

# A Postcolonial Reflection on the Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsi and Statement of Solidarity with Its Survivors

Journal of Victimology  
and Victim Justice  
1–18

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DOI: 10.1177/25166069221084855  
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## Keywords

African affairs, human rights, justice, law and legal, participation, politics of France, rehabilitation, victim protection, victimization

## Belgian Colonization of Rwanda: Racism, Division and Exploitation

In commemorating the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi, we affirm the integrity of Rwanda and the Rwandan people. They were torn asunder by the German and Belgian governments and the Belgian White Fathers for whom a morally perverted form of religion and destructive colonialism went hand in hand. They worked together in arrogance and wilful ignorance of Rwandan culture and civilization—with their bigoted, racist ideologies—when they forced themselves upon Rwanda during colonization.

The Belgian government ruled Rwanda particularly catastrophically and ruthlessly. They built upon Germany's racist policies in Rwanda, and, by cultivating division and hate in Rwandan society; employing a divide and conquer strategy of invasion, conquest, discrimination and persecution, helped lay the groundwork for mass murder and genocide.<sup>2</sup> They destroyed Rwanda's physical and spiritual integrity, freedom and independence—politically,

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\* Please note that four paragraphs of this essay have appeared in an earlier publication of mine, as referenced later in the article in footnote 26. Portions of this essay have been posted online by several human rights organizations, but not formally published.

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<sup>2</sup> M. MAMDANI, *WHEN VICTIMS BECOME KILLERS: COLONIALISM, NATIVISM AND THE GENOCIDE IN RWANDA* (Princeton University Press, 2001); J. SEMUJANGA, *ORIGINS OF RWANDAN GENOCIDE* (Humanity Books, 2003).

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religiously, culturally and socially. They exploited Rwandans to fight in their wars only to betray Rwandans following their ultimate sacrifice with ingratitude and malice.

They destroyed an indigenous culture and form of governance that integrated Hutus and Tutsis into diverse clans.<sup>3</sup> Instead, they cultivated artificial and foreign notions of essentialized and racialized Hutus and Tutsis. Rwandans know the horrific consequences of this coercive and racist Belgian reconstruction of Rwandan social and political identities in the service of dividing Rwandans and alienating them from one another to advance Belgian colonization and its pernicious aims. Rwanda neither asked for nor needed Europeans to meddle in its affairs and offer false promises. But the Germans and Belgians did not ask—they felt entitled—they invaded, attacked and plundered. Rwanda lives with the murderous consequences of their colonization and racism and the mass resentment, jealousy and violence it begot every day.

The Belgian government—with its relentless history of colonization not only in Rwanda but also in Burundi and Congo and Belgian racism against Rwandans—both Hutus and Tutsis, and since 1959, directed against Tutsis—owes an infinite debt to the Rwandan people and particularly to Rwanda's Tutsi minority. The Belgian government conveniently and narcissistically imagined the Congolese, Burundians and Rwandans as savages—projecting its own brutality, immorality and utter ignorance and the evil of its racist theories onto the peoples Belgium oppressed and subjugated. Belgium has yet to acknowledge its moral and legal responsibility for its unconscionable crimes in Africa in any meaningful and significant way that will address its legacies of harm, violence, death and attacks on African democratic self-rule and on the human rights of Africans. Its racist legacy still powerfully informs Belgian law, government and society today.<sup>4</sup>

To the colonial Belgians who thought they arrived in a dark continent laden with jungle and any who sympathize with them we say, never and never and never again shall you bring your moral darkness and your racism to dominate, discriminate, dehumanize, devalue and divide—not in Congo, not in Burundi, not in Rwanda and not anywhere in Africa. Better for Belgium to develop its as yet unmastered skill of effectively self-governing a population divided between the Flemish and Walloons, with little love lost between them. Belgium's reckless and arrogant sense of entitlement brought violence and destruction on a scale and scope that Rwanda, Burundi and Congo never experienced prior to the arrival of Europeans. Whatever heart of darkness Belgium's colonizers thought they encountered in Africa was their own and remains their own as many still celebrate and honour the

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> J. Rankin, *Belgium Forced to Reckon with Leopold's Legacy and its Colonial Past*, THE GUARDIAN, 12 June 2020, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/12/belgium-forced-to-reckon-with-leopolds-legacy-and-its-colonial-past>; D. Boffey, *Cecile Djunga: It Hurts—So We Must Talk About Racism in Belgium*, THE GUARDIAN, 9 September 2018, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/09/cecile-djunga-racism-belgium-viral-video-tv-presenter>.

Belgium's sadist king, Leopold, who killed and tortured over one million Congolese.<sup>5</sup>

When Congo won its independence from Belgium in 1960—as Tutsis were being massacred in Rwanda and Belgium began the first of its many collusions between 1959 and through 1994 with an exterminationist Hutu supremacist regime in Rwanda—Belgium reaffirmed its racist ideology of colonization. Belgium's King Baudouin spoke of the murderous King Leopold, calling him a 'genius', in a bigoted and condescending speech laced with lies about Belgium's purported altruism.<sup>6</sup> The king said that Belgium came not to conquer to but civilize—a comment of staggering poverty of morality, honesty and integrity.<sup>7</sup> His speech seemed aimed at humiliating the Congolese, but ultimately, he humiliated and dishonoured Belgium and Belgians. It revealed the utter lack of self-awareness and insight of colonial perpetrators of the gravest human rights violations, and the contempt with which Belgium viewed Africans. Belgium—with extensive European and American governmental and intelligence collusion would later murder Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, dismember his body and dissolve it in sulphuric acid.<sup>8</sup> That was the clearest expression of Belgium's 'civilizing' mission in Congo. It was and remains an irredeemable infamy and an unforgivable crime.

