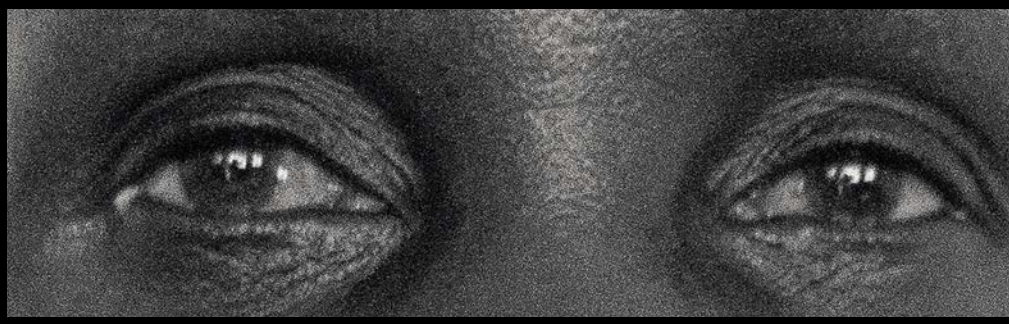
FACES AND TRACES:

PAYING TRIBUTE TO UNSUNG HEROES



FACES AND TRACES:
PAYING TRIBUTE TO UNSUNG HEROES

Edited by Patrick Hajayandi
Photographs by Jean Edmond Manzi/J&J Pictures

This book is part of the Burundi Memory Project launched in 2018. The project has led to the production of a research report, a serialisation of the documentary film *1972 Broken Hearts*, and a number of public engagements that have enriched the debate around the process of reconciliation and addressing the violence of the past in Burundi.

This Burundi Memory Project is part of the Peacebuilding Interventions Programme at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), Cape Town, South Africa.

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This book was made possible thanks to the support of many organisations and individuals

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Note from the editor

It was around eight o'clock in the morning of 21 October 1993 when we started hearing rumours: in the capital Bujumbura, it was said, a military coup had begun, and perhaps the president had been killed. We felt the atmosphere changing around us.

I was in the ninth grade at Lycée Musinzira, one of the many secondary schools in the city of Gitega, now Burundi's capital city. I did not know the city of Gitega very well because I was new in town. I was unsure about where I could go and feel safe enough. Staying at school was not an option. It was rather dangerous because of rising violent tensions between Hutu and Tutsi students. In addition, the traumatic history of students being taken from schools and massacred in 1972 was another incentive compelling many students to seek refuge in other places.

In only three days, tensions escalated to the point that the situation became extremely dangerous at the lycée. In the mountains surrounding the school, we could see houses burning, and there were gunshots. Students started grouping themselves according to ethnic affiliation. Because of the mounting tensions at the lycée, the need to leave became even more pressing.

Unfortunately, the Tutsi students, equipped with knives and sticks, decided to block all the exits from the school. This meant that I was facing two challenges at the same time: the first one was to find a way to leave the school without getting hurt, even as the Tutsi students had come to practically control the school. If I overcame the first challenge, the second challenge would be to find a safe place to stay until the storm was over.

Because of the mounting tensions at the lycée, the need to leave became even more pressing

On Sunday morning of 24 October 1993, three days after the coup, I was in front of our dormitory when a classmate whispered in my ear: 'Today, they are planning to kill Hutu students. If you have any place … to go, please go [there quickly]! I am leaving too!'[1] I rushed inside our dormitory, folded all my best clothes, and put them in my suitcase. I put on my most casual clothes, took the little money I had in my pocket (BIF1 000, or about USD$35), and grabbed my toothbrush, toothpaste, and a plastic cup. That day, there was no running water at the school. Students were going to fetch water at a nearby source outside the school fence, but only with the permission of those guarding the exits. With my toothbrush, toothpaste and cup in hand, I looked as if I just needed a little water, like the other students, and the 'guards' let me go.

Once outside the school fence, I could not believe I had managed to go through that checkpoint unharmed. When I was far enough away, I threw the toothpaste, the brush and the cup into the bush. Then I took the road to downtown Gitega. I went to see the only person I knew in town. His name was Niyonzima. I was introduced to him by my uncle, Gerard, who used to work at the School of Public Works (ETP) in Gitega before he left for the Ukraine to study aviation engineering.

With my toothbrush, toothpaste and cup in hand,
I looked as if I just needed a little water,
like the other students, and
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When I arrived at his house, he received me as an old friend. But he was anxious. His house was on open land, with no fence, and in a poor area where anything could happen at any time. He thought the location wasn't safe for me and he decided to look for a better shelter. He took me to his elder brother, Mr Justin, who lived in Magarama. Mr Justin's house was next to the main road. It was spacious and solid, with an open space out front where mechanics repaired cars and many nearby kids could play. In Mr Justin's compound, there were already many people who, just like me, had come seeking refuge. I was received and welcomed by Mr Justin's wife, Ms Mo-Mamo Karerwa.

1 It is believed that many students were killed at Lycée Musinzira in 1993. These were mostly Hutu students. There are witnesses who know a place where a mass grave with bodies of the killed students is located.

I don't remember exactly how many days I spent in Mr Justin's house. What I do remember is that, by offering me shelter, as he and his wife did for so many people, they protected me against so many dangers that I couldn't even imagine. A few years later, when people started relating what had happened during the three days after the coup, I discovered with horror how many students died while trying to leave the school, or the city of Gitega, or to flee the country and go into exile. I heard about former classmates who were killed at my former school and thrown in a deep hole or into latrines. There were other horrible stories about atrocities committed in different parts of the country by both Hutu and Tutsi. Many lives were even lost when good people did not stand up and do what they were supposed to do. But Mr Justin and Ms Mo-Mamo were faithful to their God-given mission. There are others like them, who also protected so many people and saved so many lives during the violence in 1993. They are the foundational pillars our society is built on. Without such people, our communities could easily crumble.

When we returned to Burundi in 1995, I focused on finishing secondary school and university and starting my professional career

I left their home in November 1993, and I did not see them again until almost 30 years later. In those decades, civil war had intensified, and my family and I were refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo. When we returned to Burundi in 1995, I focused on finishing secondary school and university and starting my professional career. Only then did I find out that these two pillars continued to invest in building peace across communities – until Ms Mo-Mamo was called to represent the Burundian people in our National Assembly and, later at the regional level, within the East African Community. In December 2021, I was able to meet Mr Justin and the Honourable Mo-Mamo (she is now a member of the East African Legislative Assembly) again. I was glad to see them once more and to be able to thank them in person for what they did. They did not remember me, and that was fine. The most important thing was that I continued to remember what they had done. Almost three decades have gone by, and so quickly, but their loving, compassionate spirit has stayed alive.

What Ms Mo-Mamo and her husband Justin did for me, and for so many others who sought refuge in their home, is what inspired this book. When thinking about the role they played in offering not only shelter, but also food, encouragement, and support to me and other young

people, I consider that their deeds deserve to be known. They have been true role models for a society torn apart.

Putting in a book extraordinary stories of people like Ms Mo-Mamo and her husband, who were willing to put their lives on the line and sacrifice their comfort to accommodate those in need – and who were able to manifest love for a suffering neighbour in so many ways – is a way of paying tribute to them, even if a real tribute is beyond what words can describe. I would like to simply thank them for everything they did. My hope is to see their good example replicated by new generations of Burundians. It is my belief that these stories will contribute to the healing process of Burundian society, a process that is already taking place slowly, and with hope.

This book cannot hope to record every story of every good deed by people who acted like Ms Mo-Mamo and her family during the 1993 crisis. I trust that other people will be inspired to take this work further and do even more than what has been done so far in acknowledging those who acted as the righteous among the people. In our Burundian society, we often hear stories about those who were evil, who committed heinous crimes. My approach in this book is a little different. Without ignoring the wrong deeds, I would like to emphasise the good – the acts of selfless love that showed us as a nation that we still have hope. It is my way of inspiring the next generation. I hope the message will be heard.

Without ignoring the wrong deeds,
I would like to emphasise the good

Chapter One
Introduction

This book contains extraordinary stories by ordinary people. Most of these stories are linked to the political crisis that erupted on 21 October 1993, when Burundi President Melchior Ndadaye was brutally assassinated by the army, and to the violent ethnic clashes that followed.

The military coup and the assassination of President Ndadaye and his close allies plunged the country into unprecedented violence, chaos and anarchy. Hundreds of thousands of people – both Tutsi and Hutu – lost their lives in the mass violence and killings that were triggered by the coup and the decimation of almost all of our decision-making institutions.

Thousands of Tutsis were brutally killed by angry and furious mobs of Hutu, who believed that they were avenging Ndadaye's death but in reality were committing heinous and atrocious crimes against humanity. It is undeniable that Ndadaye's death triggered these crimes. However, it would be wrong to explain their actions by referring only to their simple willingness to revenge a beloved president. There were other triggering factors that came into play, some of them stretching back into history.

The military coup and the assassination of President Ndadaye and his close allies plunged the country into unprecedented violence, chaos and anarchy

The 1972 genocide against Hutu intellectuals was the most prominent factor, even if it was not the only one. Orchestrated by Captain Michel Micombero, leader of Burundi's first oppressive military regime, the genocide led to the massacre of approximately 300 000 people, or ten per cent of Burundi's population at the time. The majority of people who lost their lives were educated Hutus – including students in secondary school – and those with privileged positions in society. It was a huge tragedy, but it did not attract any attention from the international community, which did absolutely nothing to stop the onslaught. Thus, the Micombero regime remained in power and silenced any voices condemning the mass killings. The memory of this bloody era has long haunted Burundian families. In 1993, when Dr Jean Minani, the health minister in Ndadaye's government, went on Radio Rwanda and asked people (especially the Hutu) to remain vigilant so that they were not arrested and killed without resistance, as they were in 1972, he was pointing to this historic fact. Dr Minani's message was a clear reminder that many wounds from that past were still wide open. An unresolved past was coming back to haunt Burundians.

The second factor behind people's consuming anger was unfulfilled hope. The electoral victory of Ndadaye's political party, FRODEBU, and his inauguration as a new president, brought a lot of hope to many Hutus in Burundi, who expected the new regime to bring an end to discriminatory or socially exclusive policies that had long been in place, policies which limited what the Hutu could study, work at, own and become in their own country. The successive military regimes that had run the country almost exclusively since independence had been an unbearable burden, especially for Hutus. These regimes excluded Hutu Burundians from almost all spheres of national life, including the army, the diplomatic corps, and daily political, economic and social life.

Dr Minani's message was a clear reminder that many wounds from that past were still wide open

Even after Micombero was overthrown by Colonel Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, in 1976, life did not get easier. Though it is generally agreed that Colonel Bagaza played a key role in modernising the country by building infrastructure and advancing industrialisation, his regime was not less repressive. He created an exclusive education system that effectively prevented many Hutus from accessing even secondary schools, let alone the only university in Burundi. His regime made a few exceptions to try to hide this policy of exclusion, but its 'success' led to serious inequalities with regard to who could access the labour market.

In 1987, Major Pierre Buyoya removed Colonel Bagaza from power in yet another bloodless military coup. At that time, new voices were starting to call for fundamental political reforms to allow all Burundians to participate in the management of their country. With these demands came escalating tensions, and, in 1988, a new and violent crisis erupted in two communes – Ntega and Marangara – in the north of Burundi in Kirundo and Ngozi provinces, respectively. According to estimates, around 20 000 people lost their lives in the crisis, which, to so many people, felt like a fresh reminder of what had happened in 1972. The deaths, and Buyoya's draconian response, resulted in enormous pressure being placed on his regime by the international community, which finally began to notice what had been going on for decades.

As international scrutiny increased, the world order also changed. President Buyoya found himself at the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a democratisation movement sweeping across the developing world, affecting many countries in Africa. Heavily dependent on international aid, Buyoya's regime had no way of avoiding the newly democratic dictates of donor countries. In response, Buyoya adopted multipartyism and led the country to a new

constitution, one which stipulated how to access power through elections and allowed for freedom of expression. He also established a new, inclusive government in which both Hutu and Tutsi were represented – and which was tasked with addressing what Buyoya called the 'question of national unity'.

As the country marched toward elections, the political establishment in Bujumbura was not ready for the change

Despite his political reforms, some people expressed concerns about Buyoya's fear of opening up space for a frank dialogue among all the political forces in the country – especially a dialogue in which the tragic history of Burundi and its consequences for social cohesion could be acknowledged and practical solutions proposed. In fact, Melchior Ndadaye became the emblematic example of the hypocrisy underlying Buyoya's political unity project. During a campaign in Gitega, in October 1988, Ndadaye described the historical roots of Burundi's national problems and discussed what could be done to prevent the return of violence similar to that which had just happened in Ntega and Marangara. Instead of taking stock of Ndadaye's incisive and useful analysis, Buyoya's regime arrested Ndadaye and threw him in jail, where he stayed for three months (Ntibantunganya 2018).

Such contradictions created an air of uncertainty around the rest of Buyoya's reforms. As the country marched toward elections, the political establishment in Bujumbura was not ready for the change, and no one believed with certainty that the results were going to be accepted. Indeed, after Ndadaye's victory in the June 1993 presidential vote, Tutsi students from the University of Burundi demonstrated against the results, denouncing what they called an 'ethnic vote'[1]. Also, while Ndadaye as president-elect was still awaiting his inauguration, two military-coup attempts were organised by a small group of extremist Tutsi officers, both of which failed. Though the officer group was small, its actions were an expression of what many others inside the military and political establishment feared: giving up power.

1 The ethnic vote meant that the overwhelming victory of Ndadaye (with 65% of the vote) showed that the Hutu had voted for him because he was a Hutu as well. Buyoya, the then-president, garnered 34% of the vote. The irony is that Burundi is considered to have a population comprising 85% Hutu, 14% Tutsi and 1% Twa. So, if Buyoya, a Tutsi, got 34%, this meant some Hutu necessarily voted for him, thus refuting the assumption of the students.

