



‘The Second Betrayal?’ Commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide

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As the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide approaches, there are increasing moves to commemorate it internationally. Centering around a voluntary organization known as ‘Remembering Rwanda,’ the aim is to ensure that memory of the genocide is preserved and ‘not...allowed to disappear.’ There are a number of prominent individuals and groups now affiliated with ‘Remembering Rwanda,’ such as the former head of UNAMIR (the United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda) Romeo Dallaire, and Ingvar Carlsson, chair of the independent inquiry into the role of the United Nations in Rwanda. In 1999, the Carlsson Inquiry confirmed officially that there had been a ‘failure’ to prevent the genocide, and it is this sense of failure and subsequent betrayal that is motivating the organization. In keeping with the understanding that genocide represents the greatest example of human atrocity, various Holocaust memorial organizations have also offered support to the activities of ‘Remembering Rwanda.’ Daniel Libeskind, the architect who designed the Holocaust Museum in Berlin, has also agreed to design a memorial for Rwandan genocide. Within Rwanda itself, ‘Remembering Rwanda’ has been endorsed by the rector of the National University of Rwanda, *Ibuka* and *Avega* (the organizations representing survivors of the genocide). The current Rwandan government, installed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) who came to power in July 1994¹, has also endorsed ‘Remembering Rwanda.’

Given the scale of what occurred in Rwanda, it is perhaps fitting that the tenth anniversary of the genocide be commemorated in such a way in April 2004. Although there have been annual commemoration ceremonies held in Rwanda since 1995, each anniversary of the genocide has failed to attract significant international attention. ‘Remembering Rwanda’ is attempting to coordinate numerous commemoration ceremonies internationally, to publicize as widely as possible the tenth anniversary next year. An increasing number of individuals and organisations have chosen to participate in, and organise commemoration ceremonies both locally and internationally. The apparent urgency behind this is the understanding that Rwanda will be now be betrayed once more if the Rwandan genocide is not commemorated. The first ‘betrayal’ is seen as the failure to prevent the genocide and the abandonment of the Rwandan population; the second is perceived as the risk that it will be forgotten. Not only will the lessons of Rwanda remain unlearned, but by failing to commemorate the genocide internationally the culpability of the ‘West’ will eventually be forgotten.

Motivating ‘Remembering Rwanda’ is the belief that the genocide that occurred 1994 was unique. Although there have been other instances of genocide, what distinguishes the Rwandan genocide is both the manner in which it was realized, and the belief that it could have been prevented. Almost ten years after it occurred, discussion of what happened in Rwanda is usually introduced with reference to the way in which the genocide was committed. The genocide is seen to be characterized by

¹ http://www.visiontv.ca/RememberRwanda/main_pf.htm



a certain 'intimacy,' in that "neighbours were called upon to kill neighbours." By privileging this intimacy as a unique feature of the genocide, it reinforces a further generalisation that the genocide was committed simply by the Hutu majority against the minority Tutsi. Even for those who claim familiarity with Rwanda, the categories of Hutu and Tutsi are often posited as identifiable causes of the genocide. This has led to explanations centering on either the quiescent nature of the Rwandan population, the social discrimination against the Tutsi as a prerequisite for genocide, or that the explanation for the genocide lays in the mythological history of Hutu. Accordingly, the genocide appeared to the Hutu population as self-evidently necessary. Emphasizing the 'intimacy' of the genocide rests also on the assumption that a significant proportion of the population participated, or that a significant number had to have participated in the genocide owing to the scale of what occurred. For 'Remembering Rwanda,' the nature of what happened in Rwanda has resulted in the unprecedented situation that survivors are required to live amongst the perpetrators of the genocide. For the Rwandan government, 'Remembering Rwanda', and the many other organizations involved in Rwanda, maintaining a 'precise memory' of the genocide is necessary for reconciliation between Hutu and Tutsi to occur, and to ensure that the divisive practices of the past that culminated in genocide are not repeated.

Described as 'low tech' due to the use of common agricultural tools, the genocide is seen as not only requiring mass participation, but also extreme physical effort. Phillip Gourevitch, whose work first appeared in *The New Yorker* and later published the most well known account of the genocide, consistently reiterates this. "By comparison," Gourevitch writes, "Pol Pot's slaughter of a million Cambodians in four years looks amateurish, and the bloodletting in the former Yugoslavia measures up as little more than a neighbourhood riot."² Privileging these supposedly unique features of the genocide in the way that Gourevitch work has done, has resulted in an aesthetic understanding of what occurred in Rwanda genocide free from any consideration of what is still unknown about the genocide (such as who was responsible for assassinating President Habyarimana, whose death immediately preceded the genocide), or the way in which the genocide has become subject to ideological interpretation since 1994, it is this aesthetic understanding of Rwanda's uniqueness that now predominates. The most searing example of this is the frequent reference to the rate of killing during the three months of the genocide. This particular aspect of the genocide is seen as unique because despite the 'low tech' nature of the genocide, it was presumably more effective than the genocide conducted by the Nazis. Calculated as continuing for 'one hundred days,' the duration of the genocide itself has become emblematic, as the rate of killing between April and July 1994 is seen to be unprecedented.³

But the essential reason why the Rwandan genocide is seen as unique is that there existed both the foreknowledge of and a capacity to prevent it. Rwanda has come to represent one of the most ignominious and abject moral failures of the United Nations. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) is understood to have provided sufficient forewarning of the genocide. After the genocide began, the Security Council refused to countenance intervention, even though such intervention

² Phillip Gourevitch. "After the Genocide," *The New Yorker*, 18th December 1995, 78.