As to civilization, like Congo, Rwanda knows Belgium's so called 'civilizing mission' all too well. It was the Belgian government who insisted that identity cards define Rwandans as Hutu, Tutsis and Twa. It is that racialized identity reflecting a European obsession with race, pathological European notions of superiority to Africans and racism that enabled Hutu Power and the murder of Tutsis during the genocide. It was those same identity cards that determined who would live and who would die at roadblocks during

<sup>5</sup> A. HOCHSCHILD, *KING LEOPOLD'S GHOST: A STORY OF GREED, TERROR AND HEROISM IN COLONIAL AFRICA* (Mariner Books, 1999); S. Islam, *Europe Can Only Fix Its Relationship with Colonial Africa if it Exorcises its Colonial Ghosts*, THE GUARDIAN, 19 January 2021, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2021/jan/19/europe-relationship-africa-colonial-racism-eu>; D. Boffey, *Belgium Begins to Face Brutal Colonial Legacy of Leopold 2*, THE GUARDIAN, 23 November 2019, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/23/belgium-begins-to-face-brutal-colonial-legacy-of-leopold-ii>; J. Rankin & J. Burke, *Belgian King Expresses Deepest Regret for Brutal Colonial Rule*, THE GUARDIAN, 30 June 2020, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/30/belgian-king-philippe-expresses-profound-regrets-for-brutal-colonial-rule>.

<sup>6</sup> *King Baudouin speech*, available at [https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/address\\_given\\_by\\_baudouin\\_i\\_king\\_of\\_the\\_belgians\\_on\\_the\\_self\\_determination\\_of\\_the\\_belgian\\_congo\\_brussels\\_13\\_january\\_1959-en-07bdc215-b64e-4550-8004-7697246105b9.html](https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/address_given_by_baudouin_i_king_of_the_belgians_on_the_self_determination_of_the_belgian_congo_brussels_13_january_1959-en-07bdc215-b64e-4550-8004-7697246105b9.html); [https://en.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Congolese\\_independence\\_speech\\_by\\_King\\_Baudouin\\_on\\_June\\_30,\\_1960](https://en.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Congolese_independence_speech_by_King_Baudouin_on_June_30,_1960).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> G. Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Patrice Lumumba: The Most Important Assassination of the 20th Century*, THE GUARDIAN, 17 January 2011, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/jan/17/patrice-lumumba-50th-anniversary-assassination>; J. Rankin, *Belgium Mulls Charges Over 1961 Killing of Congo's First Elected Leader*, THE GUARDIAN, 1 July 2020, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2020/jul/01/belgium-mulls-charges-over-1961-assassination-of-congos-first-elected-leader>; J. Burke, *Louis Armstrong and the Spy: How the CIA Used Him as a 'Trojan Horse' in Congo*, THE GUARDIAN, 12 September 2021, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/sep/12/louis-armstrong-and-the-spy-how-the-cia-used-him-as-a-trojan-horse-in-congo>.

the genocide.<sup>9</sup> Anyone the Belgian government had categorized as Tutsi was murdered.

Projecting their own colonial insecurities about their foreign origins, Belgians depicted Tutsis as foreign to Rwanda. As a result of this dangerous and hateful notion that Tutsis are not genuinely Banyarwanda, Tutsis suffered discrimination, resentment and persecution since Belgian colonization's end and the rise of a Hutu supremacist regime with Belgian support. During the genocide, thousands of Tutsis who were slaughtered had their bodies dumped into the Nyabarongo River. Hutu supremacists would say in the midst of their murdering that in this way Tutsis would forcibly be returned by the flow of the river to Ethiopia, the country from which the Belgians claimed Tutsis hailed.

As Scholastique Mukasonga writes of the Belgians in Rwanda,

The Bazungu had unleashed all the insatiable monsters of nightmares on the Tutsis. They held up the distorting mirrors of their untruths, and in the name of their science and their religion, we were made to see ourselves in the malevolent double their fantasies had given birth to ... those words would bring death to so many of us.<sup>10</sup>

## Belgian, French and Global Responsibility for the Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsi

It was the Belgian government and the United Nations and their mutual perfidiousness that enabled the slaughter of more than two thousand Tutsi at the ETO—Ecole Technique Officielle wilfully and deliberately. This was done with full knowledge of the consequences of withdrawing their soldiers during the genocide and leaving the Tutsis to the machetes of the Interahamwe and to certain death as they were marched to Nyanza and massacred there.<sup>11</sup> It is the Belgian government today that has yet to be held legally to account for this complicity, which Belgian courts have whitewashed in an example of the legal and moral corruption of Belgium's courts and their complicity in the Belgian's government's enabling of the genocide against the Tutsi.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> L. MELVERN, *A PEOPLE BETRAYED: THE ROLE OF THE WEST IN RWANDA'S GENOCIDE* (Zed Books, 2019); L. MELVERN, *INTENT TO DECEIVE: DENYING THE GENOCIDE OF THE TUTSI* (Verso, 2020); L. MELVERN, *CONSPIRACY TO MURDER: THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE* (Verso, 2007). *Leave None to Tell The Story*, Human Rights Watch Report on the Rwandan Genocide, available at <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/>.

<sup>10</sup> S. MUKASONGA, *THE BAREFOOT WOMAN* (Archipelago Books, 2018), p. 112.

<sup>11</sup> See *infra notes* 12 and 13 and the book, 'A People Betrayed' by Linda Melvern, as listed in *supra note* 8.

<sup>12</sup> THE NEW TIMES, *ETO Massacres: CNLG Condemns Belgian Court Ruling on Withdrawal of Peacekeepers*, RWANDA NEW TIMES, 17 June 2018, available at <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/eto-massacres-cnlg-condemns-belgian-court-ruling-withdrawal-peacekeepers>; T. Ruys, *Mukeshimana-Ngulinzira and Others v. Belgium and Others*, 114(2) Am. J. Int. Law. 268–275 (2020), available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-journal-of-international-law/article/mukeshimanangulinzira-and-others-v-belgium-and-others/EE37C3B257746BD5D4E4B5AAC3B7D355>.