On 21 October 1993, the inevitable happened. President Melchior Ndadaye's palace was attacked with heavy weapons and was destroyed by artillery. The army unit in charge of protecting the president evacuated him during the attack and took him to the First Commando Battalion in Bujumbura. What happened next is not clear, but the presidential protection unit lost control of the situation, and the president was assassinated by strangulation. At the same time, other military units were sent to hunt down high-ranking officials from Ndadaye's new regime and assassinate them as well. Among these officials were the speaker of Parliament, Pontien Karibwami; the vice-president, Gilles Bimazubute (the only Tutsi killed that day); the minister of interior and communal development, Juvenal Ndayikeza; the head of the intelligence service, Richard Ndikumwami; the wife of the foreign affairs minister, Eusebie Minani, and her guest, Sylvana Katabashinga; and many more. The remaining Cabinet members went into hiding.

President Ndadaye served only 102 days in office before his assassination. For his supporters, the future looked bleak. The president and all of his constitutional successors had been systematically eliminated. That all of these officials were Hutu (except for Bimazubute) gave the coup an ethnic slant, a factor which exacerbated the tensions. As a result of these deaths, the military overthrow of Ndadaye's regime created a complete vacuum of legitimate and legal power. The space was thus created for chaos and anarchy.

The peasants used machetes, knives, clubs and flaming torches, and lashed out at anyone they perceived as the enemy

Outrage and frustration pushed peasants to launch fierce attacks against the Tutsi. The peasants used machetes, knives, clubs and flaming torches, and lashed out at anyone they perceived as the enemy. Across the country, homes were burned, and families and individuals were massacred.

In retaliation, the army, surprised by the turn of events, countered with its entire arsenal. With helicopters, mortars and machine guns, it indiscriminately massacred Hutus, burned entire villages, and looted any home that held anything of value. In total, an estimated 2.5 per cent of the population was slaughtered by both sides.

By 1999, one estimate of Burundian refugees in Tanzania put the number at 470 000 people, representing almost seven per cent of Burundi's total population.[2] This number, although taking into account refugees in only one country, suggests the magnitude of the exodus that was taking place at that time.

However, in the midst of all this horror, there were people who stood firm in their values and did what was needed to save lives – to offer shelter, food, and medical care; to hide the targeted victims of violence; and to perform any other act of kindness. These are the people to whom this book is dedicated.

By telling the stories of people who helped or saved others, who put their lives on the line during troubled times, who manifested the spirit of Ubuntu in the simplest but most dedicated way, we want to pay tribute to their noble deeds: to acknowledge that they are living examples of what true humanity should be, in good times and bad. They are like shining stars in the midst of a dark sky. They inspire us. May the coming generations follow in their footsteps and may we all keep the memory of them alive.

We want to pay tribute to their noble deeds: to acknowledge that they are living examples of what true humanity should be, in good times and bad

2 International Crisis Group, Burundian refugees in Tanzania: A key factor in the Burundi peace process, Africa Report, 30 November 1999. Available at https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/burundi/burundian-refugees-tanzania-key-factor-burundi-peace-process.

Chapter Two

Testimonies

1 *Finding solutions in hard times*

*By **Yves Sahinguvu**, retired military officer, and former member of a rebel movement, Muramvya*

After the president was killed, people started behaving strangely. It was as if they had lost their moral compass. The entire nation went mad. Some people started looting, targeting their neighbour's properties. Any house located in their neighbourhood was looted, without exception. It became almost normal, even shameless, to take someone's belongings by force and appropriate them. When I noticed this behaviour, I understood that something was going wrong with these people. Was it because of war trauma? Was it something that was already in them? I had no idea. What I did know was that people I normally considered 'honest' citizens began to roam villages, looting all the houses, running away with whatever goods they found, and destroying what they could not take with them. During this time, the owners of the houses fled in search of shelter from the widespread violence.

One day, a member of one of the armed movements known as the National Forces for Liberation (commonly the FNL after its French abbreviation) came and told me that the leadership of this armed group wanted me to help it with fundraising for the movement's cause. Before this, the fundraising strategy involved ransoming public-transport vehicles by stopping them on their journey and making them pay a 'tax' that was used to support field operations. The central government in Bujumbura was furious about this FNL strategy and tried unsuccessfully to stop the ransoming. Meanwhile, the transporters were paying a heavy price, as they were being targeted by both sides in the conflict. I was asked to find a channel through which we as an armed group could talk to government officials in order to solve some of the road-security problems together.

Major Pierre Buyoya was still president of Burundi. The government under his leadership considered the FNL to be a group of bandits, and had therefore prohibited transport companies from paying any roadside 'taxes' to such a group. Any attempt by transporters to disobey would be considered a form of complicity with the enemy. Disobedient transporters could face heavy fines, such as the banning of all their business operations across the national territory, as well as imprisonment.

Following this government decree, the FNL declared that drivers who allowed military personnel in their cars or trucks would have their vehicles burnt. In the midst of this muscle-flexing by all sides, the drivers were faced with a difficult situation. This is the context I was called on to work in. My role was to negotiate a mutually satisfactory solution for both the government and the FNL. This was not a particularly easy task because the government did not give the FNL much credit for being a credible interlocutor.

Finding a solution was crucial because so many people relied on free-flowing transport to obtain food supplies and to move around. The increased insecurity on the roads was slowly but

surely weakening the already crippled economy. Farmers needed to get crops to local markets to earn some money, while people living in major cities like Bujumbura needed food. Remember, despite the fact that a civil war was raging, and rebels were fighting the regular army on a daily basis, the rest of us tried our best to survive in any way we could. Life, or something similar to it, continued. To stay alive in the middle of the war, 'Madness' was the motto.

Life, or something similar to it, continued. To stay alive in the middle of the war, 'Madness' was the motto

I managed to get contacts, and some people helped me arrange a meeting at a place known as Gare du Nord, the main parking and passenger area for vehicles heading north from the capital. The meeting was attended mainly by transport company owners and drivers, but I ensured that my message would reach the highest authorities in Bujumbura. During the meeting, I told those who attended that we had choices to make for the good of our people and of our families. I said that we were fighting not against the civilian population, but against the army which, in our eyes, was illegitimate. I did not try to hide who I was or my affiliation to a rebel movement. In fact, I told them that I had come as an FNL member. More importantly, I said that I was trying to discuss ways of finding a solution to a serious problem: How could we establish a basis for dialogue between the FNL and the Buyoya regime in order to sort out a number of problems, including that of vehicles being burnt on the roads as well as the increasing insecurity and the conflict between the movement and the army in general? The meeting went well, and my message reached the decision-makers.

In the meeting, I proposed a solution to the problem of burnt vehicles that I hoped would satisfy each party to the conflict.

I told people to obtain membership cards from all parties – from the FNL as well as from the other armed movement, the CNDD-FDD, and from the government. It was a crazy suggestion but my concern was to ensure that people involved in the transport sector could move freely, peacefully, and without being targeted by either the army or any of the rebels. I also had to make sure that all sides were aware of the new dynamic. Then, together with those who attended the meeting, we decided on the amount drivers would pay to armed groups in order to guarantee protection for each vehicle: a minibus would pay BIF20 000; a small truck, BIF50 000; and a larger truck, BIF100 000. They would pay these amounts three times a year.

I also asked them to designate a person who would play the role of liaison to keep communication flowing between the two sides. At this point, some people attempted to sabotage the process. Fortunately, they were chased away by those who believed in what we were trying to do.

Although the solution to the issue of the burning of vehicles was not perfect, it showed that there were people who still wanted to find peaceful solutions in the midst of the chaos caused by the civil war. It brought some hope. In the process, I became popular: all sides in the conflict trusted me and relied on me to keep the channels of communication open. At any given moment, people who might have targeted me in the past instead protected me whenever I found myself in trouble.

From then on, I started applying the principle of 'dialogue for solutions' to various situations. The approach was very successful. But the most important outcome is that it led to sparing people's lives. People who could have died when buses were torched or who could have been killed for not supporting the cause of the rebel movement, or of the government, were saved by this unwritten agreement that I brokered. I supported similar processes in rural Bujumbura province and across the city proper.

During the ethnic cleansing in Bujumbura, between 1994 and 1996, it was common for some people to falsely accuse others of complicity with the enemy, with the intention of taking their property. Many people were executed following such false accusations, especially in Cibitoke, Musaga and Nyakabiga. This evil behaviour extended to some places upcountry. If you found yourself in conflict with your neighbour over land or something else of value, the neighbour could easily report you to a

military station, falsely accusing you of sheltering members of the rebel movement or of being its informant. Such an accusation was enough for the military to arrest and execute you without any other form of justice. Many people disappeared in such circumstances.

Even in my village, some people adopted this evil behaviour, seeing it as a path to quick riches. However, when I noticed what was going on, I couldn't help but confront them. I sent letters asking those whom I knew were involved to come to me so that we could discuss the situation and the consequences of their actions. I told them that it was imperative to stop what they were doing before it was too late. Though I was a negotiator, I also had a group of fighters under my command who could retaliate if necessary. However, I chose not to use force but dialogue. At the end of the meeting, I told the people who were present that, when the civil war ended, there would be many opportunities to start a new life and to get material things. I asked them to remain human. I was really happy that I was able to stop this foolishness and spare a few of my fellow villagers' lives.

When the civil war ended and the armed movements joined the peace process, I met a few of the people whom I had helped. In some cases, they had never met me before and recounted how my actions had saved them. In others, I had no idea of what had happened to them. I was, however, surprised by their stories, like anyone else.

Today, when I pass by a village where people used to know me during the war, they ask me to stop a while and share a meal with them before continuing my journey. I normally don't feel comfortable telling stories of what I did during that period. I don't even feel like a hero. To be frank, I think that I did what any normal human being would have done to ensure that the lives of his or her neighbours were spared.

2 *Ignoring threats to one's own life to save the lives of others*

By ***Constance Ntiranyibagira****, teacher, and former volunteer during the crisis, Rutana*

Back in the '90s, my family was living in Rutana province, in the southeast of Burundi. But I was studying at a high school in Muyinga province, in the north. In October 1993, when the violence started, I had to leave my school and go home, like many students across the country. On my way home, I knew that danger was everywhere and that I had to be careful. I remember praying a lot, for I was not sure I would arrive safely or whether I would be able to return to my school. My heart was almost 'jumping out of my body' because I was so scared. Luckily, I arrived safely, and I was happy to be with my family. This was not the case for many other students like me. Unfortunately, some died, while others lost their loved ones or ended up in refugee camps somewhere in one of the neighbouring countries.

My family home was very close to the main road. As a result, we used to receive a lot of passing visitors asking for water or something to eat. This was, and still is, absolutely normal in Burundian culture, though mostly in the rural areas. Any person, even a stranger, can come to one's house asking for water. You receive them and give them a drink before asking any questions. Only when they have quenched their thirst, do you ask who they are or where they are going.

My father was well known in the whole village, and the areas surrounding it, for his generosity. And, because of his popularity, we received many guests, all day long. What made our home even more popular was the fact that we were good at making sorghum and banana beer, or *impeke n'urwagwa* in Kirundi. The villagers loved it. So, we were really accustomed to seeing many people coming and going.

As insecurity and violence increased, so did the number of people passing along the road near our house. Some were going into hiding and, on their way, they would ask for anything to drink or eat. It felt as if we had been given a mission to help people and restore their strength before they could continue their journey. Sometimes, we had no food left and nothing to give. But we still offered people shelter for one or two nights. At other times, we gave people pounded sorghum just to ensure that they regained their strength. It was very hard, but something made us keep doing what we were able to do in order to help.

In Burundi, when someone, particularly a head of the family, is known for doing good, the person is considered to be *Umushingantahe*. In Burundian culture, *Umushingantahe* (singular)/ *Abashingantahe* (plural) is a concept which defines a person whose life, behaviour and character embody human values such as generosity, charity, compassion, integrity, self-control, etc., in a holistic way. This is how many people considered my father during the civil war. It was a time of such despair that people saw no future, no way out. They often expressed this by saying, 'We don't have any more *Abashingantahe* left in this country.' But, when addressing my

father, they would say, 'If only this country had been filled with people with your golden heart, things could have been different. We could have avoided this bloody conflict.'

Unfortunately, not everyone was happy with what my father was doing. Some of our neighbours did not like the fact that my father treated people equally, without considering their ethnic affiliation. One day, a neighbour conceived a plot to kill my father. The neighbour organised a gang of thugs and gave them instructions. Surprisingly, the neighbour's own son, along with some of the son's friends, came to our house before the gang arrived and took my father to a safe place. When the gang itself finally arrived, my father was nowhere to be found. The next morning, the neighbour was arrested and taken to a traditional court to be punished. That is how my father's life was saved. The support of all the people who benefited from his generosity was therefore crucial.

As people tried to escape from the violence, they sought shelter in areas that were difficult to access – places with cliffs, or near the muddy banks of rivers, or among mosquito-infested bushes. In such areas, it was difficult for them to find food or potable water, and they often fell sick. Some of them came to our house with sick children, many of whom had diarrhoea from drinking or eating whatever they could find. At the time, we had three cows which were giving milk. I remember that my father decided to donate one cow to the sick children so that they could get milk every day. This became a kind of lifeline for them. Within a matter of a few days, the children got better. For someone who was not present then, this may not seem important, but, if you look at the statistics of children who were dying of diarrhoea in the refugee camps at that time, you understand how significant the gesture of giving away milk to sick kids was.

Within a matter of a few days, the children got better

We could obviously help only a small number of kids. But, when people saw the effect the milk had on the sick children, they brought even more. From one person to another, word of mouth did its job. Wherever there was a sick child, the parents were told that they could get milk from Gregoire (this is my father's name).

