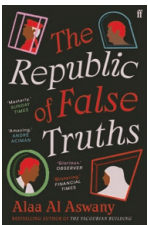
EGYPT

In brief – all hopes from the Arab Spring reversed by intense repression

Population 102 million; authoritarian regime, with an army of 438,000 – the biggest in Africa.

For more on the fortunes of Egypt after 1994 see the extract from *Laughter in the Dark: Egypt to the Tune of Change* by Yasmine El Rashidi on page 135 in Book Reviews.

A novel published since 1994



The Republic of False Truths by Alaa al-Aswany (author) and SR Fellowes (translator from the Arabic). Knopf, 2021. Kindle \$9.19

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)

In brief – a journey to hell and back again, and again and again and again, not helped by the curse of its extensive mineral deposits and by President Paul Kagame of Rwanda next door.

Population 90 million plus; second largest country in Africa; authoritarian regime



Source UNHCR John Wessels

The long dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko (1971-1997) was already crumbling in 1994 when the Rwanda genocide broke out, destabilising the entire region. A total of 1.5 million refugees fled to eastern ‘Zaire’.³ Paul Kagame instigated the formation of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for Liberation (AFDL), an alliance of Rwandan, Ugandan, Burundian and Congolese fighters, which became known for its child soldiers, to make it look like a domestic uprising.

The Congo wars have been numbered: War the First was from 1997 to 1998 in which the AFDL drove out Mobutu and Laurent-Désiré Kabila became president. During this war there were six massacres and hundreds of thousands died; War the Second followed from 1998 to 2003 after Kabila fell out with his backers – Uganda and Rwanda – who invaded creating anarchy and *over five million died*.

But the wars are not strictly countable. Despite the deployment of the largest and most expensive peace-keeping initiatives of the United Nations and literally hundreds of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) the fighting goes on. Elites in Congo and Rwanda benefit from the wars, which are driven by the mining of gold, diamonds,

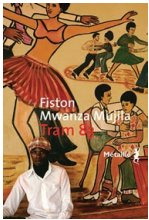


copper, cobalt and cassiterite (tin). Mining is both large-scale, by international and state-owned companies, and of the smallest scale, with intense self-exploitation by miners and mining communities.

Elections have been scheduled, postponed and eventually held several times since 1994. None have met standards of fairness. But Kabila and his son, Joseph Kabila, who took office ten days after the assassination of his father and remained in power until 2019, and his successor, the current president Félix Tshisekedi, have all been elected after a fashion.

Mining, music and military operations continue alongside agriculture, refugee camps, volcanic activity and bad roads. Kinshasa, the capital, is one of the largest cities in Africa and the fount of all manner of cultural innovation – and corruption.

A novel published since 1994



Tram 83 by Fiston Mwanza Mujila (author) and Roland Glasser (translator from the French). Dallas, TX: Deep Vellum Publishing, 2015.

TANZANIA

In brief – one party has ruled since independence.

Population: 60 million; hybrid regime; the home of African socialism ‘ujamaa’

In 1994 Tanzania was reaching the end of a period of one-party rule which had lasted since independence. The Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), the ‘Party of the Revolution’ founded by Julius Nyerere, was the sole legal political party until 1992. Multi-party elections have now been held every five years since 1995. The CCM has won every election, maintaining a supermajority throughout.

CCM can take credit for Tanzania’s strong sense of unity and togetherness; loyalty to the country often counts for more than tribal or religious identity. Kiswahili and English are the only two official languages in a country with over 100 languages. This long-term policy has reduced tribe and language-driven tensions in politics.

The CCM has provided stable, if largely ineffective, government. There was a spurt in economic growth as old state economic policies based on discredited “African socialism” loosened up after 1995. Tanzania was 10th out of 105 countries in terms of the extent of state ownership in the economy over the period 1975-1995. Subsequent rates of growth were impressive, if from a really low base, up to about 2010.



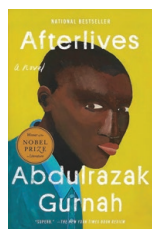
President of Tanzania, Samia Suluhu Hassan

Economic progress took a severe hit from the policies of the erratic President John Magafuli, who was elected in 2015 after Jakaya Jikweti stepped down, in accordance with two leadership terms policy. In addition to unfriendly economic policies, Magafuli transformed Tanzania into a strongly authoritarian state – with repression against the media and opposition political figures. The judiciary, appointed by the President (as are many other offices) does not act as a check or a balance.

Magafuli's sudden and unexplained death in 2021 led to the accession to the presidency of his deputy, Samia Suluhu Hassan, in accordance with the constitution. As a woman and a representative from the politically marginal island of Zanzibar she would never have been chosen to head the CCM, but for the constitution. She faces a presidential election in 2025.