Shortly after the Belgian troops left the Tutsis at the ETO school to be massacred, the United Nations withdrew the vast majority of its peacekeepers in Rwanda, signalling to the genocidal regime that the United Nations and the world's nations would do nothing to stop them from pursuing genocide. The world's great powers—Britain, Germany, the United States, China and Russia joined France and Belgium in their betrayal and abandonment of Rwanda's Tutsis. Their inaction and indifference was essential for the genocide to take place and they were each and all complicit in it.

Today, there is a memorial garden of peace in Nyanza, in Kigali.<sup>13</sup> But there is no peace there, because the Belgian government denies Rwanda's genocide survivors justice and has denied legal responsibility for its role in that massacre. While Rwanda honours the memory of the Belgian peacekeepers savagely murdered by the Hutu supremacist genocidal regime with a dignified memorial,<sup>14</sup> Belgium shows contempt for Rwanda's genocide survivors in refusing them justice. The dead and the living know the truth—and no amount of lies, denials, evasions, distortions and half-hearted apologies will remove the stain of innocent blood that Belgium helped to spill in Rwanda.

We remember the accomplices of the Belgian government's racism in Francois Mitterand's genocidal French government. In 1994, Rwanda's Tutsi population did not experience the purported Egalite, Liberte and Fraternite of France or the alleged concern for the disadvantaged of Mitterand's socialism. It experienced one thing and one thing only, genocide, genocide and genocide. The Rwandan genocidal regime had the full support of the French government. The French government is both legally and morally responsible for its active complicity with the genocidal government and through that complicity, its participation in the genocide.

We recall that the former President of France, Jacques Chirac, after 50 years of France refusing to acknowledge its responsibility for the murder of over 70,000 French Jews during the Holocaust, finally issued a powerful and honest accounting of France's culpability for participating in the genocide against the Jews, without prevarication. France owes the same honest accounting and acknowledgment of moral and legal responsibility from the French state for its role in the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi.

These words, which President Chirac said in 1995, just one year after the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi, resonate with Rwandan survivors:

The criminal madness of the Nazi occupier was seconded by the French, by the French state. Those black hours soiled our history forever ... France, the homeland of the Enlightenment and of the rights of man, a land of welcome and asylum, on that day committed the irreparable. Breaking its word, it handed those who were under its protection over to their executioners.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Nyanza Peace Garden*, available at <http://www.kigalimemorialcentre.org/centre/other/nyanza.html>; M. Nkurunziza, *Nyanza Memorial Garden to be Completed by July 4*, RWANDA NEW TIMES, 13 April 2021, available at <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/video-nyanza-memorial-garden-be-completed-july-4>.

<sup>14</sup> *Kigali memorial website*, available at <https://kgm.rw>.

<sup>15</sup> M. Simons, *Chirac Affirms France's Guilt in Fate of Jews*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, 17 July 1995, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/17/world/chirac-affirms-france-s-guilt-in-fate-of->

Speaking of the Jewish victims, Chirac said, 'we owe them an everlasting debt'. Finally, he said, 'To recognize the errors of the past and the errors committed by the state and not to hide the dark hours of our history, that is plainly the way to defend a vision of man, of his freedom and dignity'.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the criminal madness of the Hutu Power movement was seconded by the French, by the French state. Those black hours soiled France's history forever. France committed the irreparable in Rwanda in 1994. It handed the Tutsis to their rapists, torturers and murderers. It trained the genocidaires, supported them militarily and diplomatically and provided them with weapons. It enabled them to kill in Bisesero under the disguise of humanitarian intervention in Operation Turquoise when the French duplicitously claimed to be there to protect the Tutsi, and provided the genocidaires with a safe route of escape to Congo from where they would continue to terrorize Rwanda and kill Tutsis and Hutus who rejected genocidal racism in Rwanda.<sup>17</sup>

France supported the Hutu Power supremacist regime before, during and after the genocide.<sup>18</sup> It gave and gives safe haven to genocidaires in France and chooses not to prosecute them for political reasons and thus perpetuates the legacy of the genocide every day and remains genocidaire in its policies. Its justice department is utterly compromised by genocidaire philosophy at the highest level of the French state and under international criminal law and international human rights law it is engaging in criminal acts by providing illegal protection to genocidal leaders, including Agathe Habyarimana, the wife of Rwanda's Hutu supremacist leader, Juvenal Habyarimana. France violates the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide every day with absolute impunity.<sup>19</sup> The horror of the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi was only possible because of France's support for and participation in it. France owes Rwanda's survivors an everlasting debt, redress, justice and an ongoing apology.

To all the governments of the countries of the world—the British, German, American, Russian, Chinese and the European who stood by as the genocide

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jews.html; E. Paris, *Jacques Chirac's Courage: Acknowledging France's Role in the Holocaust*, THE GLOBE AND MAIL, 30 September 2019, available at <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-jacques-chiracs-courage-acknowledging-frances-role-in-the-holocaust/>.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> D. KROSLAK. THE ROLE OF FRANCE IN THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE (Hurst, 2007); A. WALLIS. SILENT ACCOMPLICE: THE UNTOLD STORY OF FRANCE'S ROLE IN THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE (IB Taurus, 2014). J. Burke, *France Did Nothing to Stop Rwanda Genocide, Report Claims*, THE GUARDIAN, 19 April 2021, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/19/france-did-nothing-to-stop-rwandan-genocide-report-claims>; K. Willsher, *France Not Complicit in Rwanda Genocide, Says Macron Commission*, THE GUARDIAN, 26 March 2021, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/26/france-was-not-complicit-in-rwandan-genocide-macron-commission-claims>; *A Foreseeable Genocide: The Role of the French Government in Connection with the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda*, Levy, Firestone, Muse Law Firm, 19 April 2021, available at [https://www.gov.rw/fileadmin/user\\_upload/gov\\_user\\_upload/2021.04.19\\_MUSE\\_REPORT.pdf](https://www.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/gov_user_upload/2021.04.19_MUSE_REPORT.pdf); V. Duclert, *La France, le Rwanda et le genocide des Tutsi (1990-1994)—Rapport Remise Au President de la Republique*, 26 March 2021, available at <https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/279186-rapport-duclert-la-france-le-rwanda-et-le-genocide-des-tutsi-1990-1994>

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> See the reports in *supra* note 16.

against the Tutsi unfolded and Queen Rosalie Gicanda, queen of all Banyarwanda and a Tutsi, was killed on 20 April 1994—as the genocide that began on 7 April 1994 spread to southern Rwanda and the UN, and world powers made no effort to stop it and it engulfed the entire country and world powers withdrew UN peacekeepers which enabled the genocide—listen closely. To you Tutsi lives did not matter, black lives did not matter.