For my part, one of the important events I remember was the night my former classmate, Theodore Mbazumutima, and his friends were almost killed by members of my village. Theodore and I were classmates until the ninth grade, in one of the secondary schools in Gitega, until I changed schools. The civil war started when Theodore was in the twelfth grade in Gitega. He and his friends decided to escape the massacres by fleeing to Tanzania. They left Gitega on foot and took the road going through my village in Rutana. As they

passed near our home, they were ambushed by people wielding machetes, clubs, spears and axes. The mob was composed of Tutsis who were very angry and prepared for a confrontation – back then, our village was mostly populated by Tutsis.

Theodore and his friends were arrested by the mob and questioned. Theodore knew he was going to die. He was shivering all over and his body was like a leaf in the wind. His friends were also stunned and traumatised, and did not know what to do or to say. When I heard the clamour, I came running to see what was going on. To my surprise, Theodore was there! I immediately recognised him and hugged him. Then I started yelling at the mob, asking them to back off. I told them he was my friend and I clung onto his arm. Then I started moving towards our house. His friends followed silently. They could not believe what was happening, that this was how they could be saved. I brought them home and showed them where to sit down. Then I brought them food and sorghum beer. They were unbelievably thirsty and hungry. After that meal, I decided to go with them as far as the River Nyamabuye. We crossed the river together and, only after that, did I say goodbye. I told them that they were safe there. Then I returned home, running as fast as I could.

Looking back, I am surprised at my boldness in confronting the angry mob and stopping the impending carnage. I don't know how I did it. I think that I was not fully aware of what I was doing then. And I believe strongly that the mob backed off because of my father's reputation. I was not strong enough for this alone, and I also believe God used me because He wanted to spare the life of Theodore and his friends.

For many years, we lost contact. I had no idea what became of him. But, when Theodore returned from Kenya, he searched for me and found me. He is among those people who never forgot the good done for them. I really rejoiced to see him alive again. We have since renewed our friendship. We are just like a family now.

3 *Paying the price for caring for others*

*By **Donatien Uwoyitungiye**, former officer and commander of an armoured unit in the Burundi Armed Forces, Bujumbura*

My father was killed in 1994. He was assassinated by a group of four men, all Hutu. This happened during the difficult period of civil war when all hell seemed to have broken loose. He was living in Rugombo town, in Cibitoke province, in the northwest of Burundi. The day I was informed that he died, I went to Cibitoke and organised his burial ceremonies. At that time, I was an officer and commanded an armoured unit within the Burundi Armed Forces (FAB). I was very angry about his death. But I was also in the advantageous position to exact revenge. There were two tanks and several armed men prepared for war under my command. However, my heart prevailed and I decided not to avenge my father's death. I returned to Gitega where the armoured battalion was based and where my unit operated from.

Two weeks after the burial ceremonies, the people who killed my father were captured. The military officer who was operating in Cibitoke called me to come and see them, which I did. Then, together with the officer, I discussed what should be done to them. In his opinion, they deserved to die. But, as the discussion continued, I told him, 'I see you have captured them, and I know what you want to do. But the most important question is this: if we kill them, is my father going to come back?'

Two weeks after the burial ceremonies, the people who killed my father were captured

I said this because I was convinced that killing the four assassins was not going to solve any problem. However, I was also aware that my position on the issue was going to stir up a lot of anger among those who wanted revenge. At that time, my attitude was unheard of. Some thought I was either stupid or crazy. But one thing was certain for them: I was not a normal officer.

After the incident, I went back to Gitega. My relatives became really angry with me. They spread a rumour that I was an accomplice of the rebel movement, working with the movement against my government. That was a serious accusation. The punishment was a quick execution if the rumour was found to be true.

In my defence, I simply told them that I believed any retribution or revenge should come from God, not from me. It was not my role to punish evil people. But even the general prosecutor got involved in the case of my father's death. One day, he questioned me and asked whether I had a mental disability. I told him of course not, and that I was an officer in the army.

Still, I insisted that the assassins of my father be released. When they were, I told them, 'See, you have been released from prison! Go back to your community and never commit such an abomination again. If you get involved in criminal activities once more, you will surely die.'

The four men went back to their homes. Unfortunately, three of them killed someone else and, in the end, they were also killed. But the one who didn't return to crime is still alive. In fact, he has become a member of the church where I am a pastor. Today, I have no problems with him. When you look at us, there is no better example of reconciliation.

This has been a long and tiring journey. When we started the reconciliation journey, my family could not deal with it. For instance, it was extremely difficult for my mom to accept my decision to release the killers or to see my father's assassin coming to my church. It was very painful for her. Fortunately, she has also started her healing process. And, when the former assassin, turned brother, would come to my house, my children would run to my sister. They would stay there until he went away. They used to say that they could not sleep in the same house as somebody who had killed their grandfather. But, in the end, they accepted him. I took them along on my journey, teaching them about forgiveness. I taught them, 'Those who do not forgive others will not be forgiven themselves.'

Finally, they came to understand how forgiveness works. Today, they go and stay with him at his home.

They used to say that they could not sleep in the same house as somebody who had killed their grandfather

The following is another account of things that happened to me back in those days.

In 1998, I retired from the army. I felt that my beliefs were incompatible with my duty as an officer in the midst of a civil war. My heart was bleeding because of the evil I was witnessing every day. However, when I voiced my intention to leave the army, Bijonya, my commanding officer, and the other officers thought that I was joining the rebel movement. From then on, they ordered a group of soldiers to follow my every move. I didn't pay much attention to this. I bought a plot of land in Cibitoke, one of the areas of Bujumbura. The plot was located in 13th Avenue in Mutakura.

Later on, I started appreciating the fact that there were soldiers controlling my movements and spying on me. It helped me a lot. It made me popular as an army officer in the area: people, for some reason, respected me and avoided causing trouble for me.

On my plot in Mutakura, I built a family house and eight other smaller houses to rent out. Then, I started with prayer meetings using one of the rooms in my family house. In the beginning, my wife and I were the only people to join the prayer programme. We would go there and sing hymns accompanied by the sound of a drum and prayers.

It made me popular as an army officer in the area: people, for some reason, respected me and avoided causing trouble for me

One day, I went to visit a church in Kinama, as I wanted to join the Sunday service there. Now, this was during a terrible period when the neighbourhoods of Bujumbura were divided according to ethnic affiliations. There were areas that belonged to the Hutu, and other areas that belonged to the Tutsi. The phenomenon was known as the 'Balkanisation of Bujumbura'. It was tough and ugly. As a Tutsi, going to Kinama, a Hutu area, was either a suicide mission or a provocation. So, when the priest saw me arriving, he stopped the mass. He told his congregation, 'Be careful, he is a Tutsi. The only reason that has brought him in here is to spy on us. Perhaps in a while, soldiers will be here.'

I pleaded with them saying, 'Please, dear brothers, I have come here with only one thought in my mind: praying.'

'How did you get here with such an escort of soldiers with you?', he asked me.

'No, I am not what you think I am,' I replied.

The priest called me in so that I could make a confession about people we were planning to kill. He completely stopped the mass. I told him that I was not there to kill people. I added that I was an ordinary Christian who was simply looking for a place to worship. After our discussion, he came back and told the terrorised congregation that my escort and I had no intentions to kill them. But, by then, at least half of the worshippers had gone home or were already in hiding.

In this same Kinama area, a rebel officer whose nickname was Savimbi had posted some of his men. They took me to Kidumbugwe for interrogation. They asked me, 'Tell us, are you a soldier or not? We want to know the truth.'

'Yes, I was a soldier,' I replied. 'I was in the army but now I have retired. I organise prayer meetings in my home with my family.'

'Are you sure of what you are telling us? Don't you have a secret plan?', they asked anxiously. 'If you are telling the truth, we are going to release you, but we will keep an eye on you until next Sunday. We want to see if you really are going to come back.'

The people talked about me, but the members of the rebel movement knew that I was not a bad person. When it was time to release me, they sent people with me to ensure that I arrived home safely. And one week later, I went back to pray. This time, the congregation was calm, and my presence did not bother them anymore. Later I joined the church choir and enjoyed singing with the congregation.

However, the violence continued. I remember a time when fierce fighting took place around Bujumbura and caused general panic. In Kidumbugwe and Rubirizi, the army and rebel groups clashed, and heavy gunfire sent people running in all directions. Some church members asked me to give them shelter. The request was almost impossible to satisfy, for one simple reason: I was living in a Tutsi-only neighbourhood as a result of the Balkanisation, and bringing Hutu into my house could not only endanger them, but also my own family. On the other hand, I could not ignore that these people were in real need of a safe place. They had nowhere to go. So, I had to do something to help them out.

My biggest challenge was to convince the neighbours that I should be allowed to bring some Hutu into my house

My biggest challenge was to convince the neighbours that I should be allowed to bring some Hutu into my house. This was unacceptable for most people living in my neighbourhood: there was a lot of suspicion between Hutu and Tutsi at the time, and no one knew what to expect from the other side. Also, there was this particular individual whose name was Isaac. He had taken it upon himself to deal with all security matters in the neighbourhood. He formed a group of young people whose role was to patrol the street. But he was the

embodiment of evil. Still, I knew that I had to inform him about the people I was planning to give shelter to. I did not want to risk their lives and that of my own family.

I was very anxious. At a recent meeting with my neighbours, we had decided that we would not allow people from other places to bring trouble to our 13th Avenue in the Mutakura area. My decision to give shelter to church members was in fact contrary to that agreement. So, I was the one breaking it, and, to a certain extent, I was in trouble. Nevertheless, I went and met with Isaac.

I said to him, 'Isaac, you know that I am a good man, right? You know that I like praying and do not want trouble? So, listen, I am going to receive some people from Cibitoke because they need a shelter.'

Isaac asked curiously, 'You say they are from where?'

'They are from Cibitoke, my province,' I told him.

He then asked, 'Are they Hutu?'

'Yes, they are,' I replied.

He frowned and was not happy!

He looked at me and asked, 'How will we know that they have not been sent to attack us or spy on us?'

I assured him that they were not bad people because they were just believers like me.

After this long and tough negotiation, Isaac and his militia laid down three conditions. First, I had to write a declaration saying that I would be responsible for any trouble that might happen on 13th Avenue. Second, I had to provide food for the people I wanted to shelter and for the young men tasked with patrolling the avenue. And third, I would be in charge of patrolling the street from 4 a.m., every single day. The time slot I was given was tough because, back in those days, most attacks and gunfire would start at around 4 a.m.

I was reluctant to accept the third condition. But they refused to listen to me. They also demanded that I bring the people I was sheltering along on patrol with me. This was impossible, as my guests were only women and children. As a former soldier, I decided to be the one patrolling.

Only after signing the declaration, was I allowed to bring the people to my house. On my way back, things were not easy either. When I arrived at the first roadblock operated by the young patrollers, we were arrested, and I was asked where I was taking the women and children. I showed them the declaration, and they allowed us to continue. We did not use the main road. We used some backyards, and small and dirty roads. Finally, we arrived safely.

Once in my house, my guests were almost prisoners. They could not make any move outside without me to protect them and justify why these Hutu were in this Tutsi-only neighbourhood. I had to stay vigilant all the time to ensure that no one attempted to hurt them.

When other people heard about what I was doing to help, they also asked to join me. Before I knew it, I had around 70 people, mostly Hutu, under my roof. Some people were not happy that I had allowed Hutu to live in the neighbourhood. They informed the head of the municipality, whose name was Bagirimbereka, that my house was full of strange people, probably rebel combatants.

They could not make any move outside without me to protect them and justify why these

I remember that, one day, they hired militia members from Nyakabiga to attack my household. They surrounded us at 2 p.m. At that time, I was working in an Adventist non-governmental organisation called DRA. Some friends called me at work and told me that my family and guests were under attack. I quickly called the chief of our municipality, but he refused to help. He argued that I was deemed suspicious because of all the people in my house. I then called the mayor of Bujumbura, who was then Pio Ntiyankundiye. I told him that my house was surrounded by a militia group trying to massacre my people. To my surprise, he said that he already knew what was happening. Instead of intervening, he asked me to go to his office to explain what was going on. Before leaving my office, I talked to my wife to get an update on the situation. She informed me that the militia was asking her to vacate the house together with our two children.

The militia members' macabre intention was clear. They wanted to burn down the house with all the Hutu families I was hosting, inside. But they wanted my wife and kids to be spared. In their words, they 'wanted to finish the operation'. My wife refused to go outside and decided to wait for me. She understood only too well that, once she was outside, it would be the end for the people inside the house.

I asked a colleague at work to lend me his car so that I could go and check on how the situation was evolving. He refused. He said that they had been warned that I was involved in hiding rebels. I was shocked! It was then that I understood that I could only count on myself. But, suddenly, I remembered one officer who worked at a Military High Command office. We used to work together.

I called him and told him, 'I know that you are busy controlling my movements. But I have another more pressing issue: a militia group has attacked my house.'

The officer asked me where I was, and I replied that I was in Rohero. He arrived with a pickup truck full of soldiers, and, together, we swiftly moved to my house to see what was happening to my family and guests. When we arrived home, the members of the militia became scared and ran in all directions. Once inside the house, I found that the Hutu families I was sheltering were terrorised but I tried to calm them down.

After the attack by the Tutsi militia, we received a new alert that the following Friday Hutu rebels were planning to attack Mutakura. This was not a joke or a rumour. Everything was so confusing, and I did not know how to handle the new situation. I decided to stay at home to see how things were going to unfold.

The frightening thing was that the son of one of the people I was sheltering was a member of the rebel movement. So, the person approached me and said, 'Pastor, we are all aware about the imminent rebel attack this Friday. Can you help us get out of here?'

I asked him, 'Does your son know that you are here with me?'

'Yes, he does know that I am here', he replied.

