

The absence of a significant political overture is a source of immense frustration not just for Hutu; among Tutsi, the survivors of the genocide, numbering some 150,000, are not the least resentful of their growing marginalization. Meanwhile, the selective homage paid to the victims of the genocide through the annual ritual of commemorative ceremonies makes it abundantly clear to the Hutu that they are collectively seen as perpetrators. Symbolic memory thus reflects the pattern of exclusion inscribed in the new political dispensation. How to restore the impulses of truthfulness, civility and democratic governance will remain the central issue faced by the new Rwanda in the years to come; only then will the prospects for national reconciliation—as distinct from grudging mutual tolerance—enter the realm of the possible.

### EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

Unlike the events surrounding the 1972 genocide in Burundi, a number of eyewitness accounts of the horrors surrounding the Rwanda genocide are available from a variety of sources. Journalists, human rights activists, and members of the clergy have collected a rich harvest of firsthand testimonies. Nowhere, however, are the human dimensions of the cataclysm conveyed in more chilling detail than in the London-based African Rights publication, *Rwanda: Death, Despair and Defiance* (Omaar, 1994). Except for Account 3, excerpted from a report by Physicians for Human Rights (1994), all of the testimonies below are drawn from the African Rights report.

#### Account 1

The following account addresses the critical role played by local government authorities—*bourgmestres*, communal counselors, *prefets*, and *sous-prefets*—in organizing the killings in the countryside. It draws from the testimonies of Antoine Mugambira, from the Kivu commune (Gikongoro prefecture), and Francois Nzeyimana, from the Muganza commune, also in Gikongoro.

We were attacked by *interhamwe*, CDR [the *Coalition pour la Defense de la Republique*], MDR-Power [Hutu hard-liners in the MDR], and MRND [the *Mouvement Revolutionnaire National pour le Developpement*]. Among those who led the attack were a certain Mukama, a soldier, together with the *bourgmestre* of the commune Kivu. They set fire to houses, destroyed our property and ate our cows. We fled to Muganza parish. When we arrived there we met many other people from

Muganza. . . . We were with white nuns who said, "Fight those people because they are killers." The second day they came back with four soldiers, reservists from Ngara and two from Nyabimata. They shot at us and left us with fourteen wounded and six dead. That was on Saturday. On Sunday, we fled again, to Cyahinda. Soldiers shot at us. *Interahamwe* too. We fought them one day, the day we arrived there.

Two of my children were killed, Nkusi and Muhire. I know the killer. He was a soldier, Mukama. He had a gun; he is the one who shot many people. They would shoot at a hundred or two hundred people. . . . It is all former soldiers who killed us. Those who fell over were beaten up with clubs or hacked to death.

In the night we decided to flee to Burundi. On the Mubuga side we saw many dead bodies, for example children on top of their dead mothers. . . . When we arrived in a place called Kukibuga, in a market place called Kugisenyi, we saw more than 300 people who had been killed with their children. They were piled up.

With other peasants we fled together at Muganza and we put up some fight against the killers by throwing stones at them but later they brought guns and shot indiscriminately. So many people were killed. Some fled to Cyahinda but there was burning and killing, so some are dead.

The killers included the *bourgmestre* called Juvenal Muhitira, helped by some local police. One of the policemen was called Mukama, another one was called Ngenzi and [there were] others who were armed. Others who killed my parents were *gendarmes* who were supposed to be protecting them. They were led by Damien Biniga who was the *sous-prefet*. I saw more than 15 dead bodies in all when I took my brother to the parish. We tried to take the worst off for treatment but the white doctors and nurses had fled themselves. When we went to the Nahihi commune, the local people threw spears and stones at us. The *gendarmes* drove us into the forest and many people were killed. We were about 400 people when we entered the forest but only 45 got out (Omaar, 1994, pp. 366–8).

#### Account 2

Nothing is more revealing of the extent of the moral breakdown engendered by the genocide than the wholesale desecration of churches. More people were killed in churches and church compounds than in any other site. Among many others, the churches of Ntamara, Nyarabuye, and the Centre Christus in Kigali became the scene of incredible cruelties. The first testimony, by Josianne Mukeshimana, a 15-year-old school girl, recounts what happened in Ntamara; the second, by a 13-year-old girl named Makuramanzi, describes the scene after she survived the massacre at Nyamata.