Tutsi lives matter. Hutu lives matter. Twa lives matter.  
Rwandan lives matter.  
African lives matter.

The words of Shakespeare's 'A Winter's Tale' should serve to prick your long dormant conscience. They should remind you—you who are referred to here—quite rightly, as tyrants of the most rank and bitter hypocrisy—of the depth of your depravity and its eternal legacy of suffering, loss, pain, persecution and grief you have wrought through your indifference to and complicity in the genocide against the Tutsi of Rwanda in 1994.

Across Europe, in the UK, in Belgium as in France, in the USA, in Canada, in Australia and in much of Africa, many countries are sheltering Rwanda's genocidal leaders, giving them protection and preventing their extradition, prosecution and are wilfully remaining indifferent to the moral and legal imperative to bring them to justice. Zambia, South Africa, Congo, Burundi, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Kenya in particular must bring the genocidaires living in their countries to justice. Failure to do so constitutes obstruction of justice and causes enormous harm to the rights and welfare of Rwanda's genocide survivors.

Shakespeare warns of the limits of remorse and apology, of the impossibility of forgiveness for certain crimes whose destructiveness, devastation and evil allow no absolution to the perpetrators and their accomplices. To comprehend the destructive impact of the killing of Queen Rosalie Gicanda, Shakespeare can help us empathize across time and space, language and culture, to express the horror of the shattering grief and loss that followed and follows from it, and the haunted spirit and moral and spiritual torment it should cause those who enabled it and the genocide of which her murder was but one of one million acts of murder.

The queen, the queen, the sweetest, dearest creature dead. O thy tyrant, do not repent these things, for they are heavier than all thy woes can stir; therefore betake thee to nothing but despair. A thousand knees, Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting. Upon a barren mountain and still winter, in storm perpetual.<sup>20</sup>

## Addressing the Survivors

You, the survivors, are the Tutsi fighters of Bisesero and they are your proud heritage. You are Simeon Karamaga of blessed memory of Bisesero, who valiantly defended his people and who lost his wife and eight children and the vast majority

<sup>20</sup> W. Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, available at [http://shakespeare.mit.edu/winters\\_tale/full.html](http://shakespeare.mit.edu/winters_tale/full.html).



of his community because no one came to rescue them. When the French came—claiming to be undertaking a humanitarian effort—they looked away and helped the killers kill the few remaining surviving Tutsis.

You are all the resilient and extraordinary Tutsi widows of Nyamata and Kibuye and Cyangugu and Butare. You are the Tutsi of Butare and the unbowed Bagogwe. You are the Tutsi were made to live in the Bugesera in a place selected and calculated so that you would starve and suffer and die in its unfertile land of marshes, flies and snakes.

But you did not die.

And today that land is not barren.

It is fertile, it blossoms and blooms with life.

You—the Tutsi targeted for genocide between April and July 1994 and living within Rwanda's borders at that time—were and are invincible and incredible Inkotanyi in your resilience, strength and survival. In who and what you had to face during the genocide and what you face every day as survivors and what you experienced through decades of discrimination, persecution, hostility and humiliation.

You had no country to find refuge—temporarily or permanently—you had no place to escape. You lived as a persecuted minority within Rwanda never knowing when the next massacre would take place. You only knew that there would be no justice for Tutsis, no equality and no freedom and that your safety was never assured, your rights never respected.

When the great British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, protested massive massacres against Tutsis in 1960 and 1961, the world was silent and complicit, just as it would be silent and complicit again when those massacres grew exponentially in size and took the form in 1994 of the genocide against the Tutsi.

Russell characterized these earlier massacres of Tutsis by Rwanda's Hutu supremacist regime and its civilian colluders as: 'The most horrible and systematic massacre we have had occasion to witness since the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis'.<sup>21</sup>

Your bravery is beyond description. You fought during the genocide and you fight today without arms and without conventional forms of power but with the weapons, the wisdom, the courage and the strength of your indomitable spirit. And you are no less invincible for the wisdom of your spirit being the source of your strength.

I salute the way you stand tall, proud of who you are, your heritage, and your hopes and dreams—always in generosity and never in malice, and also demanding justice—including reparative justice—as is your fundamental human right protected by international human rights law to which Rwanda is signatory which no one has the right to violate or ask you to forfeit. Anyone who does so betrays survivors, discriminates against them and against Tutsis as a whole, and undermines the unity of Rwanda and your ability and the country's ability to heal,

<sup>21</sup> J. Carlin, *New Dawn in Rwanda as Nation Forgives*, THE GUARDIAN, 24 August 2003, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/aug/24/theobserver1>.



rebuild and flourish. Unity and social cohesion can only be built from respect, affirmation and inclusion of genocide survivors—not from the divisionism that stems from their marginalization.

Despite the horrors of the malice and cruelty you have faced—you, the survivors, are unvanquished and you stand unintimidated and we stand with you. The West African symbol of the Sankofa bird that looks backwards in order to look forward poignantly reminds us that we must always honour the memory of the past in order to build a new, healthier, more peaceful and prosperous future. We must know who we are, what we have experienced and where we come from to know where we are going, how and why.

For without this consciousness and intentional memory, we will lose our roots, balance and capacity to sustain momentum, forge ahead and fly into the future. Today, your ancestors, your mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, and cousins and friends are with us in spirit. They give us strength as we remember. We promise them that not only do we remember them and honour their dignity and infinite worth but also remind those who want to forget them of their humanity, of their will and right to live, and how this was so brutally assaulted and destroyed during the genocide because they were Tutsi. We honour them as individual human beings and we honour them for the very reason they were murdered, for being Tutsi.