'So, if you go out, what direction are you going to take? You cannot go to Kinyankonge or to Bukirasazi because all the houses there have been demolished. So where are you going to go?'

He replied, 'We do not want to die in front of your eyes. Let us go!'

'Believe me,' I told him, 'you won't die if I am still alive. Stay here with me.'

Before the attack, the rebel fighter whose father lived with me came to my house looking for him. He wanted to take him to a safe place. The man refused to go. He did not want to escape alone, leaving others behind to perish.

On Thursday, one day before the attack, it was as if everyone in my house was mourning. Nobody asked for food. They had no appetite.

On Friday, the rebel group attacked, but they did not reach my house. In fact, the army had surrounded my compound, as it was believed that I would be one of the key targets. So, that's how we were unknowingly protected as we went to sleep that night.

Around 18 people died during the attack. When the local authorities came to find out what had happened, they also discovered how many people I was sheltering. I was suddenly at the centre of an investigation. Civil and military authorities asked me why I was sheltering such a large number of people. I fetched and showed them the declaration I had signed. I explained that these people were like my family now and were members of a home-based church I was pastoring. But one military officer who used to work with me said, 'This guy is a moron. You can't believe that these people he is sheltering are the ones who killed his father.'

Civil and military authorities asked me why I was sheltering such a large number of people

The officer's words added fuel to the existing anger and allegations that I was colluding with 'the enemy', meaning the Hutu rebel movement. I was arrested and sent to jail at a military base. Meanwhile, a new group of young militiamen from Nyakabiga were sent to patrol around my house. My wife found a way to inform me that they were surrounded and that tomorrow they might not be alive.

That night, I asked one of the officers why in fact I was in custody.

He replied, 'You know your father died. Why couldn't you avenge him? Just choose a few people among those you are sheltering in your house and kill them. You have to avenge your father's death.'

I replied, 'Those are God's people. They cannot be put to death. If you want to kill, you have the whole country. Why are you insisting on those in my house?'

He said to me, 'At headquarters they have decided to eliminate you. And you know why? They think you are a traitor. The Hutu you are sheltering are relatives of some of the rebel fighters, and you are supporting them. There is no way you can explain why, in the whole neighbourhood, they are only in your house.'

After his patrol, I was brought in once again for interrogation.

The officers asked me, 'Donatien, tell us the truth. Why are you protecting these rebels?'

I replied, 'Those people are not rebels. If you think they are, then count me with them.'

They asked, 'Are you ready to die with them?'

I answered that I was ready.

A decision was, however, made to take me back home instead.

When we arrived at my house, they called out the persons I was sheltering and asked them, 'Would you accept us taking you back to your houses?'

They replied, 'We have no homes anymore. Our houses in Kinama have been demolished. We have nowhere else to go.'

This whole story took about a month to end. In the process, I lost my job and then recovered it. Luckily, one of my bosses, Jean Chris Bisetsa, did everything he could to have me back at work, even though many of my colleagues were against me. I waited for six months before I could go back to the office. We experienced a lot of problems that threatened our lives, both those of my family and my guests, but, miraculously, we were protected all the time we stayed together.

I lived with those Hutu families for two years, until the crisis ended. When my friend Laurent Gahungu was chosen to lead our municipality, the threats against me stopped and the situation gradually improved until the people I was sheltering were able to go back home.


IKORWA AMAJAMBERE

4 *A fearless woman on the frontline*

*By **Marie Immaculée Nzohabonimana**, farmer and volunteer during the crisis, Rutegama, Muramvya*

The military coup that took the life of President Ndadaye was carried out at night. The following morning, I heard a car passing by my house very early, around 5 a.m. This was unusual.

So, I got up and went to see what was happening. After a while, as the car was coming back, I saw the administrator of our commune passing by. I rushed toward him and asked, 'What's the matter?' He replied, 'Marie, things are getting really bad. I have been asked to barricade all roads because the president has been killed.'

Then I asked, 'What is the purpose of the barricades?'

He replied, 'Don't you realise we are in deep trouble?' He then continued on his way towards the main road. When he had finished erecting the barricade, he went back to his office.

A few hours later, we saw a crowd of people going to the municipal office. Very quickly, they came back with the administrator and started entering houses that belonged to Tutsis, asking the people to go outside. The group of Tutsis gathered in front of my house while the mob went on to another area to capture some more people. The captured Tutsis were left at a nearby pub, a place known as Ku Musaraba, but were not tied up. A small group of young people had been tasked with keeping an eye on them.

The mob came back with two more people, who had been trying to escape. Then the group of captives was taken to the communal office. The administrator, whose name was Simon, pleaded with the mob to release the Tutsis. He insisted that innocent people should not be killed. But no one listened to him. When he saw that his efforts were in vain, he simply said, 'I wash my hands! Before God I will not be found guilty of this innocent blood.' Then he fled with his family. He did not wait to see how the arrested people were killed.

He insisted that innocent people should not be killed. But no one listened to him

However, while the mob was still in the process of taking the captives to the office, my friends and I managed to help a few individuals to escape. These individuals came to my house as if they were looking for some water to drink. I then showed them a hiding place. I was fortunate that the chaos had distracted the mob. I kept around ten people in my house.

In the evening, when it was dark, we decided to get food and bring it to the people we were hiding. So many painful things happened in a single day, Thursday 21 October 1993, after the assassination of the president of the Republic of Burundi.

The next day, Friday, I went to the communal office to see what had happened. To my surprise, I found some people still alive and locked inside one of the buildings. As anarchy reigned all over, there was no one guarding the building and it was not properly locked. The key had been forgotten in the lock. I took the key with me and went straight home. At night, around 10 p.m., I told my husband everything that I had seen. I also told him that I had the key. I asked him whether we could go there and free the people locked inside. He replied that 11 pm would be a good time to go because there would be less patrols by the mobs.

So, at 11 p.m., we moved furtively towards the building. When we reached it, I told the people inside that I was going to leave them with the key so that they could open the door and escape at a later hour when the patrolling teams would be asleep. It was not a good idea, I said, to leave all at once, or while the mobs were still awake. So, I gave them the key hoping that they would run away and thus escape. I don't know what happened after that. But, in the morning, they were still inside. I suppose they did not believe me. That could be the only explanation. The mob came and found them there. You can imagine what followed. But four young girls managed to escape. I took them inside my house where I was already hiding the ten people.

The following morning, the mob came to my house looking for the girls and asked me to hand them over. I told them that they had jumped over the fence and had fled through the coffee plantations. I had destroyed my fence on purpose to give the impression that someone had escaped through it. When the leaders of the mob checked the fence and found it destroyed, they believed me and left. That's how the girls' lives were spared. The same day, the mob moved on to attack Kiganda. But people of Kiganda had been warned of the imminent attack and had prepared themselves to counter-attack. Consequently, members of the mob were ambushed and beaten badly. Some of them came back bleeding. As a result, on Sunday tensions started to decrease.

On Monday, the army units from the Mwaro artillery base were deployed 'to pacify' the people of our region. In reality, however, 'to pacify' meant retaliate, avenge, and massacre the Hutu – whether involved in killing the Tutsi or not. The army removed all barricades left by the administrator and established its own checkpoints. Then, the soldiers from Mwaro began their killing spree. They started from Mucamamandu and killed people, set houses ablaze, and looted property. Then, they came here to Rutegama and started shooting at anything that

moved. I must admit that it was the first time that I had heard the sound of a gunshot. I panicked and ran through a banana plantation in order to hide. I was running with no clear destination, and I found myself near the communal office, where large numbers of soldiers were gathering. They did not spot me, as they were busy trying to open the administrator's safe to get money. I quietly returned home. On my way, I saw a crowd of people screaming. They said they were going to stop the soldiers. I knew that this would be a very unwise move and warned them that they had better find a hiding place as quickly as possible because the soldiers were heavily armed and ready for war. They listened to me and in a blink of an eye disappeared.

Still feeling panicked, I went home. On my way, I prayed inaudibly, asking God to spare us from what was coming next. I knew the presence of army units in such large numbers meant that danger was looming.

Later on, I was informed that the army had positioned one of its armoured vehicles in the middle of the tarmac road. I gathered my strength and, containing my fear, went straight to the vehicle. When I was close enough, the soldiers opened a window of the armoured vehicle and I told them that I had several Tutsi families under my roof. I asked the soldiers if they could come and evacuate the families to safety. One of the soldiers replied, 'Go and tell them to come here. We would like to evacuate all vulnerable people.'

I went home and told the families to join the soldiers. But they refused. I went back to the soldiers and told them that the Tutsis did not believe me and refused to come out. So, some soldiers came along with me and asked the people to come out. When they saw the soldiers, they agreed to come out of their hiding place. They were then evacuated and taken to the Giheta military base. That is how, for several days, I was able to provide shelter and food for some Tutsi families.

At this time, our village was almost empty. Most Hutu families had run away, fearing for their lives. My children had followed other villagers. I decided to go and search for the children so that they could be at home with me.

Meanwhile, the soldiers deployed to 'secure' the village decided to erect a camp near my house. Slowly but surely, I became familiar with them. One day I visited their camp and noticed that they had arrested a group of people. The commander of the camp told me that the people I saw were suspected of colluding with the armed rebellion. I asked him to allow me to have a closer look at the men. I was surprised to find some of my neighbours and friends among them. There was Yves, the current chairman at Kirehe, Remegy from Rusama, the principal of a school in Gatabo, and Prosper from Nkonyovu. I said, 'Chief, you cannot be serious. These are my neighbours. Please don't harm innocent people.'

Because they had been badly beaten, I asked permission to visit them and treat their wounds. After four days, their bruises and swelling were disappearing. I bribed the commander and he agreed to release them from jail. But, once out of that prison, they joined the rebel army. And they survived the civil war. Today, as we speak, one of them, Yves, is the chairman of the ruling party at the local level and is leader of one of the administrative entities known as the zone of Kirehe. Remegy, for his part, is working at the Immigration Office.

A few years later, during the civil war between the armed movements and the regular army, the units deployed to Rutegama were still trying to destroy it completely in revenge for the Tutsi who had died there. I was afraid and sad. I wanted to know more about their plans, so I started selling beer in order that they would spend time at my clandestine pub. I got a lot of information just by listening to the soldiers' discussions.

One day, I overheard them planning to attack a village. The same night, after feeding my children and putting them to bed, I went to the targeted village and warned them so that they could flee. This happened several times with different villages. At 4 a.m., the military convoy would enter the village only to find it empty.

When the soldiers could not find people in the villages they were attacking, they decided to loot the houses. They would go into a village and come back to the camp with cows, goats, iron sheets for roofs, etc. In this way, the villages were gradually being destroyed. One day, I went to see the chief of the district in Muramvya to report what was happening. He came and asked them to stop.

When the soldiers could not find people in the villages they were attacking, they decided to loot the houses

The soldiers were not happy. So, they changed their strategy. They started stopping cars, pulling people out, and killing those they suspected of who knows what without even a second thought. There was a deep pit located not far from the checkpoint. That was where they started throwing the bodies of their victims. To find out about the pit, I had to use some trickery. I asked a woman to go for a walk in the nearby forest, and we pretended to look for firewood. We first saw a lot of flies around the pit and, as we came closer, we noticed how the bodies were being laid in the pit. This is how we knew that all the people who disappeared

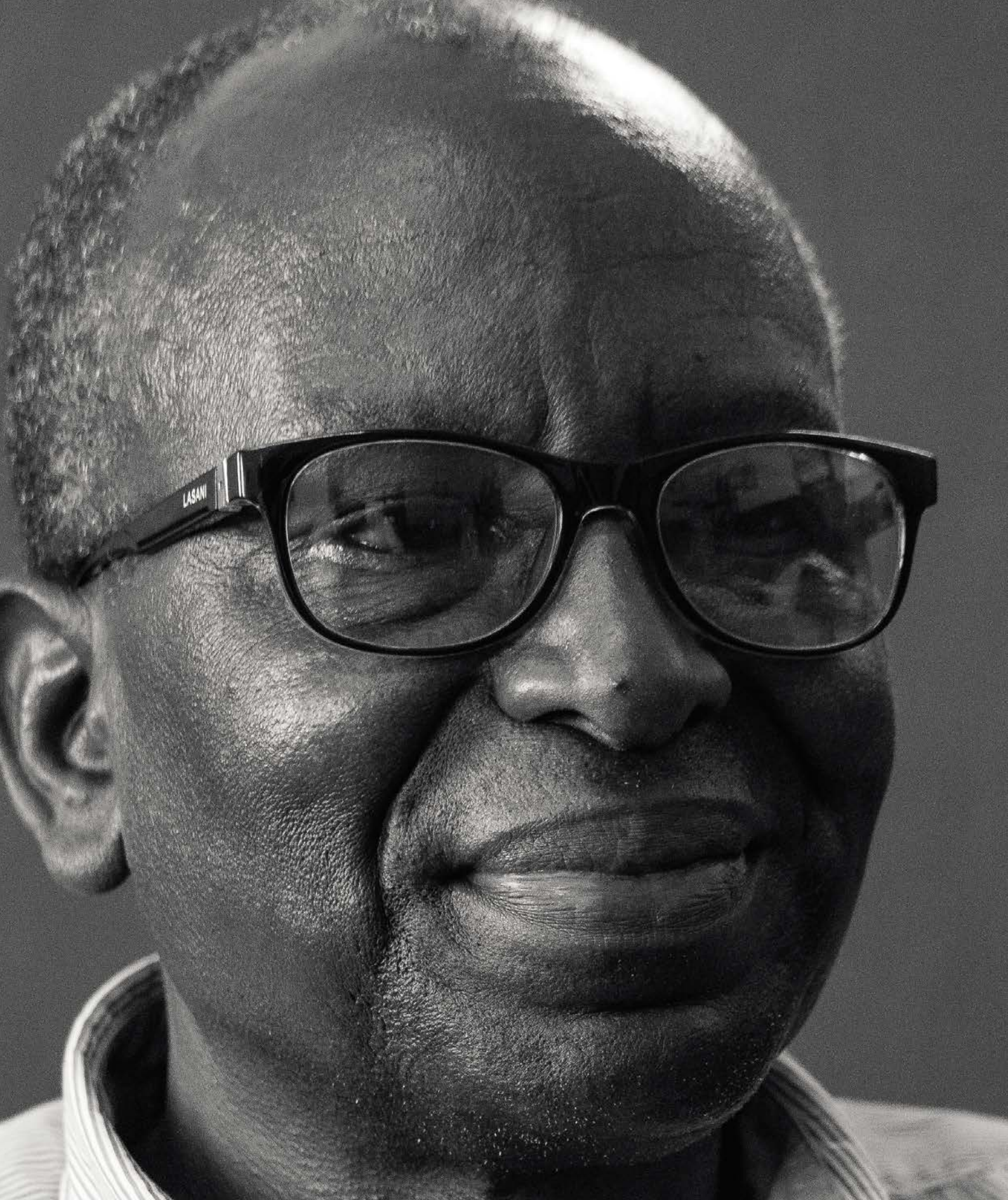
were being thrown in the pit. Two soldiers saw us. One of them got really angry with us. But his comrade who knew me decided to escort us home.