Suluhu implemented some democratic reforms, releasing detainees and creating an atmosphere in which political exiles returned, but laws passed by her predecessor to limit the operation of NGOs and the media remain in force. Also, the opposition faces an unreformed electoral system and has yet to recover from six years in which their rallies were banned.

A novel published since 1994



Afterlives: A Novel by Abdulrazak Gurnah (who was awarded the 2021 Nobel Prize for Literature). Bloomsbury, 2020. Kindle \$12.81



KENYA

In brief – from a one-party state to murderous multi-party politics with ruthless corrupt elites and tendering scandals galore and with difficult northern borders.

Population 54 million; hybrid regime



Violence and conflict often accompany Kenya's elections

In 1994 Daniel Arap Moi's corrupt and repressive regime had been in place for 16 years. He had succumbed to international and internal pressure to return to multi-party politics for the 1992 elections, but the process was dominated by ethnic tensions and electoral malpractice. He was re-elected in 1997 and stepped down in 2002 after two terms.

The Kenya African National Union (KANU), the ruling party since independence, lost the 2002 election to the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) whose presidential candidate, Mwai Kibaki, won a landslide victory over the KANU candidate Uhuru Kenyatta.

NARC split in 2005 when Kibaki lost a referendum that aimed to change the constitution to entrench his power and that of his 'Mount Kenya mafia' of Kikuyu politicians. The Luo leader, Raila Odinga, once a Kibaki ally, was expelled from the cabinet after he launched a 'No' campaign.

Opinion polls expected Raila Odinga and his new Orange Democratic Movement to win the 2007 elections but despite obvious signs of fraud, Kibaki was declared the winner by 231,728 votes. In the aftermath of the elections Kenya fell apart in an explosion of ethnic violence and looting in which more than 1,100 people were killed and 650,000 had to flee their homes.

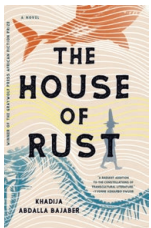
A subsequent commission of inquiry found there was so much interference in the election – from both sides – it was not possible to identify the actual winner. Kofi Annan, who led the Panel of Eminent African Personalities set up by the African Union, brokered an agreement: Kibaki, President; Odinga, Prime Minister – each selecting half of a huge cabinet. Cynical observers said this just doubled the number of mouths to feed from ongoing state corruption and tender manipulation.

The International Criminal Court indicted several leading Kenyan politicians on a charge of crimes against humanity perpetrated in the wake of the 2007 elections. These included soon to be president Uhuru Kenyatta and current president William Ruto. Charges were dropped by 2016 and no one has been held to account for the dreadful events.

Uhuru Kenyatta won bitterly contested elections in 2013 and 2017 against Raila Odinga. Odinga has contested the elections for president five times, has never won and each time has alleged vote rigging. In 2017, the Supreme Court annulled the results of the election – but Odinga and the opposition boycotted the rerun. After a truce in 2018, Odinga joined Kenyatta’s government. Kenyatta backed Odinga in the presidential elections in 2022, but William Ruto was declared the winner.

Kenyan voters have been unable to move much beyond tribal identities – and the philosophy of “it’s our turn to eat,” (Wrong, 2009) as one set of ethnic alliances replaces another. Corruption takes many innovative forms and government procurement scandals persist.

A novel published since 1994



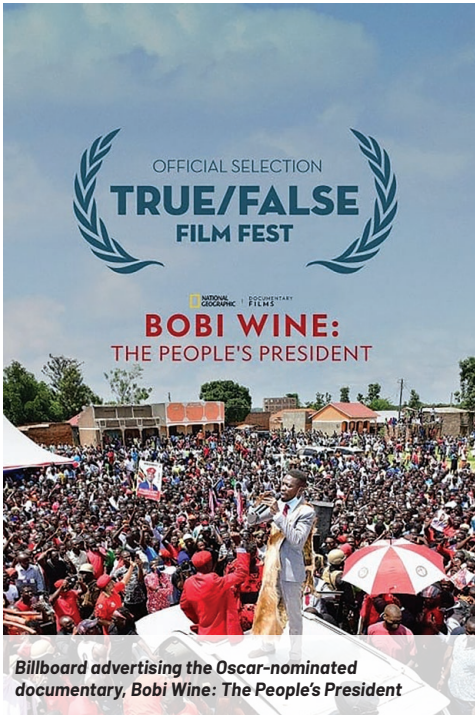
The House of Rust: A Novel by Khadija Abdalla Bajaber (who won the 2022 Ursula K. Le Guin Prize for Fiction). Grey Wolf Press, 2021. Kindle \$11.19

UGANDA

In brief – long rule by an aged and increasingly testy strongman, despite vibrant and daring social activists who risk violence and death. But it was worse before him.