³ Michael Barnett writes; "For the statistically inclined, the rate works out to be 333 deaths per hour, 5 deaths per minute. ...The Rwandan genocide has the macabre distinction of exceeding the rate of killing attained during the Holocaust." Michael N. Barnett, *Eyewitness to a Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda* (Ithaca ; London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 1.



would have been relatively unproblematic. The only meaningful response on the part of the Security Council was to authorize the withdrawal the bulk of UNAMIR. In short, the Rwandan population were abandoned with full United Nations knowledge of what was occurring. As a consequence, culpability for this failure is seen to lie with the Security Council and the Secretariat, certain ‘Western Nations,’ or even more ambiguously the ‘international community’ or humanity itself. The most strident critics equate the failure to intervene with ‘complicity’⁴ in the genocide.

With little variation, this has become the predominate understanding of the Rwandan, one that dominates both academic discourse and the general perception of what happened. Indicative of the way that genocide is treated as a discrete object of study, Rwanda has come to be known solely because of the genocide, and it is through the genocide alone that Rwanda continues to be understood. While this may reflect the reality confronting many Rwandans given the inestimable consequences of what happened, the attention paid to the genocide and the desire to uphold the uniqueness of what occurred in Rwanda has created an implicit conceptual bias. This bias privileges the ‘one hundred days’ of the genocide, and has resulted in a decontextualisation of what occurred in Rwanda both before and after 1994. Genocide has an iconic status as the pre-eminent example of human atrocity. Therefore it is only through ignoring those questions that directly problematise this understanding that this status can be maintained. The ongoing attribution of uniqueness to the Rwandan genocide depends on a demonisation of the role played by the ‘West,’ as well as on generalised abstractions about the nature of what occurred in Rwanda.

The acute moral and historical questions raised by the extent of the killing can only be answered by reference to what happened in Rwanda immediately after the RPF invasion in 1990 that precipitated the genocide. Treatment of the Rwandan genocide as unique ignores not only the intrinsic historical redundancy this raises (as any event can be accorded such status), but also that such killing and extensive cruelty is present where impunity is guaranteed.⁵ In many ways, what occurred in Rwanda is consistently seen to invoke questions regarding both the nature of humanity, and who it is that qualifies as a human being worthy of being saved. This reflects the tendency to invest the concept of genocide with such deontological significance, that Rwanda now “haunt[s] the collective history of humanity,”⁶ Emphasizing this would be unnecessary if it were not for the way that the Rwandan genocide has come to prominence. It is the focal point around which Rwandan history is now interpreted. Acceding to the view that genocide has a singular and unique status affirms the hierarchy that has been created within the Rwandan population itself, where there is special recognition of a select number considered as genocide ‘survivors’ – or *rescapés* - but not of those who were killed in the course of the war and in years after 1994. The urgent concern for the suffering of the genocide survivors that characterises such projects as ‘Remembering Rwanda,’ ignores the fact that the killing in Rwanda was not limited to the ‘one hundred days’ of the genocide.⁷

⁴ Linda Melvern writes that “[t]here is evidence that points not just to negligence, but to [the] complicity...of Western nations.” Linda Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2000), 5.

⁵ Jean Paul Kimonyo. *Revue critique des interprétations du conflit rwandais*. (Editions de l'université nationale du Rwanda; Butare, 2000), 4.

⁶ *Discours du Premier Ministre Guy Verhofstadt à l'occasion de la commémoration du 6e anniversaire du début du Génocide rwandais, Kigali le 7 avril 2000*. (http://premier.fgov.be/topics/speeches/f_speech12.html)

⁷ Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda itself and Burundi



Consequently, treating the Rwandan genocide in such a way derives from an aesthetic affection, where the full extent of what has occurred after 1994 is either wittingly or unwittingly ignored. This affective response to the Rwandan genocide that now predominates, disregards what was central to the genocide occurring. It has created an implicit conceptual bias, one that does not consider the subsequent violence in Rwanda as part of the same historical phenomenon. Although couched in the language of reconciliation and acceptance of culpability – or for the Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt in 2000, an explicit desire for ‘forgiveness’⁸ – continued emphasis on the uniqueness of the Rwandan genocide and the failure to prevent it is inimical to understanding and appreciating what has occurred in Rwanda. Yet more significantly, the desire to commemorate and preserve the memory of the genocide through such projects as ‘Remembering Rwanda’ neglects the way it has become subject to concerted ideological campaigning by the RPF. Since 1994, the RPF have astutely created and sustained a ‘politically correct’⁹ view of the genocide, one that excludes any consideration of their responsibility for the genocide.