The following week, a minister by the name of Ndimurukundo Onesphore held a meeting here in Rutehgama. I took that opportunity to inform him about what was happening at the checkpoint and how people were being killed and thrown into the pit. I don't know where I got the strength or courage to denounce the crimes that were being committed, but, to my surprise, I was fearless. Before leaving, the minister had the checkpoint removed. That was my small victory.

In 1997, a new administrator was appointed for our commune. His name was Mbesherubusa Leonidas. He was evil. Under his rule, my husband and I were put in jail. We were suspected of working with the rebel fighters. We spent four years in jail. Leonidas was also the one who grouped people into what looked like a concentration camp near his office. The suffering of people in the camp was difficult to describe. It was only after the ceasefire that the camp was closed. Today, I am thankful for being able to save some people's lives.

5 *Resisting the killing mobs*

*By **Marie Samson Gahungu**, former staff member in charge of discipline at Kibimba High School, Gitega*


LASANI

In 1993, I was working at the famous secondary school of Kibimba. I was in charge of discipline and had a team of five people working with me. As many would know, Kibimba found itself on the international stage for a terrible reason. The tragedy which took place at the school was covered a lot by local and international media. The assassination of President Ndadaye by a Tutsi-dominated army and the massacre of Tutsi students from Kibimba school by a mob of angry Hutu peasants highlighted the divisions along ethnic lines that existed within Burundian society at the time. A lot happened then. Too many people died on all sides –Hutu and Tutsi alike.

Most people remember the bad and horrible things that happened, and this is something we can easily understand. But what people do not remember is that, in the midst of all the madness, there were good deeds. There were people who, in total anonymity, tried their best to bring some hope in the face of evil.

When President Ndadaye was inaugurated as the first democratically elected president, there was a lot of enthusiasm in the air. People were very happy and looked to the future with many expectations. They had confidence in the newly established state institutions. President Ndadaye was a great orator and a convincing leader. People loved his speeches because they carried a message of hope and the rebirth of a nation. They were very excited about the change. The opposition parties tried to change people's minds, but in vain. Ndadaye's victory brought hope to the population, especially the Hutu, who were marginalised and felt hopeless under oppressive military regimes that ran the country for almost 30 years. With his assassination, all that hope was dashed into pieces. That is how it happened that people went crazy and started committing crimes that were inconceivable just a few weeks earlier.

Most people remember the bad and horrible things that happened, and this is something we can easily understand

The day the Tutsi students from Kibimba were massacred, the principal had a meeting with the whole community early in the morning – with students, teachers and everyone connected to the school. Because of the rumours of ethnic violence everywhere, he asked everyone to remain calm and united. He insisted that, if everyone remained together, nothing would happen.

Strangely, I did not know what was going on until my shift started. When I arrived at the school, I found empty classrooms and very few individuals. So I asked what had happened and was informed that the Tutsi students had fled. They had been encouraged to do so by a Tutsi teacher who thought the principal was not serious when he asked everyone to stay calm and united. The teacher had gathered all the Tutsi students around him and had told them to pack their bags and go to the Mwaro military base. He said they had to fight against the Hutu. From his words, it was obvious that the Tutsi stood accused of killing President Ndadaye, who was a Hutu.

The Tutsi students and teachers took their bags and headed for the road to Mwaro, where the main military base, the artillery battalion, was located. But, when the Hutu population noticed the Tutsi were leaving the school, they became scared and thought that it was a strategy to allow the military to come and kill indiscriminately. They decided to stop them. Very quickly, a mob brandishing sticks and clubs formed. They tried to stop the students and bring them back to the school before they could reach the military base. Meanwhile Hutu students, who were equally scared, had scattered across the village. And so, when I arrived at the school, I could not find any students around. Only a few people who had stayed at the school told me what had happened.

They tried to stop the students and bring them back to the school before they could reach the military base

The confrontation between the Hutu peasants and the group of Tutsi students happened in a tree plantation at Gihinga. Obviously, the number of peasants was much greater than the number of students. The students were overpowered and were brought back to school, but not without a fight and some wounds. When I returned to school around 3 p.m., I saw the crowd of people who were bringing the students back to school.

The crowd told me, 'You say you look after these students, right? But we have caught them running away. Now, we have brought them back, but we are not leaving them here because we don't trust you. We are taking them with us, and we intend to keep an eye on them at Kwibubu.'

Kwibubu was located just a kilometre from Kibimba high school. It was therefore possible to simply walk there – and that's exactly what they did, the mob and the arrested students. I tried to convince the mob to leave the students with me at the school. But they categorically

refused to do this. They said that they wanted to wait for information on the fate of President Ndadaye. If he was still alive, the students would be freed and could return to school. But if he had been killed, then they would decide the fate of the students. I tried again and again, asking them to leave the students alone and release them. But they did not want to listen to me.

Before they left the school grounds, I tried to stand between the two groups. The mob was so furious that they wanted to hit me with a club or tie me up. Finally, I pleaded with them to at least release those who were wounded, and, to my surprise, they agreed and let them go to a hospital close to Kibimba high school.

When I pleaded for the wounded students to be released, my intention was not only to provide them with medical care, but also to help them escape the deadly trap they found themselves in. In addition, I told the peasants that I needed about 12 more strong students to carry the wounded ones who were unable to walk by themselves. My secret intention was to save as many students as I could.

The students who remained under the surveillance of the mob were akin to a ransom for those who left. But even in the case of those who would be left behind, I tried to find a way out. I told the peasants that the arrested students could wait in the teachers' room while we waited to hear what had happened to the president. I knew that the teachers' room had large windows which, once opened, gave the students the chance to escape. I hoped that smart students would read my mind and, once in the room, would find a way to leave unharmed at night. I managed to get 50 students into the teachers' room and 20 more into a hidden office with smaller windows. I did the latter so that no one would notice the hidden office where the 20 students were hiding. By then, however, the mob was already accusing me of protecting people who had killed 'their president'.

The students who remained under the surveillance of the mob were akin to a ransom for those who left

Fortunately, the students in the teachers' room were smart enough to escape and run away. Then, I followed those who were being taken to the hospital so that I could find out how they were doing and if they were being taken care of by the medical team.

Unfortunately, most of the students taken by the mob to Kwibubu did not survive. They were locked into a gas station and burnt alive when the Hutu peasants were informed that President Ndadaye had been killed by Tutsi soldiers.

Surprisingly, some of the students managed to escape from the deadly flames. Those were the ones who were my witnesses and who testified in court when I was wrongly accused of killing people in 1993. I am a Hutu and would like it to be known that those witnesses were all Tutsis. They boldly said that they did not see me anywhere at Kwibubu. I was therefore acquitted of the charges.

Let me also say that those who accused me were students too. They told the court that I had provided the mob with a barrel of petrol which was used to burn their comrades. Because I had a motorbike back in those days, my accusers also said that I was the one coordinating the activities leading to the massacre that occurred at Kwibubu.

I thank God that six witnesses stood up for me, thereby resulting in my acquittal. The Tutsi teacher who had held a meeting and had incited students to disobey the principal and leave the school, was among those who accused me. He did not even remember that I had saved his own children from being killed. In fact, it was the attorney who informed the court that one survivor among the students had reminded the teacher that I had saved his children. Only after this, did the Tutsi teacher acknowledge that he had wrongly accused me.

When I was arrested and imprisoned, my mind was at peace because I knew I had done nothing wrong; I had only tried to save people. Some of my friends were also wrongly accused, and some of them were also burnt to death despite the fact that they were innocent. They were killed simply because they were from Kibimba. In my understanding, the killings which took place in 1993 were connected to the painful memory of what had happened to the Hutu in 1972. This wounded memory was revived by the killing of the very first Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye. The rest is the horror that we all witnessed.

I thank God that six witnesses stood up for me, thereby resulting in my acquittal

6 *Giving the right advice*

*By **Alexis Maboneza**, agronomist, and former trainer of farmers, Ruyigi Centre*

The1993 tragedy erupted when I was working in Kumoso, in Ruyigi province. I was an agronomist employed by a French organisation involved in agricultural projects and operating in Kinyinya, Nyabitsinda and Gisuru. One day, I woke up early in the morning and went to work as usual. It was a Thursday. When I reached the roundabout at Kinyinya, there was a man standing there. I recognised him. I used to train him how to plough land with his cows and to assist him as he tried to learn about, and use, modern techniques for growing food on his farm. He saw me and asked me to stop. He seemed to have something important he wanted to tell me. I was surprised and curious to know what he wanted to say. Then, with a serious face, he told me to go back home. I was very shocked!

But the peasant insisted, and so I stopped. Then he approached me and said, 'Don't you know what happened …? The president has been killed.' It was only then that I realised the magnitude of the terrible event that was shaking our nation.

Sad, shocked, and in disbelief, I went back home. At that early hour of the morning, not many people were on the streets yet. But when I reached my village, the sun was already up. I told the people from my household and my neighbours the bad news I had just received. I said that everyone should be afraid of what was going to happen next, and that the situation we were used to had completely changed.

He seemed to have something important he wanted to tell me. I was surprised and curious to know what he wanted to say

The coordinator of the project I was involved in was from Rutana. He was a relatively old person who had in the past seen how violent crises unfolded. He gave instructions not to open the offices where we worked. He informed us that, in such an unpredictable time, everyone had to rely on themselves. He then jumped into his car and returned to Rutana where he was staying.

Back then, there were no mobile phones, and it was not easy to share information about what was happening in various places as the country was burning. It was also an epoch when very few people could afford to have a telephone at home. In fact, what we see today with widespread access to mobile phones and social media was simply unimaginable then. And so, though I didn't know it, if I had continued on my way that day, I would have been killed for certain. Though I was unaware of this, the killings had already begun in Nyabitsinda:

that very day, some people had decided to go on the rampage, killing their neighbours and burning or demolishing houses and bridges. The destruction of bridges was meant to stall retaliatory action by the army, which was being deployed to 'pacify' communities.[1]

Personally, I was informed of what was happening by the administrator of Nyabitsinda at that time, whose name was Etienne. On that day, he was passing by Kinyinya on his way to Tanzania to search for a safe haven. He came to me looking for fuel for his motorbike. I gave him some and he left. During our brief meeting, he told me about the dramatic events that were taking place in Nyabitsinda and why he was running for his life. The situation was extremely dangerous and unpredictable.

I remember that Abraham, another local administrator, and a former teacher, came to where we had gathered and tried to meet with us. He was attempting to allay our fears and to encourage us. But, as hard as he tried, he was unable to convince people and calm them down. At one stage, what he was saying was even drowned out by the noise and anger. Our meeting place was protected by some police armed with guns. This was a relatively sufficient deterrent to repel attacks by mobs, which only had clubs, sticks and pangas. However, at a certain point, the mob that wanted to kill us grew in size to the point that even the police felt overwhelmed. They told us to run for our lives while they fought back using the firepower they had. Only those among us who were able to use weapons could stay and defend themselves.

Our meeting place was protected by some police armed with guns

One of the police officers gave me a small knife with which to defend myself. I took it and put it in my jacket pocket. At the same time, I was praying and was very confused. I was asking myself, 'How in the world could I use a knife and probably kill someone with it?' I decided that I was not going to be involved in any violence.

I asked a friend of mine whose name was Jean Claude and who was also an agronomist, 'Do you really think that you and I will be able to stand and fight in this war? Can't we run for our lives? What are we waiting for?'

1 In this case, 'pacify' simply meant protecting the Tutsi and punishing the Hutu. [*Editor's note*]

Jean Claude was with his fiancée. Another man joined our tiny group. We were all members of the same Christian fellowship. After agreeing that we were not in a position to fight, we decided to run and hide in a closet that was inside an office in the district where we had gathered under police protection.

The four of us spent four days in that closet – from Thursday 21 October until Sunday 24 October 1993. We almost died of hunger; we could only get drinking water from the bathroom basin. That is all we had with which to survive. Luckily, soldiers from the Mabanda military base came to rescue us during their 'pacification' mission. When the soldiers arrived in the village, we could hear the gunshots from where we were hiding, but we did not know what was happening. Later, when the gunshots stopped, the soldiers started searching for people, asking them to come out of their hiding places. The soldiers gathered everyone in the grounds of the district in what later became a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs). This is how we were liberated and were able to leave, this time under the protection of the army. A camp for the IDPs was erected for us near the office building of the district administrator.