Population 46 million; authoritarian regime

In 1994, Yoweri Museveni had been President of Uganda for eight years after he seized power in a military invasion in 1986. He was re-elected in 1996 and 2001. In 2005, presidential term limits were removed and he won again in 2006, 2011 and 2016. In 2017, the previous upper age limit of 75 was also removed (in time for his 75th birthday in 2019) and Museveni won a sixth term in 2021. Many campaign rallies had been banned



before the elections – because of Covid-19 – and oppressive action was taken by the government against the opposition and its leaders. The most well-known opposition figure was the musician and legislator, Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as Bobi Wine.

Reports say, “Museveni’s security forces are among the most brutal and violent in the world. They have tortured legislators and killed opposition supporters, gunned down unarmed villagers, and sparked conflicts in neighbouring countries (Epstein, 2021).”

Museveni was one of the few African leaders who confronted HIV / AIDS openly (even if he was sceptical about condoms) – and supported policies that significantly reduced its prevalence.

Uganda has the most extreme anti-LGBTI+ legislation in Africa. On 3 April the country’s constitutional court upheld

the main parts of Uganda’s Anti-Homosexuality Act, which became law in May 2023. The law has long prison sentences for “promoting homosexuality” and prescribes the death penalty in particular cases. The judges did strike down a section that imposed a duty to report gay people to the police. The court said the law reflects Uganda’s history, traditions and culture.

Uganda has also [acted harshly](#) against young climate activists who have opposed the controversial East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP).

A novel published since 1994



The First Woman by Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi. Oneworld Publications, 2021. Kindle \$10.83

ALGERIA

In brief – civil war, dodgy elections, rule by a clique of clans, censorship ... and bread (but no circuses!)

Population 44 million; biggest country in Africa; authoritarian regime



In 1994 Algeria was engaged in an intense and bloody civil war that had started two years earlier after the Algerian army cancelled elections that the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) had been poised to win. An estimated 150,000 people died in a decade of violence with Islamist rebels which ended after peace negotiations and, eventually, an amnesty for all involved. A state of emergency was in place until 2011.

From 1999 to 2019 Algeria was headed by Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was re-elected in 2004, 2009 and 2014. A movement called the Hirak led peaceful protests against the ruling elite that saw Bouteflika overthrown in 2019 – after he had announced a bid for a fifth presidential term.

The Hirak continued regular demonstrations against the rule of *Le Pouvoir* (“the powers that be”), the corrupt clans who ran Algeria from the shadows throughout Bouteflika’s long rule (and continue to do so). The protests have been stifled by arrests, detentions and oppression. Elections have never been free or fair, in a system marked by media censorship and harassment of political opponents of the military-dominated government.



At the same time Algeria's vast oil and gas wealth – nationalised in the 1960s – has been used to honour constitutional guarantees to provide citizens with education, health care and housing and massive subsidies provide cheap water, electricity and housing, as well as staple foods. "No one goes hungry," concedes a critic of the regime.⁴

A novel published since 1994



The Tongue's Blood Does Not Run Dry: Algerian Stories by Assia Djebar (author who goes by the pen name of Fatima-Zohra Imalayen) and Tegan Raleigh (translator from the French). Seven Stories Press, 2010.

SUDAN

In brief – a dictatorship and civil war, with the country split; the protest movement triumphed briefly but there has been military rule and catastrophic conflict since April 2023.

Population 44 million; authoritarian regime – no government since April 2023



The capital, Khartoum, lies in ruins

According to *The Economist*, "Since independence Sudan has been governed, with only occasional breaks, by an Arab elite in Khartoum, bent on plundering the country's considerable wealth at the expense of its people. Their rule, exercised through the army, has been cloaked in the language of Islam; it is really a kleptocracy. The consequence is a country beset by wars and conflict between the centre and the immiserated peripheries".⁵

By 1994 Omar al-Bashir had been in power in Sudan for five years, heading an Islamict dictatorship which he imposed after a military coup. The regime supported terror attacks across north Africa and in other countries. Civil war enveloped the oil-rich south of the country. By 2002 when a peace agreement gave the south the right to secede (which it did in 2011, creating the new country of South Sudan) two million people had died.

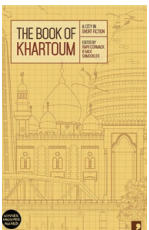
A rebel insurgency in Darfur in the west was met with a campaign of ethnic cleansing to drive out the local population and replace it with Arab settlers. ‘Janjaweed’ militias, supported by the government, could kill, loot and rape at will. By 2010 – when Bashir was indicted by the International Criminal Court for ordering mass murder, rape, torture and genocide – 300,000 people had died in Darfur violence.