The day after the President died, houses started burning in our commune. Refugees began streaming in from other areas. We panicked as we saw *interahamwe* following people everywhere. The second day we left home and went to look for protection in the church of Ntamara. But we were not to find any protection in the church.

About five days after we had been there, there was an attack against the church. When we saw them coming, we closed the doors. They broke the doors down and tore down some of the bricks in the back wall. They threw a few grenades through the holes where the bricks had been. But most people who died were killed by machetes. When they came in, they were obviously furious that we had closed the doors. So they really macheted the refugees. The attackers were *interahamwe* but they were not from our sector. They were ordinary villagers from somewhere else. They surrounded the church to knock down anyone who escaped.

In a fury, those [*interahamwe*] inside really desecrated the church, destroying the statues. They told us: "We are destroying your church!" People could not leave. But it was also intolerable to remain in one's position as the macheting continued. So like the mad, people ran up and down inside the church. All around you, people were being killed and wounded.

Eventually I decided to drop down among the dead. I raised my head slightly; an *interahamwe* hurled a brick at me. It hit me just on top of my eye. My face became covered with blood which was useful in making them think I was even more dead. I tried to stop breathing so they would really believe that I was dead. The macheting continued all round me.

Once they thought most people were dead, they paid more attention to looting the dead. Most of them left. But one of them was not satisfied with his loot. He remained in the church. . . . He came to search my pockets and discovered that I was alive. He threatened to kill me unless I paid him. I said I had no money. He took my watch. In the meantime the other attackers were calling out to him, warning him that he might be killed if he delays any longer. He left.

I tried to get up but it was in vain. I was very weak from my injuries and there were so many bodies everywhere that you could hardly move. A few children, perhaps because they were unaware of the dangers, stood up. I called one of the children to help me. She was a girl of about nine. She replied that she could not help me because they had cut off her arms. I struggled and managed to sit up. But what I could not do was to stand up. I tried and tried but just could not do it. Finally I saw a young woman I knew, a neighbor. I called out to her. At first she did not answer. I insisted and finally she responded. When I looked closely I saw she too had had her arms cut off.

By now I don't know if what I am feeling and seeing is real life or a

nightmare. I asked her if it was real life. She tried to get someone else to help me but could not find anyone. Eventually I forced myself to get up and out of the church. When I got out I got so scared that I returned to the church in spite of the dead bodies. I spent the night there with all the corpses around me (Omaar, 1994, pp. 3, 488–9).

### Account 3

Next to churches, hospitals became a prime target for the massacre of civilians. The search for, and subsequent killing of, wounded survivors of previous massacres were frequent occurrences at the Centre Hospitalier in Kigali, at the Caraes Psychiatric Hospital at Ndera, and the Butare Hospital. On April 23, militias and soldiers from the Rwandan army killed 170 patients and medical personnel at the Butare Hospital. Dr. Claude-Emile Rowagoneza was present at the hospital when the massacre began on April 21. This is his testimony.

The massacres were delayed until April 20. That day everyone was asked to stay at home except those working in the hospital. Medical staff were transported to the hospital. Nurses had to walk and many were stopped at the checkpoint, asked to show their identify cards, and killed if they were Tutsi. There were 35 doctors at the hospital, of which 4 were Tutsi. Because of the danger, all four Tutsi stayed at the hospital as did some nurses. Drs. Jean-Bosco Rugira and Jean-Claude Kanangire are known to have been killed, and the fate of Dr. Isidore Kanangare, who was hiding in the hospital and may have been evacuated by the French, is unknown.

In mid-May, injured soldiers from the Kanombe barracks started being brought to Butare Hospital and no more civilians were being admitted. They also started deciding who were Tutsi on the basis of their features, looking at the nose, height, and fingers because the identity cards were no longer accurate. Some of the doctors at the hospital risked their lives by helping threatened staff by hiding and feeding them. . . .

When the patients' wounds had healed, some of the doctors—the "bad" doctors—expelled the Tutsi even though everyone knew they would be killed outside. At night, the *interahamwe* and the soldiers came in but these doctors were colluding willingly. If people refused to go, they were taken out at night. They could be seen being killed by the *interahamwe* waiting at the gates. Later the prime minister came down to Butare—apparently the educated people in Butare asked him to come—and while here he had a meeting with medical staff. They all said peace had returned and told the patients that it was safe to return home. They wanted those who were remaining here to go. Those who did were then killed. . . .