While at the camp for IDPs near the district office, we continued our prayer meetings, since we were part of a Christian fellowship group comprising believers from different denominations such as Pentecostals, free Methodists and Anglicans – even two former Muslims joined us. In our fellowship group, there were also some ethnically mixed families. Two families had husbands who were Hutu and wives who were Tutsi. At a time like the 1993 crisis, being associated with such families was a source of much trouble because of the existing divisions along ethnic lines. I remember that one day conflict flared up, since some family members wanted to go to Tanzania (mostly the Hutu) and the others wanted to stay under military protection (mostly the Tutsi). It was so painful to watch these families being torn apart. But as Christians, we supported and encouraged those who wished to leave by asking them to stay as we continued our life of prayer together.

However, within the camp itself, there were people who were very angry with those who had attempted to go to Tanzania. Two people in particular were furious and, during heated discussions, almost created chaos inside the camp. These two people considered those who wanted to go to Tanzania to be traitors and started looking for ways to physically eliminate them. They started plotting to kill them with the help of a ruthless soldier.

When I saw what was happening, I approached the chief officer in charge of protecting the camp for IDPs. I told him that there should be no killings and that security for everyone should be the top priority. I asked him to ensure that the people threatened were protected and that there would be no shedding of innocent blood.

I also asked whether I could bring people from Kinyinya (mostly Hutus) so that they could stay with us in the camp. Their leader, Abraham, had organised a meeting in which he had asked people to remain unified among themselves, but some other individuals were accusing him of having organised killings. However, I knew that there had been no killings in Kinyinya.

A few extremists in the camp did not want the officer to go and fetch the people from Kinyinya. They did not want the camp to be mixed, but, in my view, that made the camp vulnerable. I told the officer that it was his duty to take those people under his protection as well. After all, the war was going to end one day and people would remember those who did what was right. I added that, if he refused to do as I had suggested, he would be responsible for things that would happen thereafter.

few extremists in the camp did not want the officer to go and fetch the people from Kinyinya

After some moments of reflection, he finally accepted my advice. We went to Kinyinya together and brought the people who were there to stay with us. After that, we were moved to the parish, in a new and bigger camp. The parish was led by a Dutch priest, and the person in charge of the camp comprising people from Kinyinya and Giharo was a nun whose name was Odile.

One day, we went to look for food, and, when we came back, I found one of my friends, whose name was Jonathan, in an isolated place. He was so scared that I immediately knew that something was wrong. Jonathan was one of those who had attempted to flee to Tanzania. He was shaking like a leaf in the wind. Finally, I asked him what was going on.

He told me that he had seen a new soldier arrive in the camp together with two women, Kajambere Marie and a lawyer's wife. Jonathan knew that they were plotting to kill him. I quickly went to see the priest and the commander of the military unit deployed at the parish. I did this because I had been chosen as the new representative of the people in the camp.

I informed the commander of the unit that there was a soldier who had come into the camp and was joining forces with a group plotting to kill Jonathan. I also informed the commander about the two women who were working together with the soldier.

The captain said he wanted to see them, and I showed him where they were relaxing and drinking. The new soldier was very drunk. The captain ordered that he be disarmed and be

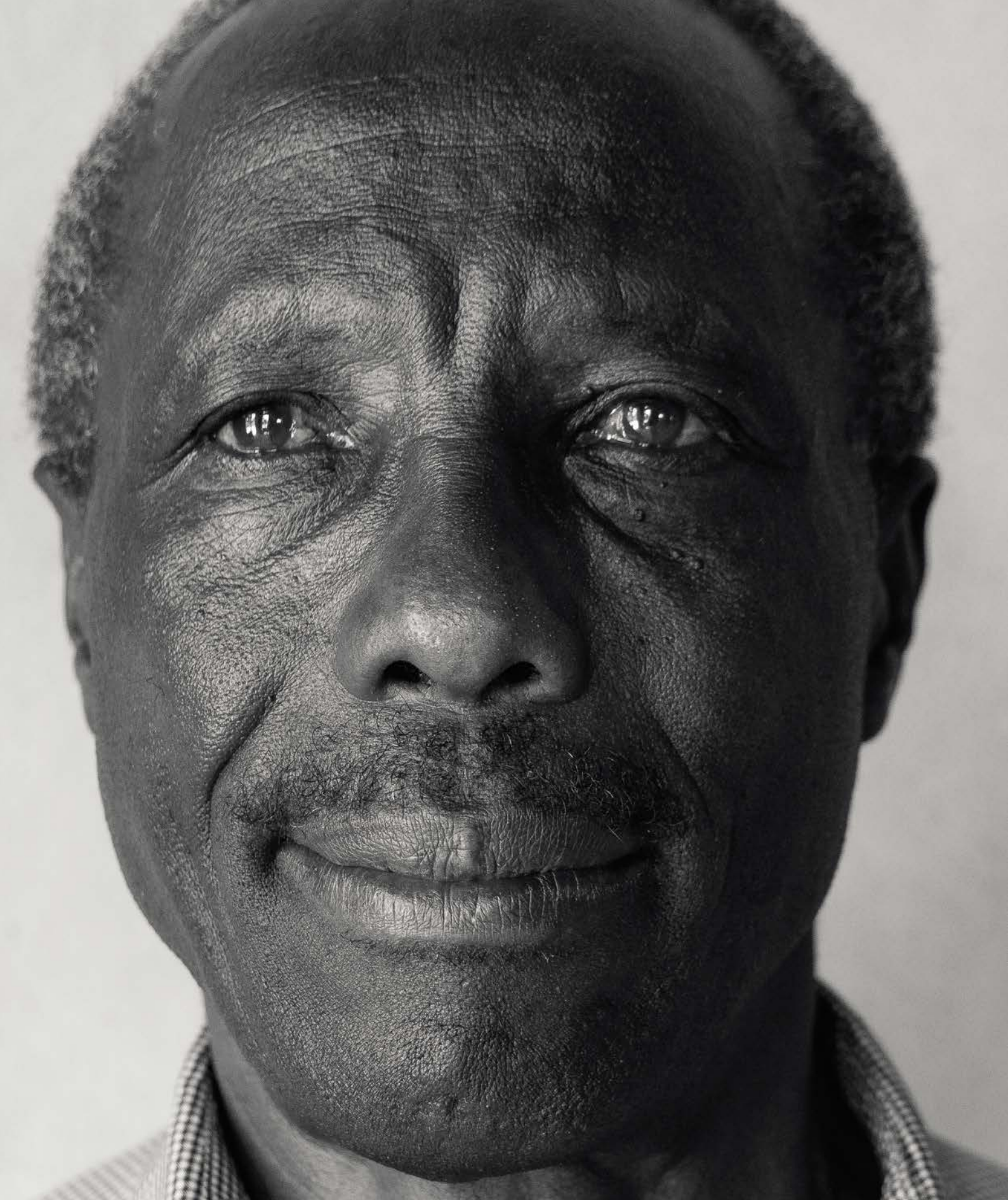
taken into custody. Only then did I know that the worst was over. I went back to Jonathan and told him what had happened and asked him to calm down. The next day, the head of the parish, the commander of the military unit, and I called all the displaced persons in the camp, the police, and the soldiers to a special meeting. We informed them that we were planning to evict all those who were attempting to undermine our unity and safety by summoning strangers from outside the camp to come in and kill or hurt any person in the camp. We singled out the two women who were planning to kill Jonathan and gave them a last warning. They were informed that, the next time they tried to kill someone, they would be facing severe punishment. That is how we restored peace in the camp for IDPs.

I managed to save other people during the civil war, but I also have to admit that I myself was saved by others on several occasions. The most important thing, however, is that I ensured that the camp welcomed both Hutus and Tutsis at a time when the ethnic divisions were tearing apart Burundian society. It was simply a miracle to witness the kind of harmonious cohabitation during an ethnic civil war.

I am happy that Kinyinya remained at peace despite all the violence going on in surrounding villages. The former district administrator, Abraham, played an important role in preserving peace in the area, and this is something to be remembered as well. He really made sure that there was no spilling of innocent blood on his watch.

7 *The making of a star*

By ***Côme Ruhoze****, farmer and former community representative, Ruyigi*



Prior to the 1993 crisis, people in Burundi seemed to live peacefully, or at least so it appeared. There was only one political party, and there was military rule that kept people's anger in check. I remember one day trying to join the ruling party, the Union for National Progress (UPRONA), back in the '80s. But, when I went to ask for a membership card, my request was denied, despite the fact that I had even brought money to buy it. The membership card cost BIF100 at the time. They refused my money. They thought I was not worthy.

With the wave of democratisation that took place in the '90s, things rapidly began to change. New political parties were formed and there was fierce competition to win the hearts and minds of the people. Anyone could now choose to become a member of any of the officially recognised parties. The most prominent opposition party was the Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), led by Melchior Ndadaye. The party's ideology was totally different from that of UPRONA, and its new ideas attracted a lot of members, especially from those who had been marginalised by the regime in place. So, with the introduction of a multiparty system, the political landscape changed, and we started observing new political behaviour. This time, there was no need to buy a membership card; cards were simply being given out free of charge.

There was a time when, to my surprise, members of UPRONA came to me and asked if I wanted a free membership card. But I did not feel the need to have one anymore. Times had changed. It was my turn to refuse their card. Rather, I had resolved not to support any of the two main parties which were in competition with each other, namely UPRONA and FRODEBU.

One day during the electoral campaign in 1993, I went with a friend of mine to attend a political rally organised by one of the parties. I stood at a good distance from the meeting, but I could hear what they were saying. I couldn't believe my ears. What they said was akin to sowing the seeds of hatred. As we returned home, I was saddened and it was as if my heart was weeping silently. From what I had heard, I concluded that, unless we were fortunate, something bad was going to happen.

As the campaign continued, I could clearly sense that the electoral competition would not end well for our country. I was convinced that the elections would lead to a bloody war or something similar. My assessment was based on my analysis of what lay deep down in the speeches of various political leaders, and of its potential consequences. I frequently discussed these issues with my friends from both UPRONA and FRODEBU as I tried to understand their respective points of view. Even during our discussions, I could sense hostility mounting between the two political groups. They had differing views and opinions on the country's history, its politics, and what the way forward for the nation should be.

My neighbours who were members of FRODEBU already knew that there was a threat hanging over their presidential candidate, Melchior Ndadaye. They also knew that, if Ndadaye died, the country would burn to ashes. Unfortunately, that is exactly what happened.

When the president was killed, many rumours started circulating in our village. Members of FRODEBU were hit hard by the news of Ndadaye's assassination. I remember that, when the horrifying news arrived, we were drinking alcohol at a small pub in our neighbourhood. Ndadaye supporters immediately gathered to discuss the terrible situation and to decide what they were going to do. The meeting took place right there inside the pub. Since I was not a member of any of the parties, I was excluded and left alone during the discussion.

Some Tutsi women were also drinking with us in the pub. Others were serving beer. As the discussion continued, the Tutsis became increasingly scared. FRODEBU supporters were saying that the aftermath of Ndadaye's assassination would be unpredictable. After their meeting, FRODEBU members told us to leave the place immediately. I left at once together with the Tutsi women. When we were about 200 metres from the pub, I told the women to inform their husbands of the situation and how it was evolving. I also asked them not to spend the night inside their houses because nobody knew what was going to happen. I suggested that they find a hiding place and wait there until morning when things would be a bit clearer.

Since I was not a member of any of the parties, I was excluded and left alone during the discussion

The next day, FRODEBU members held a second meeting. This time, I tried to hide in a bush so that I could hear what they were planning to do. Unfortunately, it was too difficult to hear them. Afterwards, they scattered and went home. However, I noticed that one of them seemed troubled. I approached him and asked what was going on, but he refused to tell me. I tried to persuade him about how critical the situation was, but he was not helpful. So, I rushed home.

When I arrived, I found my younger brother preparing himself to capture and kill our Tutsi neighbours. I could not believe what I was seeing! I instantly shouted at him in anger. I told him that in no way was I going to allow him to kill innocent people.

I was furious. He, also, was very angry. As we shouted angrily at each other, ready to fight, our parents intervened and separated us. Then my brother rushed outside. I called to him

and asked where he was going. He told me, without any remorse, that he was going to join the mob of armed people that were planning to kill the Tutsi.

When I saw his determination and that he would not listen to me, I asked to go with him. He reluctantly agreed. I made it clear to him that I wanted to come along and see what they were up to. Again, he agreed. When we reached his group, I saw a lot of people getting ready. They were waiting for others to join them before commencing the massacre. They were armed with clubs, machetes, sticks, spears, etc.

I could not hold my tongue any longer, despite all the weapons being brandished about. So, I stood firmly on my feet and asked them, 'Brothers, did you really take the time to think about what you are going to do? Let us suppose that soldiers, who have families and siblings here as you know, were to find you with all those weapons, what would be your explanation? Would you be able to fight them? Don't you think it is better for you to renounce what you are about to do?'

After my short speech, I stepped out and everyone followed me. We went to a hill in the middle of our locality. Once at the top of the hill, I held a new meeting with them. My point was to try my best to change their minds about how they viewed the Tutsi neighbours. I told them that their way of reasoning was incorrect, and I explained all the consequences linked to getting involved in a crime like killing someone. I reminded them that, as the Christians they claimed to be, killing a human being was a sin. I also told them that they would not be able to handle life with a mind tortured by guilt.

I gave them a simple example, namely that of the well-known old man in our village whose sons were all serving in the army. Suppose that they killed him and his wife. We then together analysed what the consequences might be. By using this example, I made them think twice about what they were about to do. When they realised that the price of their potential crime could be much greater than they had imagined, they listened more carefully to what I had to say. Once their thinking shifted, it became easy for me to convince them to stop what they were planning to do.

From then on, we collectively decided that we would never become involved in initiating violence and, instead, would do our utmost to preserve peace in our community. Gradually, people started to understand that peace began with us and would spread to others. I insisted that, if any violence were to occur, we should let the other side be the trigger, not us. I said this because I knew that the Tutsi were not in a position to start any violence in our village, as they were very few in number compared with the Hutu.