## Genocide Denial and Responses to It

To those who wish to forget and deny let me quote from the head of the Red Cross mission in Rwanda during the genocide, Phillipe Gaillard, who saved tens of thousands of individuals during the genocide, speaking about those killed during the genocide.

‘You cannot kill their memory. The memory is the most invisible and resistant material you can find on the earth. You cannot cut it like diamond, you cannot shoot at it because you cannot see it, nevertheless it is everywhere, all around you’.<sup>22</sup>

That memory is also you, the survivors, it is a living, breathing, memory. It is today and it is every day. It has survived, it is the survivors and your children, and it will never be vanquished.

Some now speak of the genocide against the Tutsi using euphemisms and a subtle form of what is all too charitably called revisionism but which amounts to a form of genocide denial. They speak as though they are unwilling to acknowledge the difference between victim and perpetrator, violator and violated, abuser and abuse. We must vigorously reject such obfuscation and wilful suppression of the truth whatever its purposes, whoever adopts it for whatever ends and wherever it is found whether in Rwanda or abroad. Nothing justifies it.

It is essential that we acknowledge with specificity, honesty and historical integrity who pursued genocide against whom and in what ideological, political, cultural and historical context. We must never conflate the victims and the

<sup>22</sup> *Film interview, Frontline, Ghosts of Rwanda*, available at <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ghosts/>.

survivors with the killers and torturers and we must never downplay the responsibility of the *genocidaires*—morally and legally—for their actions.

When we discuss the Armenian genocide we make clear that the Ottoman Turkish government perpetrated genocide against its Armenian Christian population. When we discuss the Holocaust of European Jewry we make clear that the German Nazi regime and its accomplices across Europe including hundreds of thousands of European civilians and tens of thousands of police, militias and other state functionaries in France, Belgium and all across Europe and millions more of indifferent, complicit Europeans targeted the Jews of Europe and North Africa for genocide.

And when we discuss the Rwandan genocide we make clear that Hutu Power, a Hutu Supremacist racist and genocidal government with the massive widespread participation of Hutu militias and hundreds of thousands of Hutu civilians dehumanized, denigrated and set about the destruction of the Tutsis in the genocide. They killed tens of thousands of Hutus in the crime against humanity of extermination for their refusing to submit to genocide against the Tutsi.

We must also acknowledge that Rwandan citizens chose as individuals to join militia groups like the Interahamwe and to participate in the genocide. They did not merely succumb to the government's genocidal ideology and destructive leadership. They were not passive. They participated in it extensively, and in the vast majority of cases willingly and enthusiastically. They had the capacity to reason, to empathize, and to resist and reject genocide. But they overwhelmingly chose murder, torture, rape, looting and genocide. They were and are responsible for their evil actions.

The killers killed and raped and tortured during the Rwandan genocide because they shared a racist ideology of hatred, dehumanization and devaluation; a sociopathic philosophy of domination, cruelty and destruction; a violent and vicious jealousy and resentment; an ideology of killing and misogyny; and a worshipping of their own power and capacity for staggering cruelty and sexual violence. They acted in full awareness of what they were doing.

Genocide is not a mitigating circumstance for murder and anyone who kills in a genocide should face at least the same accountability and punishment as someone who murders in peacetime. Pardoning those who murdered Tutsis during the genocide demeans and devalues Tutsis both individually and as a community. It undermines their dignity as well as the freedom, safety and well-being of genocide survivors.

## **Churches and Their Role in the Genocide**

Churches of every type—with the exception of the Jehovah's Witnesses—participated in the genocide, with priests and ministers organizing and often leading killing and directing Tutsis to churches where they were then massacred.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> C. McGreal, *Chaplains of the Militia: The Tangled Story of the Catholic Church During Rwanda's Genocide*, THE GUARDIAN, 2014.

All of them—Catholic, Protestant and Anglican were involved at the highest levels in organizing and implementing the genocide. Many, including the Catholic Church, have given safe haven to genocidaires in an act of extreme and ongoing evil revealing the falseness of their apologies and hollowness of their alleged repentance.<sup>24</sup>

How can anyone in Rwanda have any trust in the church when it provides shelter to genocidaires in France and elsewhere in Europe and around the world? All of them were complicit with the discriminatory Hutu supremacist ideology of the regime ruling Rwanda from 1959 to 1994 that persecuted Tutsis relentlessly and lay the groundwork for the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994.

The apologies that some of the churches have offered in Rwanda are utterly incomplete, unacceptable and fail to take sufficient responsibility for their actions and to provide survivors with reparations from the churches themselves. If a survivor is hungry then a priest and a minister must give them food, if a survivor lacks shelter then it is the responsibility of the church to find housing for them, if a survivor is tormented in sadness and suffering then it is the church that must show them love after so many decades of showing them hate.

That the Catholic church in Rwanda and in Rome sees it fitting to raise seventy million francs to build a new church in Kibeho and another church in the heart of Kigali in Nyarugenge before it repairs the lives of the survivors it harmed so profoundly and before it finances adequate memorials in the very churches where its priests murdered Tutsis speaks to its divisionism, its utter contempt for genocide survivors and its failure to advance peace, justice and unity in Rwanda. None of which is surprising, given that the Catholic Church came to Rwanda by way of the racist colonizing Belgian White Fathers. The White Fathers knew little of ethics and justice, let alone of the true principles of their faith, unadulterated by their blasphemous and rapacious rapture for power and desecration of their own religious obligations to love and respect others without discrimination and domination.<sup>25</sup>

Genuine Houses of God are not large, expensive church buildings that convey power and might where pomp and ceremony seek to invoke God. Houses of God are the small, humble houses of genocide survivors. It is in the voices of genocide survivors that you will find the voice of God as expressed in the Bible, 'A still, soft, quiet voice'. The greatest house of God is a home of a genocide survivor built in solidarity for his or her safety, well-being and peace. One home like that has more divinity imbued in its walls and sheltered within it than one thousand churches built and sustained while survivors remain without adequate shelter.