In April 2019 Bashir was overthrown after four months of mass protests triggered by rising prices. When government forces tried to clear demonstrations, some elements of the army and navy joined the crowd. An alliance of generals and technocrats ruled the country from August 2019 in a ‘transitional government’ with elections to be scheduled after two to three years. But the popular revolution – which unleashed a wave of optimism – was hijacked by a military junta in 2021 and General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan arrested the civilian prime minister Abdalla Hamdok and others in a coup. In November 2021 Hamdok was back in ‘office’ but under the military. He resigned on 2 January 2022.

Sudan was then ruled by an increasingly uneasy alliance between the ‘Chairman of the Transitional Sovereignty Council’ al-Burhan as head of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Deputy Chair, Muhammad Hamdan ‘Hemedti’ Dagalo, the head of a powerful militia named the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

In April 2023 the alliance between the two Sudanese generals collapsed and war broke out. There have been fierce military battles within the capital city, Khartoum, and at the last count the number of people displaced, both inside and outside Sudan, has reached 8.4 million. Over 14,700 women, men and children have reportedly been killed. Nearly five million people are one step away from famine and 18 million people are facing acute food insecurity.

A novel published since 1994



The Book of Khartoum: A City in Short Fiction by Raph Cormack and Max Shmookler (editors) and various translators from Arabic. Reading the City, 2016. Kindle \$7.28 – but only 92 pages.



RWANDA

In brief – when the genocide ended the country returned to totalitarian rule under Paul Kagame, who has been approved by 98% of voters.

Population 13 million; authoritarian regime, beloved by many other governments



Remembering the 1984 genocide

The exact numbers are not known, but internecine fighting involving the Tutsi minority and Hutu majority led to about 800,000 (mainly Tutsi) deaths over just 100 days from April to July 1994.

The genocide was stopped by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel army made up mostly of ethnic Tutsis that had formed in neighbouring Uganda during the 1980s. The RPF took power after their military victory. Millions of refugees from the genocide had fled into neighbouring countries and, particularly, destabilised the eastern provinces of the DRC (then Zaire). The RPF, supported by Uganda, fomented regional wars that escalated until a peace deal was reached in 2003. The death toll in the region exceeded five million.

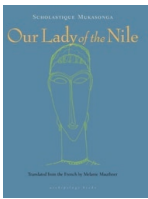
Paul Kagame, the *de facto* ruler of Rwanda from 1994, became President in 2000. A new constitution was adopted in 2003 and Kagame won the first post-genocide election with 95% of the vote. He was re-elected (with 93% support) in 2010 for a second seven-year term. He won again in 2017 (with 99%) after a referendum approved the adjustment of term limits – just for Kagame. (If he wishes he may run for election in July 2024 and five and ten years after that!)

Rwanda has never been a democratic country and when there have been elections and referenda they are not and have never been free and fair. Critics of the government and Kagame are silenced or acted against with a determination that extends beyond the borders of the country.

Internally, using lots of foreign aid, Rwanda has shown some economic success, most notably a fast GDP growth rate. The towns are notably clean and orderly. Most people live in rural areas where the soil is extremely fertile and well-watered. Farmers can get two crops a year.

Externally, over the last decade, Rwanda has made itself indispensable by supplying disciplined peacekeepers to trouble spots across the continent (e.g. in Mozambique). Rwanda has accepted money from the UK to house Britain's unwanted asylum seekers (none have yet been sent). From 2012 Rwanda has provided military support for the 'M23 movement' a militia in the DRC that has, in recent months, displaced hundreds of thousands of people near Goma on the Rwanda border. Rwanda shares in the shady networks that profit from minerals mined in the DRC.

A novel published since 1994



Our Lady of the Nile by Scholastique Mukasonga (author) and Melanie Mauthner (translator from the French). Archipelago, 2014. (Winner of the Prix Renaudot, published by Gallimard, 2012 as *Notre-dame du nil*). Kindle \$11.49 **NA93**

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ENDNOTES

- 1 This followed a civil war in which the EPRDF defeated the Derg junta, the military dictatorship that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1987.
- 2 Ethiopia included present-day Eritrea until a 1993 referendum in which the people of the northern province of Eritrea voted for independence.
- 3 Zaire was the name of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 1971 to 1997.
- 4 See <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2022/11/17/why-algerias-rotten-regime-has-been-lucky>
- 5 See <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2022/01/04/why-is-sudan-so-unstable>