Once we had agreed on our non-violent attitude and strategy, I advised the crowd surrounding me to scatter in small groups and hide. I also asked the leader of those who were planning the killings to stay with me. We agreed to meet in the same place the next morning to obtain updated information and to discuss what to do further.

Having managed, in an extremely difficult situation, to prevent the Hutu from attacking the Tutsi, I convinced the Tutsi families to leave our village and to go to a camp for IDPs under military protection. My strategy of putting sufficient distance between the two ethnic groups was intended as a way of closing any gaps that could be used by extremist groups to fuel ethnic violence. I was surprised to notice that a small number of Tutsis families chose to stay with me. My strategy also involved sending my wife, who is a Tutsi, and my kids to the camp in Ruyigi. The idea behind this gesture was to guarantee to the Tutsi that I would do whatever I could to prevent any violence against them, since my family was also there. Generally, I had very good relationships with both the Tutsi and Hutu. So, my good reputation, in addition to having a Tutsi wife, allowed me to play the role of mediator.

On the following Saturday, we saw special forces on their way to Ruyigi. It was very unusual, frightening even. I think it was the first time in my life that I had witnessed the deployment of special forces in our province. Deep down we knew that nothing good could come of this for our community. Still, we agreed to stick together, Hutu and Tutsi, as one family. A friend of mine and I decided to go to Gasenyi, a place close to Ruyigi, to gather some information on the reasons behind the deployment of the new military units. On arriving in Gasenyi, we found that there was renewed tension between Hutu and Tutsi.

Deep down we knew that nothing good could come of this for our community.

When I asked the reason for the tension, I was told that the Tutsi were refusing to share anything with the Hutu. For that reason, the Hutu were afraid, for they did not know what the Tutsi had in mind. After my meeting with the Hutu, I decided to hear what the Tutsi had to say. I found that the Tutsi had gathered on their own at the marketplace. They were sharing a local alcoholic drink known as *urwagwa*.[1]

1 Sharing *urwagwa* in the Burundi tradition is a symbol of friendship, unity and trust. The fact that the Tutsi had decided to drink alone, thus excluding the Hutu, was perceived very negatively, that is, as a message of hatred or a warning. [*Editor's note*]

The Tutsi welcomed me and offered me something to drink. They had a certain amount of respect for me because my wife was a Tutsi. But my concern was to stem the tension. So, I chose three or four of the eldest from the Tutsi group. I separated them from the group and then asked them, 'Why have you excluded the Hutu from joining and from sharing your *urwagwa*? Don't you understand what this means?'

They could not give me any reasonable answer to my question. I told them that they had to right the wrong that they had done. They accepted this. I went back and asked the Hutu to join the Tutsi. They agreed. In the presence of all, I explained how, in our village, things were organised. I suggested to them that they follow our example and avoid any tension that could lead to spilling innocent blood. That is how, without knowing what was happening, I found myself leading thousands of people and teaching them how to preserve peace, though at the time I did not know what I was doing. Whatever I did then, my only purpose was to avoid violence no matter what.

During that period, I became obsessed with peace. I was fortunate in that people listened to my message and followed my advice. I also told people that it was important to protect the property and belongings of those who were living in the camps for IDPs. These included livestock and crops on farms, and even the routine tasks of caring for the farms and feeding the cattle. Taking care of the properties belonging to those who had left the village was a key factor in building peace in the village and the surrounding areas.

It did not take long for our village to be viewed as a role model. For me, I discovered leadership qualities I did not know I had. But, most importantly, when the military units were sent to attack our village, they found a thriving community where Tutsi and Hutu were living together peacefully. The units left without hurting anyone.

I was fortunate in that people listened to my message and followed my advice

One day, a mob formed by soldiers, students from Rusengo High School, and other Tutsis who had lost their loved ones in other parts of Ruyigi decided to attack the Hutu as revenge. They killed people in several villages, ransacked and burnt houses, looted what they could, and left behind ashes, blood and tears. But when they attempted to attack a village called Ruhwago, they were repulsed by both Hutu and Tutsi, who stood together and protected one another. Before the attack, I visited them and told the elders how we had managed to avoid

violence in our village. They adopted our harmonious cohabitation style and decided to remain unified. So, on the day of the attack, Ruhwago was spared because people stayed together. Following the incident, the elders from Ruhwago asked the chief officer in charge of security in Ruyigi to facilitate the return of displaced people from the camps for IDPs. In doing this, they relied on what had happened during the attack and demonstrated that they were able to preserve the peace and keep anyone living in the village safe. The military officer agreed and people who had left the village came back. They were received at a playing field and were later released to go back to their homes.

There were few people who did not support or appreciate the efforts I was making to advance the peace process in our village and the surrounding regions. For instance, people who had participated in killings or who had trust issues did not want to stay in the same village as the former IDPs from the camps and decided to leave when the latter arrived. They thereupon fled to Tanzania.

In the meantime, the elders and I decided to put in place a committee that would continue to monitor the peace dynamics within our community. One day, the Tutsi elders called me and told me that they did not feel safe as long as there were some people – the Hutu – who had fled to Tanzania. They were not sure about what was being planned there. So, they asked me to go and bring them back to the village. They made their point clear in one of our meetings – they would never feel safe until everyone was back in the village. The mission assigned to me was difficult. It seemed like a puzzle to me.

I was also challenged by the fact that I had to cross the border, enter into Tanzania, and bring people back from the refugee camps. I had no clue as to how to do this, but I knew that, for the sake of peace, I had no choice but to go and at least try something.[2]

They were not sure about what was being planned there

I took some time to process the challenge and to reflect on the best ways to accomplish the mission safely. When I felt ready, I took my bicycle and rode all the way to Tanzania. I went alone because the mission was sensitive. In the evening, I arrived at a place called Mabayi. I was wearing a military jumpsuit as I entered the makeshift refugee camp. My younger brother, who had once been among those attempting to kill the Tutsi, was the first person in

2 Ruyigi is one of the provinces sharing a border with Tanzania. So, for the hero of this story, the challenge was not about the road but about the process itself. [*Author's note*]

the camp to spot me. When he noticed the outfit that I was wearing, he immediately tore it to pieces. Although he was protecting me through his gesture, I did not know it. I was simply perplexed. He gave me other clothes to put on. After that, we went to meet the refugees and to discuss the possibility of them returning home.

We held a meeting right inside the refugee camp. During the meeting, I told the Burundian refugees about the situation back home. It was a long discussion because some of the people in the camp understood what I was explaining, while others did not or did not want to. Finally, we agreed that I could return to Burundi with a few families. A number of them volunteered to go with me the same night.

When we left, it was totally dark outside. We arrived in Burundi very late that same night. The next morning, we organised a meeting. The elders who had sent me to Tanzania saw the returnees and were relieved to know that I had kept my word. This led to more trust between us and to the consolidation of my position as a community leader – despite the fact that no one had elected me.

After two weeks, I returned to Tanzania to bring more people home. This time, I did not go alone but went with another person. On our way back, we encountered a group of Tutsi patrolling near the border, armed with spears and clubs. They had not been informed about our trip. When I spotted some of the members of the patrol, I asked the people who were with me to hide in the bush. I wanted to find out how we could continue on our journey without being ambushed. I went on alone until I saw someone on the road. I recognised him despite the fact it was night-time. He was an old and peaceful man that I knew well. I called out his name, 'Ngombo'.

'Who are you?' he asked.

I replied in a whisper, 'It's Côme!'

Then, surprised, he asked me, 'What were you doing on the other side of the border?'

I told him to lower his voice and to come closer to me. I wanted to explain what was going on and what I was doing outside at that late hour.

I informed him that I was coming from Tanzania and that I was with some Burundian families returning from a refugee camp in Tanzania. Then I asked

him how we could safely cross the road and continue on our way home. Ngombo, doubting me, asked whether I was telling the truth. I came very close to him so that he could search and confirm that I was not armed. He searched me but found nothing. Then he asked to see the people I was bringing to Burundi. He saw mostly women and children, since they were the ones whom I had brought with me. He then showed us the safest way. He even gave me some money to buy a drink as a sign of respect and support for the efforts I was making to promote peace and cohesion.

Later on, as tensions in the community started to decrease, I decided to return to my daily routine as a farmer, but community members refused to allow me to do that. They asked me to remain as their representative. They did not want to be led by the former chief who, during the crisis, did not show up to support them. They were very happy to have me as their new chief, they said. But I was reluctant to accept that position, because I was working without payment. And that was preventing me from meeting the needs of my own family as I should.

So, I decided to go and see the administrator. I asked him to choose somebody else to continue the work I was doing in the village. The strange thing is that he also asked me to appoint somebody I trusted to replace me. I suggested a Tutsi man whom I knew well and who would be a reliable replacement. Before giving up my duties, I showed him what I was doing and how I was focused on peace and cohesion in the community. Fortunately, he was accepted by the administrator and continued to walk in my footsteps. Since the 1993 crisis until now, our village has been at peace.

8 *The caring host*

By the ***Honourable Mo-Mamo Karerwa****,*
MP, former teacher and church minister, Gitega

The year 1993 will be remembered for the many horrifying events that in some way or another shaped the history of Burundi. At the onset of civil war, I was a teacher at one of Gitega's primary schools. As many already know, the civil war was triggered by the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye and the attempt to incapacitate all state institutions by eliminating almost every member of Ndadaye's Cabinet and of his support teams. Normally, the president of the republic is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. But, in the case of Burundi's 1993 crisis, the armed forces eliminated their commander for the simple reason that he was from another ethnic group.

Ndadaye came to power in July 1993 following a landslide victory in the elections organised one month earlier. In a country where the majority of the population was from the same ethnic group as the president – the Hutu – it was easy for him and his political party, FRODEBU, to win. The majority of those in the armed forces, on the other hand, came from the Tutsi, who had been in power for almost 30 years. It was quite difficult for the Tutsi establishment, supported by what was then described as a 'mono-ethnic army', to relinquish power. However, when the army killed the president, it was not ready for what was to follow.

Political actors played an important role in the terrible things that took place in 1993. In particular, it was sad to see how the crisis affected young people, who were used by various political actors to perpetrate crimes – to kill, to loot, and to burn the houses of people perceived to be their enemies or presented to them as such. Politicians tended to use people for personal gain without caring about the well-being of the nation and of the population in general.

Political actors played an important role in the terrible things that took place in 1993

In October 1993, my family and I lived in Magarama, one of the suburbs of the city of Gitega, now the political capital of Burundi. We were also very active within the Friends Church community, also known as The Quakers, and my husband and I ministered to those in one of the churches as God's servants.

The morning after the killing of the president, we saw people running in all directions as if they had lost their minds. People were afraid and everything had been turned upside down. It was what some would rightly call a doomsday scenario. We saw people running to our house to find refuge. We didn't have much to offer them, apart from agreeing that they stay in our home where they would feel relatively safe. I began to think of what I had to do to

manage the house with so many people now under our roof. I was alone and was not very sure about how to handle the situation. My husband had gone to Bujumbura to work and was still busy there. Apart from ministering in the church, my husband was also a mechanic who was in charge of servicing the cars belonging to the church and its ministries such as hospitals, orphanages and schools.

I was afraid, not only because of the events taking place around me, but also because of the increasing number of people arriving at our home seeking shelter. One day, I asked them, 'Why are you here? What do you want?' They replied, 'We think that being here with you is more secure than being anywhere else outside there.' I realised that this was a mission from God. People came to my house because they felt there was special protection. They felt some comfort and were less fearful being under the roof of a servant of God.

At the school where I was teaching, the scene was hard to describe. Students were running away. Some students were tortured and killed, while others felt threatened because they might be killed at any moment. At that time, Gitega was one of the biggest education centres in the country. The situation was like a nightmare in all of the schools around the city. There was no authority to give direction and everyone was doing what they thought was necessary to save their own life. So, since many students were running away from the different schools, some of them came to my house as well. I ended up hosting students from the Gitega Boys High School (ENG), the Athenee of Gitega, the Paramedic School (known as Medico), the Gitega Girls High School (ENF), and so on. Today, I thank God for that opportunity to serve all those people who came to my house for protection. I can really say that we were abundantly blessed as a family which received those displaced people.

The situation was like a nightmare in all of the schools around the city

Many times, I felt overwhelmed and wondered how I would meet the needs of all those who lived under my roof. Most of the time, there was obviously no solution in sight. But, at the same time, solutions would come from nowhere and everywhere, and people's needs would be met, sometimes without me knowing how it had happened. That's what I called a blessing from God. There was no way that I could help the huge number of people in the house without a miracle. There is no way I can explain how we survived together all the time that they stayed with my family. I thank God because He always has a plan and had planned long

before the crisis started what our role would be, had provided resources and had given us enough moral strength to handle the situation. God used us in taking care of His people.

I remember that, in the same year in which the civil war erupted, we had an incredible harvest of corn. The corn became a crucial food staple that we used to feed the people who lived with us. It was just what we needed during those days to make some porridge to eat together with some lentils or some sauce. Even a neighbour's avocado tree had branches straddling my fence and hanging in front of my door. The ripe avocados would simply fall in front of my doorstep and the many kids at home would just pick them up and eat them. We used to call those avocados 'manna'. We would say, 'Go fetch some manna from outside and bring it to eat.' Besides the avocado tree, there was a small patch of vegetables known as amaranth, which is very nutritious. Having those vegetables allowed us to vary the food that we put on the table.

As for the people we received in our house, we welcomed both Hutu and Tutsi. Our policy was to welcome all who came to us without discriminating. We did not separate people according to ethnic affiliations or any other characteristic. We wanted to ensure that they could get along despite what was going on outside. God helped us in appreciating each individual as simply a human being He created.