The Church's endless clamour for forgiveness reflects an unconscionable and inhumane narcissism that is as Godless as it is immoral. Those who have committed grave crimes should not be concerned with feeling forgiven and with placing such selfish and onerous demands on survivors, but with the sincerity and

<sup>24</sup> *Id.*

<sup>25</sup> For more on the White Fathers in Rwanda see, P. Denis, *The Missionaries of Africa and the Rwandan Genocide* 50(1/2) J. RELIG. AFR. 109–136 (10 August 2021), available at [https://brill.com/view/journals/jra/50/1-2/article-p109\\_6.xml?rskey=SrS3Uv&result=7](https://brill.com/view/journals/jra/50/1-2/article-p109_6.xml?rskey=SrS3Uv&result=7).

depth of their own remorse, repentance and repair. Forgiveness may or may not follow and that is a private matter for each individual survivor. Demanding it as by right is arrogant, morally corrupt and morally degrading. Moreover, the dead cannot forgive those who—including priests and ministers—murdered the very possibility of forgiveness.

To those pastors and priests and ministers in Rwanda who busy themselves constructing new churches while survivors lack dignified and decent homes you have exiled God and goodness from your conscience and your consciousness and your prayers will dissipate unanswered. If you want to find god you will not find him in your churches and your speeches and your songs. You will find his spirit and his presence in conversation with a survivor because that is where god is, that is who god loves and that is where Imana is standing and with whom we must stand. Remember what the Bible says, imploring us to care for the widow and the orphan—over and over again it repeats itself, perhaps because so often we fail to listen and follow that imperative.

There are some within the Catholic community—largely outside its corridors of power and hierarchy but closest to fulfilling its true promise—such as the organizations Catholic Relief Services and Caritas, who historically have reached out to survivors and worked in partnership with survivors to advance their rights, welfare and dignity with care and compassion. They set the standard, which the Church should emulate, and their work with survivors needs to be restored, deepened and expanded dramatically.

## **Persons of Conscience: Rescuers During the Genocide**

There were a very small number of individuals who resisted and rejected the genocide and who rescued and protected Tutsis. They made their own very different choices, despite the enormous pressures upon them from the genocidal government and from the Hutu Power movement. Some paid the ultimate price with their lives for such resistance. Many were able to both resist genocide and to protect their own families while doing so. They faced the same brutal genocidal government but they chose to exercise their consciences. They are the minority that chose goodness when the majority chose evil and we salute their memory and honour them today as a part of our community of conscience. It is they who are the keepers of Rwanda's flame together with you; it is they who honour Rwanda and Rwandans together with you.

Those individuals who rose to the challenge of morality and humanity are a light that gives each of us strength and hope. They remind us of the human capacity for goodness and justice in the face of evil and cruelty. Some of you are alive and with us today because of the humanity and conscience of those brave Hutus who defended your human rights and honoured your humanity. Not only did they reject genocide but also actively intervened to rescue and protect Tutsis and defend their rights and their very lives. Today, we honour their extraordinary humanity; they are the guardians, the uburinzi, of Rwanda and the guardians of Gihanga.

Thousands of Tutsis were rescued because of them—babies and children, men and women, the youth and the elderly. These are the names of some of the Hutu rescuers who chose life and defended freedom, equality and justice: Joseph Habineza, Zita Karuhimbi, Hakizimana Celestin, Alexis Habarugira, Nyitegeka Sosthene, Damaske Mutezintare and Helene Nayituriki. Our gratitude to them is boundless and cannot be expressed in mere words. They are Rwanda's highest and truest priests and pastors and ministers of unimpeachable conduct and purity of spirit; they are our light and inspiration. They need no special clothing, nor ornaments, nor incense and vessels, nor prayers to be God's messengers. They have no hierarchy. They provide no absolution of sins. But they are the truest conduits of Imana, the incarnation of goodness itself, unmediated by the trappings of hierarchy, of wealth, of power and unsullied by the corruption of Abazungu colonial legacies.

We honour those RPF soldiers—many of whom lost their lives—who rescued Tutsis during the genocide in often daring raids that they conducted at great risk to themselves. They provided safety, shelter, life-saving medical care and compassion to surviving remnants of Rwanda's Tutsi population which was decimated during the early weeks and first three months of the genocide, before the RPF consolidated its victory over the genocidal Hutu supremacist regime and finally liberated the country.

## **The Psychological Burdens of Survival**

For survivors, survival is not something that happened in 1994 and ended on 4 July 1994. Liberation for survivors is a daily and daunting effort, not something that happened on a historical date and is finished. It is a process and a project, a commitment and a struggle, a mountain to climb and many obstacles to surmount—physical, spiritual, emotional, psychological, social, economic and in other ways each and every day.

Often the summit of the mountain recedes and each day appears further and further away. But many survivors also summit that mountain every day they get up and live another day, go to work, have children and raise families, form friendships, celebrate milestones, express themselves creatively, and advocate for the rights and welfare of genocide survivors and educate the public about the genocide.

Survivors mourn and grieve not only in April; they remember their mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, sons and daughter, cousins, nieces, and nephews, friends and neighbours every single day. In the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening. Upon waking and upon sleeping. Survivors carry the pain and the loss of genocide with them at all times.

It is a profound grief and longing, an open wound and loss that aches and that every survivor carries and lives with in his or her own unique way and that echoes within them.

Therefore all of us who are not survivors—it is our responsibility to accompany survivors as compassionate, kind and humble companions who

listen with respect, care and attention, who help when help is asked for or necessary, and who never turn a survivor away and leave them alone, unaided. Our solidarity must not be merely of today but of every day. It must be an enduring and substantive commitment, of the heart, of the mind, of our energies and of our efforts.

It must be a true partnership for and with survivors.<sup>26</sup>

Justice and human rights cannot be built on denial of hard realities, your realities.

You, the survivors, have rights to consultation, participation, representation, inclusion, rehabilitation and reparation and these must be respected. You, the survivors, are a sacred remnant. You, the survivors are the living testimony of your parents and grandparents.