No one knew who my family were. We had good neighbors who said my family were Hutu. My wife was taken twice by *interahamwe* but neighbors insisted that she was Hutu. We have a 6-month-old daughter. My sister, mother, and father fled to Burundi but all my aunts and uncles and in-laws were killed except for my mother-in-law. In other words, more than 40 of my relatives were killed.

I spent my time hiding in a toilet at the hospital. Eventually I left the hospital and stayed with another friendly Hutu doctor who took me to another Hutu friend who hid me in his toilet. . . . On July 2, there was general panic as the FPR arrived. That night I moved from his friend's house to my own home (Omaar, 1994, pp. 27–8).

#### Account 4

Attempts by the perpetrators of genocide to dehumanize their victims took many forms. Particularly horrible were the methods used to force members of the same family to kill their immediate relatives. The following account by a 24-year-old Tutsi, Venuste Hakizamungu, tells how he was forced by a group of *interahamwe* to kill his own brother, Theoneste Ruykwirwa, suspected of FPR sympathies.

When the killings started, our family was not aware that Tutsi were the target. Therefore, we had had no time to plan our escape. Trouble began in another part of our sector, at Nyagasambu, but soon spread to our *cellule*. In both *cellules* people were chased by *interahamwe* who had been brought in from Bugesera. They assembled everyone in a group. When it came to our family, Hutu residents from both *cellules* tried to pass us off as Hutu by saying that “there was no tutsiship in our family.” Those neighbors who we thought were trying to defend us told us to escape to a neighboring village. We left. We realized later that they were not trying to defend us. There was pressure on them to kill us and they did not want to kill us themselves. So they sent us to be killed to another village. . . .

My brother Theoneste went to the nearest village. But the people there refused to kill him. . . . The next day he came home and went straightway to a roadblock surrounded by *interahamwe*. He told them to kill him themselves and end the story there. These *interahamwe* brought him back to the house. They told us that he had to be killed in order to prove that the whole family were not agents of the FPR. They left him in the house, knowing that he would not try to escape. During this time messages were coming in every hour, urging our family to kill Theoneste. The whole family was threatened with death unless we killed Theoneste. He begged us to kill him, saying that the only alternative was death for the whole family and a very cruel death for him. . . .

After these four days, about 20 *interahamwe*, armed with machetes, hoes, spears, and bows and arrows, came to the house. They stood over me and said: “Kill him!” Theoneste got up and spoke to me. “I fear being killed by a machete; so please go ahead and kill me but use a small hoe.” He himself brought the hoe and handed it to me. I hit him on the head. I kept hitting him on the head but he would not die. It was agonizing. Finally I took the machete he dreaded in order to finish him off quickly. The *interahamwe* were there during the whole time, supervising what they called “work.” When Theoneste was dead they left. The next day I buried him. And I escaped immediately afterwards (Omaar, 1994, pp. 344–5).

#### Account 5

The rape of women and girls constitutes yet another form of dehumanization. Many of the victims were subsequently killed. One of the few survivors is a 17-year-old girl, named Louise. This is how she described her ordeal.

They came back for me. They were three delinquents. As they came towards me, they were discussing how they were going to kill me. But then one of the thugs recognized me, saying, “But she is the daughter of so and so. He is a rich man.” They said I should give them money since my father is well off. I confessed I had no money. They continued to discuss ways of killing me.

Then one of them suggested that they should rape me instead. The three of them raped me in turns. Each having finished, he walked away. As the last one finished, a new group of *interahamwe* arrived. They ordered the man who raped me last to rape me again. He refused. Then they threatened to burn both of us alive unless he raped me again. So he raped me again.

When he was through, the new group of *interahamwe* beat me up. Then they said, “OK let's go. We want to show you where you are going to go.” They threw me into the pit latrine. The man who pushed me pushed me so hard that instead of falling in I fell across. He dragged me back by the legs and I fell in upright, on top of my aunt. I could still hear the thugs talking. One of them said I might still be alive and suggested throwing a grenade in. Another commented, “Don't waste your grenade. A kid thrown that deep cannot be alive.” They left.

I tried to climb out. But I had bled so much I was feeling dizzy. I felt I had no strength left in me. I kept falling down. Finally I collapsed. . . . When somebody came to take me out of the pit, I didn't know who it was. I realized I was out of the pit when I regained consciousness. I saw a soldier standing next to me . . . (Omaar, 1994, p. 425).