Besides the avocado tree, there was a small patch of vegetables known as amaranth, which is very nutritious

There is another important thing that I would like to mention. Before the assassination of President Ndadaye, I had sent my children to the village outside Gitega to visit their grandmother. When the killings started after the president's death, I heard that a military aircraft had been deployed and had shot at people living in the village where my children were staying. As the bullets from the machine gun were fired, people scattered in all directions. Many died, both adults and children. Also, many children were lost during the chaos that followed the first gunshots. My children's grandmother was wounded during the shootings when a bullet struck her in one of her legs. Luckily, she was able to recover.

When I heard what had happened in the village where my children were staying, I panicked. I started looking for ways to go and search for them and, if they were still alive, bring them home. A Tutsi family I considered as close friends helped me in my attempt to evacuate the children from the war zone. The trip to the mountains where the village was

located was a very perilous one because the violence was still ongoing. When we arrived at the village, we could not find the children at first. As mentioned, people had scattered, and they were still in hiding. We searched for the children and other survivors for a while until we found them near a river bank. It was heart-wrenching to see what they looked like. They were covered in mud and were weak after several days without eating. We helped them recover and, together with their wounded grandmother, brought them home. They joined the ever-increasing number of other displaced people, among them many students. Today, I am still thankful to the Tutsi family which helped me bring my children back home from what then looked like hell.

The members of army units deployed in Gitega knew that I was sheltering both Tutsis and Hutus who had fled the violence. Without being asked, they decided to provide us with the necessary security. Every night, they would send soldiers to guard our house. But, when the units were redeployed to another place, things changed.

One day, a group of soldiers decided to shoot at my house. They arrived in an armoured vehicle but, surprisingly, failed to agree whether they should shoot or not. Some said that our house was empty and that there was no need to waste ammunition. Others said that the house was full of people and possibly some suspects. In the end, they went back to the base without shooting at us. When I heard this story, I knew that God had protected us that night by confusing the soldiers. We were not aware of what was happening, though. It was only a few years later that we learnt of the events when one of those in the armoured vehicle met with me and told me what had happened. The soldier's name was Bigingo and he was among those saying that the house was empty and that we had fled. However, another soldier who was intent on shooting at us became so angry that he smashed his bottle of beer on the tarmac in the middle of the road, close to our house. We heard the bottle exploding but did not know what was happening.

When I heard this story, I knew that God had protected us that night by confusing the soldiers

Not all people were as lucky as we were that night. In fact, some experienced unbelievable tragedies. I remember, for instance, that there was a pastoral seminar organised by the Friends Church and that many pastors had been invited to it. The seminar venue was not far from a place known as Kwibuka. One night as the attendees rested, a group of soldiers attacked them and killed all the pastors present. But, before they were killed, somebody

came and told me to leave my house and to join the pastors at Kwibuka, not in order to attend the seminar but to find a hiding place. He tried to convince me that there was a plot to attack my house. I told him that I could not go anywhere, as I could never leave people who had run to my house for shelter and go into hiding elsewhere. Later on, I heard that all the pastors had been massacred. It was so sad.

Another day, what happened could simply be described as a test of my commitment to protect the people who came to me seeking shelter. During a gathering at Mushasha, a southern suburb of Gitega, a priest approached me and told me that there were some free seats on an aircraft dispatched by the United Nations to take a few people to Bujumbura where they could feel safer. He offered my children and me places together with the other travellers. I refused the offer. I informed him that it was impossible for me to leave the people who had found shelter in my house. That would have been so selfish. I told him that, if we were to die, I preferred to die with the people I was protecting. In my view, it would have been an unforgivable sin for me, and before God, to leave those helpless people behind and save only my family and myself. The idea of joining my husband who was still working in Bujumbura was somewhat tempting. But I resisted the temptation.

When the tensions of the war and the violence decreased, the people I had sheltered for a while started returning to their homes. Most of those who stayed with me during that period of turbulence in 1993 are still alive. Most have stayed in touch with me and my family. I sometimes meet them to catch up on things. Others, however, come to visit me regularly at my home. We have become just like one big family.

9 *Feeding the desperate babies*

By the ***Faustine Ndimubakobwa****, former volunteer who breastfed orphaned babies during the crisis, Ruyigi*

I got married in the midst of the civil war that started in 1993. In 1996, my husband got an opportunity to work for a non-governmental organisation in Ruyigi, and that's why we moved to the area. When we arrived, I became pregnant and gave birth to our first child in 1997. I was still in hospital when another pregnant woman came in to give birth, but she did not make it. She died while delivering the baby. At the time, my husband had a motorcycle, and he was well known across the district. So, the relatives of the dead woman asked my husband to go on his motorcycle to inform the other siblings and the whole family about what had happened so that they could come and organise the funeral.

While the relatives of the deceased woman were organising the funeral, I asked them about the newborn girl who had just lost her mother. I wanted to know their plans and what arrangements they were going to make for her to be breastfed. Surprisingly, they said that they did not know what to do. I was not very sure about my suggestion but I nevertheless asked them to give her to me. The baby was already very thin because she was not being breastfed.

I wanted to know their plans and what arrangements they were going to make for her to be breastfed

When they agreed to give me the baby, I had to breastfeed two babies, as if I had given birth to twins. Luckily, the new baby did not have any problems. Month after month, she steadily grew and gained more weight to the point where she was even bigger than my own child, who was being breastfed together with her.

I also had the honour of naming that child. Initially, her biological father – we adopted her as our own – wanted to name her Misigaro, meaning one who has been left alone, which reminded us of the tragedy the child had been through. I refused to name her that and, instead, gave her another name, Dushime, meaning 'Let's give thanks', because I believed God knew about her situation. I also knew that we can always find something positive in every situation we live through – there is always a reason to be grateful for the life we have.

My younger sister specially came to Ruyigi to help me with domestic chores while I was taking care of the two little babies at home. In addition to the name I gave to the baby girl, my sister added Alice as her first name. That is how the girl ended up with Alice Dushime as her full names. She grew up as a twin of my firstborn.

When I gave birth to my second child, I found myself in a similar situation. We were still in the midst of a civil war, and it was a very dangerous period. In fact, it was a period when the rebel or armed movements were frequently clashing with the regular army, causing much collateral damage and destruction and many deaths on all sides. Because of the insecurity, a curfew was instituted. Military units would patrol the streets and, if they suspected that you were someone dangerous or an insurgent, they would shoot you on the spot.

One night, a woman, whose husband was a pastor, was bitten by a snake. The husband, siblings and friends decided to take her to hospital. Unfortunately, it was late at night. On their way to the hospital, they met a group of soldiers patrolling the area where they lived. An officer asked them where they were going. The pastor said that they were going to the hospital so his wife could be treated for the snakebite. The officer and his soldiers refused to believe the pastor, arguing that he was trying to fool them. They said that they suspected him of collaborating with the rebels. Without asking anymore questions, they shot the pastor, who died instantly. The people who were carrying his wife dropped her in the middle of the road and ran for their lives. The area was close to the border with Tanzania, and those who ran away decided to cross the border to seek refuge. Another soldier approached and shot the sick woman in the head. The woman died leaving behind a three-month-old baby. When the pastor and his wife were on the way to the hospital, they asked their daughter, who was in Standard 6 in primary school, to help them carry the baby. The small girl was with her parents when they were shot dead. The same soldier who had shot the woman, went on to stab the girl in the stomach as she stood lost near her deceased parents. She was still carrying the small baby on her back. When the group of soldiers departed the crime scene, they left her badly wounded and helpless with the baby on her back, right there in the middle of the road.

As they looked for someone who could help the small baby, they thought of me and came straight to my house

The same night, it rained heavily. In the morning, people came out and were shocked by the horrifying scene. Some of them took the small baby, while others took the wounded girl to the hospital. As they looked for someone who could help the small baby, they thought of me and came straight to my house. Since I had a little baby, I was able to breastfeed the small orphan as well.

Unfortunately, within three months, the baby died. He was very sick. We organised a funeral and buried him.

Strangely enough, when we had our third baby, I was asked to help breastfeed another baby who had just lost his mother. This time, I only had to breastfeed the baby. When the child was big enough to eat something, his father took him and placed him in an orphanage, as the father was not always around to take care of him. The boy grew up in the orphanage, but we stayed in touch, as he considers me to be his mother. He recently finished his university studies, and I was invited to participate in the family celebrations.

So, those are the three children that I helped during that difficult period of civil war. Today, I am happy to consider them part of my family. The children I breastfed, and their siblings, call me 'mom'. I believe that God gave me an opportunity to become an instrument through which He could lend a helping hand to those families that were going through so much pain and were experiencing so many problems. Today, as I look back at those days, I think that we managed to do what we could to support others. We did not have much, but we shared the little we had with those who were in need. For instance, there was a period when we spent eight months with another entire family under the same roof. We shared everything we had, and we survived together. We learnt to share what we had. That is love and it is the kind of legacy I would like to leave my children

Chapter Three

Life lessons and final remarks

The stories contained in this book represent an account of incredible acts of heroism performed by ordinary Burundians in the midst of chaos, violence and despair. Most of the events recounted here took place in 1993 when a nationwide, violent inter-ethnic conflict erupted. The massive number of killings engulfed the country like wildfire following the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye by the army in the first bloody coup that led to the decapitation of state institutions. At the time, the Burundian armed forces were almost exclusively comprised of the Tutsi minority ethnic group, while the president they killed was from the Hutu majority ethnic group.

This book is an account of that period of uncertainty. It tells the stories of people we failed to acknowledge as role models for our generation and the coming one. These are stories of people who stood in the gap and protected others in the midst of indescribable violence. They had hearts filled with humanity, care, and love for their people. Unfortunately, their stories and their heroic acts have gone unnoticed for a very long time. This is the reason why I call them 'unsung heroes'. This book is probably the first space they have had to say what they remember. I am deeply thankful to them and for the fact that they left some traces behind so that, one day, we could find out what they did and be able to see their faces.

This book is an account of that period of uncertainty. It tells the stories of people we failed to acknowledge as role models for our generation and the coming one

The idea behind this book of stories and photos is to pay an overdue tribute to such individuals who, through their virtue, kept together the torn parts of Burundian society at a time when all hope seemed lost. Publishing their stories is a small contribution we can make so that they may be acknowledged as the true heroes and as the inspiration we need in our attempt to rebuild Burundian society. Their stories teach us many lessons.

One key lesson is that you don't need to be rich, powerful or extremely intelligent to do the right thing. What you need is a loving and caring heart which inspires fearless behaviour. In order to save others, the only thing you need to do is to put yourself in their shoes and ask yourself: 'If I were in their position, what would I expect from them?' Once you have an answer, you do exactly what you would want others do for you. This is a golden rule that applies to anyone.

The second lesson is that it is always possible to make good or bad choices no matter the circumstances we are in. The values we hold in our heart will determine the choices we make, and whether to do evil or to do good. Once one understands that there is something divine in every human being, it becomes easier to make the right choice. Knowing this can prevent us from falling into the trap of collective criminality, because then we understand that a criminal makes their choices individually, not collectively.

The third lesson is forward-looking: The good acts of our heroes show that, among the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, it is still largely possible to build bridges rather than walls. The Hutus who saved Tutsis and the Tutsis who saved Hutus are stepping stones toward genuine reconciliation. The mutual protection manifested during the 1993 crisis shows that hope is not lost. As a Burundian society, we can heal. It is possible.

We cannot ignore that Burundian society has been wounded by the cycles of violence and that it needs healing. The healing process starts with identifying the reasons we have been suffering. It starts with uncovering and confronting the truth of our traumatic past. Telling the stories as this book does is part of such a process of discovering the truth. It is a long process, and it needs to be supported.

It is my hope that these stories from our unsung heroes will inspire many and will be a modest contribution in the broader process of reconciliation.

Faces and Traces is a space where we discover these ordinary Burundians with an extraordinary heart, Burundians who left behind traces of good deeds so that we can follow in their footsteps.

It is my hope that these stories from our unsung heroes will inspire many and will be a modest contribution in the broader process of reconciliation

About the editor

Patrick Hajayandi

Patrick Hajayandi is a peacebuilder, a researcher and a policy analyst with more than 10 years of work experience in the field of peacebuilding, political transitions, negotiations, transitional justice, elections, demobilisation, and reintegration processes. He specialises in generating knowledge and in training, in convening intergenerational dialogues, and in the use of the media for peace.

He currently works at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) as a Senior Project Leader, focusing on how to promote regional reconciliation and on memorialisation processes in the Great Lakes Region, with a particular focus on Burundi

About the *Institute for Justice and Reconciliation*

The **Institute for Justice and Reconciliation** (IJR) was launched in the year 2000, in the wake of South Africa´s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The aim was to ensure that lessons learnt from South Africa´s transition from apartheid to democracy were considered as the nation moved ahead. Today, the Institute helps to build fair, inclusive and democratic societies in Africa through carefully selected engagements and interventions. It contributes to post-conflict stability, good governance and human security through programmes that promote political reconciliation and social and economic justice across Africa. Its staff complement of 35 people consists of highly acclaimed experts advancing the themes of reconciliation, social cohesion and justice through research, dialogue facilitation and training.

Over the past decade and more, the IJR has gained useful knowledge and has established networks with practitioners across the continent. The IJR aims to contribute to building social inclusion in order to ensure that individuals and groups are not marginalised, and that all persons and groups share the enjoyment of their human rights and share in the prosperity of the communities they live in. Social cohesion is also the recognition of the common humanity of all people and of seeking ways to work together to develop shared objectives based on a common set of values, while acknowledging and allowing for difference.

It is the IJR's combined experience in the development of thorough research interventions, coupled with the need to understand the context and the ability to consult a wide variety of stakeholders, that gives the organisation a distinct advantage in making sense of the complexity of Burundi's civil-society landscape. The organisation draws on extensive field experience of working in Burundi and the Great Lakes Region for over 15 years.

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