August Wilson, the African-American playwright said about African-Americans and it speaks to survivors too, 'We're still here, still managing through it all to find a way to live life with dignity and a certain amount of nobility'.<sup>27</sup>

You who were hated for being tall stand tall as ever.

You who were hated with ferocious jealousy and resentment for your beauty are beautiful as ever and always will be. Nothing and no one will ever change that.

You who were hated for your dignity are dignified as ever and no one will ever be able to take that dignity away from you.

May the Biblical prophecy of all living at peace under the shade of a fruit tree and the vision of the prophet Micah that all should love peace and do justice come to define a self-reliant and sovereign Rwanda for all its diverse inhabitants whatever their faith, background and identity on the basis of freedom, equality and justice as guaranteed by Rwanda's Constitution.

## **Partnership with Genocide Survivors**

We must build a partnership with survivors of the genocide. We need to join survivors in ensuring that every state and province in the United States and Canada has mandatory genocide and human rights education that includes teaching students about the Holocaust of European Jewry, the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi and the Turkish genocide of the Armenians and other genocides. Less than 15 states have such legislation today 26 years after the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi and this must urgently change. Massachusetts has now initiated legislation for Holocaust and genocide education and let us hope—and more than hope, let us work together—to ensure that every state follows suit and teaches students about the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi.

<sup>26</sup> The above four paragraphs are extracted from a recent publication of mine: N. SCHIMMEL, *ADVANCING INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW RESPONSIBILITIES OF DEVELOPMENT NGOS: RESPECTING AND FULFILLING THE RIGHT TO REPARATIVE JUSTICE IN RWANDA* (Palgrave, 2020). available at <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9783030502690>.

<sup>27</sup> National Museum of African American History and Culture Exhibit. Washington, DC (2019), available at <https://nmaahc.si.edu>.

We must advocate for UNESCO to create resources for genocide education to be used globally—not just within the United States and Canada. Knowledge of the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi is poor not only in the USA and Canada but also in Europe, Africa and around the world. This must change. Europe bears a particular responsibility for the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi because of its colonial legacy and Belgium and France should be at the forefront of ensuring that in their countries and across the European Union students are educated about the genocide and public education about and commemoration of the genocide's victims takes place across the continent. African states as well have a particular responsibility to educate about the genocide and address their own legacies of indifference to it. Countries such as South Africa betrayed Rwandans and Rwanda's Tutsi minority by not intervening to prevent and stop the genocide, as South Africa's former president Thabo Mbeki has acknowledged.<sup>28</sup> This silence was one of the greatest and most devastating moral failures of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress who had the power and public platform to intervene and demand a stop to the genocide but who failed to show any significant and sustained effort to defend the rights of Rwanda's Tutsis.

Survivors in Rwanda still need safe housing, legal support, scholarships for education, grants to alleviate poverty and intensive health services to meet their unique needs, including trauma support services. Mental health provisions for survivors are woefully inadequate and have led to a mental health crisis and suicides because there is not enough support for them.

It is long overdue that aid agencies, such as USAID enable the fulfilment of the human rights of survivors as a small exceptional minority of aid agencies have rightly and honourably done like Britain's Department for International Development. Other NGOs working in Rwanda, such as World Vision, CARE, Save the Children, Oxfam, Women for Women International and the Clinton Foundation, should be regularly assessed by the extent to which they respect and fulfil the human rights of genocide survivors and held accountable when they fail to address their vulnerability and disadvantage and when they marginalize them, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Currently, they are failing, and in failing, they are sustaining and exacerbating the impact of genocide on its survivors.<sup>29</sup> The same is true for many of the national aid agencies working in Rwanda—including many European ones—and for UN aid agencies who show little consciousness

<sup>28</sup> C. Mwai, 'South Africa's Apartheid Government Sold Arms to Genocidal Regime in Rwanda: Mbeki. RWANDA NEW TIMES, 3 May 2019, available at <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/apartheid-arms-genocidal-regime>.

<sup>29</sup> N. Schimmel, *Failed Aid: How Development Agencies Are Neglecting and Marginalising Rwandan Genocide Survivors*, 20(3) *Development in Practice* 407–413 (2010); N. Schimmel, *The Moral Case for Restorative Justice as a Corollary of the Responsibility to Protect: A Rwandan Case Study of the Insufficiency of Impact of Retributive Justice on the Rights and Well-Being of Genocide Survivors*, 11(2) *J. HUM. RIGHTS* 161–188 (2012); N. Schimmel, *International Human Rights Law Responsibilities of Non-Governmental Organizations: Respecting and Fulfilling the Right to Reparative Justice in Rwanda and Beyond*, 8(1) *CAMB. INT. LAW J.* 104–130 (2019); N. SCHIMMEL, *ADVANCING INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW RESPONSIBILITIES OF DEVELOPMENT NGOS: RESPECTING AND FULFILLING THE RIGHT TO REPARATIVE JUSTICE FOR GENOCIDE SURVIVORS IN RWANDA* (Palgrave, 2020).



and responsibility by being indifferent to the fate and welfare of survivors.<sup>30</sup> To them we say, shame on you. Where are your conscience, decency, justice and compassion?

We must all listen respectfully and with humility to survivors with open hearts and minds. We must trust you, include you and stand with you. We must understand the difference between equity and equality. Because the failure to recognize the distinctive inequalities, injustices and vulnerability survivors face which are social, systemic and economic fails at equity, and makes a mockery of equality, and while this harms survivors first and foremost it also undermines Rwanda and Rwandans as a whole and the goal of a united Rwanda.

Let us remember the words of warning and admonition of Primo Levi, a survivor of the genocide of the Jews of Europe whose words cry out to us today and every day and who echo an ancient Jewish prayer, ‘You who live safe, in your warm homes. You who find, returning home in the evening, hot food and friendly faces, meditate that this came about. I command these words to you. Carve them in your hearts, at home, in the streets, going to bed, rising, repeat them to your children’.<sup>31</sup>

Remember. Remember Murambi and Bisesero and Nyamata and Ntarama and Nyanza.

Reverien Rurangwa, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide, who in reflecting on his own writing and advocacy for and with survivors says that it is, ‘For my Tutsi people on earth and in heaven.’<sup>32</sup>

Yes, Reverien, our commitment, our teaching, our demand for justice which we will express and amplify indefatigably, our commemoration today and every day grows and endures like saplings planted in what will become a vast and beautiful forest and an orchard one day in which we will walk—together—and whose fruit and bounty survivors will enjoy.

Like Reverien, we dedicate ourselves with deepest love to his Tutsi people on earth—to everyone who stood to defend the equal rights of Tutsis as Rwandans and as rights bearing human beings possessing infinite dignity and worth. Sometimes, they made the ultimate sacrifice in so doing, including the tens of thousands of Hutus murdered alongside their fellow Banyarwanda Tutsi for refusing genocidal racism and defending freedom, equality and human dignity.

## **The Memory of The Queen: Rwanda’s Indigenous Leader and Rwanda’s Indigenous Faith and Culture**

And to beloved Umwamikazi Queen Rosalie Gicanda, who was Queen of all Rwanda and all Rwandans and who valued peace and mutual respect and famously welcomed Rwandans of every background with kindness and courtesy. She was killed while in prayer, saying the rosary. That was the very same prayer the

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> P. LEVI, *SURVIVAL IN AUSCHWITZ* (Simon and Schuster, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> R. RURANGWA, *GENOCIDE: MY STOLEN RWANDA* (Reportage Press, 2009).

Belgian Catholic White Fathers brought to Rwanda when they began to sow their division and destruction and despair and betrayed Rwanda and Rwandans; when they tried to replace Gihanga and Imana and to rob Rwandans of their country, culture, identity, unity, faith, peace and way of life.

But, Imana and Gihanga are irreplaceable and they are very much still present. No Abazungu can take them away from you because they are Rwandan and you, you are Banyarwanda. Like the queen in Shakespeare's *Winter Tale*, Queen Rosalie miraculously lives because she lives in you and your children, because her people live.

You, you the survivors, you the witnesses of humanity's depravity and savage indifference are the testament of the purest courage and most beautiful and dignified resilience, you and your children are eternal and you are strong, unbreakable and precious as diamonds. We will protect you and guard you with love and vigilance—as a mother and a father protect their children and as a mother bear and a mother lioness protect their cubs and prevent anyone from getting between them and her. We will never be separated from you—and you are a great blessing for all of Rwanda. May the waters of Rwakibirizi, released by Ruganzu Ndori, bring you peace and wellbeing and may they flow gently but generously all the days of your lives.

Today, Umwamikazi Queen Rosalie Gicanda can look down on you and be proud just as we remember her extraordinary dignity and grace with love and pride and carry her in our hearts. No longer must you say her name quietly, for fear of punishment as though, heaven forbid, you should be ashamed of her and of who you are, as though being Tutsi should be repressed and hidden, rather than honoured and celebrated as an integral part of Rwanda's Banyarwanda tapestry.

Scholastique Mukasonga, one of the only survivors in her family of Tutsis, writes of the very special opportunity to visit Umwamikazi Queen Rosalie when she was a girl, but of the need to do so furtively, fearfully, under a racist regime that sought to diminish her and humiliate, harm and kill her Tutsi people. No longer. And never, ever, ever again. Today, you can say her name in confidence. You can walk to Nyanza, head held high, unbowed, both physically and in your hearts and know that her spirit will meet you there, and her doors will always be open. And you can walk to her and fall into her outstretched motherly arms for comfort.

I think of her so very often and though I never met her I gather strength from her love for all Banyarwanda for her heart was vast and encompassed all of Rwanda's children in her reassuring embrace. When tears run down my cheeks and I feel heartbroken for all that survivors endure every day and for everyone that you lost, I remind myself that she has never left us and she never will. I hold her memory closely, as a source of hope, comfort and strength. I believe that like Rachel in the Bible who weeps for the exiled Israelites she weeps for and with her Tutsi people, as a mother weeps when she sees her children suffering, and Umwamikazi Queen Rosalie accompanies you still.

But, I also know that alongside her sorrow is awe, hope and admiration, and yes, pride. She has so much to be proud of, and she smiles upon you, at who you the survivors are and who you have become and who you will be. Her embrace of

survivors is close, unbreakable and eternal. She holds you now, she holds you together as a mother gathers her children protectively, gingerly, gently and you are sheltered under the canopy of her ever-present love, care and compassion. She comes to help you wipe away your tears, like every mother. She always does. She always will.

She is with you when you sing lullabies to your children to bid them peaceful good night. She is with you in your sorrow and when your heart and voice cry out in terror and you wake up at night from a nightmare and hear and see the Interahamwe with their machetes, pursuing you with their terrible cries and you are startled and afraid. It is her voice and her hand that come to reassure you when you suffer sadness and depression. She is with you when you rise in the morning to face a new day and you are unsure if you have the faith and energy and will to do so or you are simply tired—as you have very right to be. She is with you in consolation when you find the remains of your family members and you bury them with dignity, love and respect. She is with you in Nyamata and Nyanza and Murambi and Bisesero and Kigali.

Turi kumwe beloved Umwamikazi Rosalie, you are the eternal and living spirit of every Tutsi woman, every Tutsi mother, every Tutsi sister and every Tutsi daughter. You are the embodiment and the spirit of beauty, dignity, grace, and goodness and of being Banyarwanda. You vanquish and banish hate and you are the transcendent spirit of love.

Turi kumwe to each and everyone who perished in the genocide. Turi kumwe to the rescuers who protected precious life and turi kumwe to the survivors, to you. Together, we remember and affirm one million Tutsi people and tens of thousands of Hutus who stood in solidarity with them and refused hatred and genocide. Banyarwanda mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters. Queen Rosalie's Banyarwanda people, her Tutsi people and to the survivors, *your* Tutsi people in heaven.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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