In effect, the perceived urgency of the need to preserve the memory of the genocide through such projects as ‘Remembering Rwanda’ coincides with the way the RPF has revised Rwandan history to legitimise their rule. Both the years following the RPF invasion in 1990 and the pre-colonial history of Rwanda are seen in the light of the RPF struggle to liberate all Rwandans. Essentially, this is seen as a struggle to free Rwanda from the divisions introduced by colonial racialisation of Tutsi and Hutu, as well as the struggle against dictatorship and corruption that has plagued Rwanda since independence. Accordingly, the 1994 genocide is constructed as simply a culmination of these aspects of Rwandan society, which have finally been overcome with the RPF’s victory. In the same vein as ‘Remembering Rwanda,’ memory preservation is central to preserving the knowledge of the genocide so it is not repeated in Rwanda.

But the genocide has become the central aspect of a coherent ideology that is used to obfuscate the extent of the RPF’s killings in 1994, and to consolidate their rule following their victory in 1994. From the correspondence of their representatives to the UN, as well as from numerous press releases and statements, it is readily apparent that the RPF leadership were aware that the ignominy of the UN’s failure would serve both to justify their victory and to legitimize any subsequent actions taken to consolidate their rule. Even before the end of the war in July, this realisation allowed the RPF to increasingly “convert its moral superiority into [an] analytic monopoly.”¹⁰ The initial moral superiority enjoyed by the RPF was conferred through their conscious decision

⁸ Despite protestation from members of the Belgian Parliament, during the sixth commemoration ceremony of the genocide Verhofstadt “Standing here before you I assume my country’s responsibility, the responsibility of the Belgian political and military authorities. ...It is under our eyes that the génocide started. Belgium and the international community must recognize the errors they made. I don’t know, and I will never know, if these terrible events of 1994 could ever have been avoided. But I am convinced that we should have done more, that we should have done better. So that Rwanda can turn its glance towards the future, the reconciliation, we must initially assume our responsibilities and recognize our faults. In the name of my country, I bow before the victims of the génocide. In the name of my country, in the name of my people, I ask you for forgiveness.” *Discours du Premier Ministre Guy Verhofstadt à l’occasion de la commémoration du 6e anniversaire du début du Génocide rwandais.* (http://premier.fgov.be/topics/speeches/f_speech12.html)

⁹ International Crisis Group. *Fin de transition au Rwanda: Une libéralisation politique nécessaire* (ICG Rapport Afrique N°53, 13 novembre 2002), 1.

¹⁰ Johan Pottier. *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century.* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2002), 177.



to utilize the genocide (or more specifically the putative 'failure' to prevent it) as a mean of legitimizing their rule internationally. This was aided by widespread ignorance about Rwanda in the years prior to 1994.

Those who came to Rwanda after 1994 could observe not only with the devastating effects of the genocide and immense scale of the killing, but also the willingness of the RPF to offer a convincing and straightforward account of what had happened. The 'Government of National Unity' sworn in July 1994 attempted to represent a new beginning for Rwanda, and included members of all political parties not involved in the genocide. Its members, both Hutu and Tutsi, were those who had aligned themselves with the RPF prior to the death of Habyarimana. Consequently, the 'Government of National Unity' was seen as a continuation of the political liberalisation process begun in 1992, one that the organisers of the genocide had hoped to prevent. Also frequently commented on were the disciplined soldiers of the RPF, who, having grown up in Uganda, were able to speak English and therefore could communicate easily with the vast number of journalists and humanitarian workers who came to Rwanda. Due to the mass return of those who been refugees since Rwandan independence thirty years previously, the vast number of those who had fled the RPF advance, as well as the immense number killed, there was little indication of what the situation in Rwanda was like prior to the genocide and the war.

In the absence of any dissenting understanding of what caused the genocide (except for the patent racial mythologising and propaganda of the self proclaimed 'Rwandan Government in Exile' – a continuation of the 'Interim Government' that organised the genocide), the ideal of neutrality and impartiality after the genocide was, according to Philip Gourevitch, not only irrelevant but also morally repulsive. Combined with what was seen as the direct result of the 'West's' callous indifference, a moral legitimacy was conferred onto the RPF and the 'Government of national Unity' almost reflexively. Read simply, the failure of the Security Council to authorize UNAMIR to intervene not only allowed the genocide to occur (which according to Paul Kagame was due to "complicity more than ignorance"¹¹) it was the RPF alone that effectively put an end to the genocide by defeating the Interim Government. These two aspects of what occurred in Rwanda – the indifference to the genocide and the RPF's subsequent victory in the war – are now widely perceived as almost synonymous. The 'war of liberation' begun in 1990 by the RPF, became in 1994 a war to stop genocide, and they continue to be seen as the "only force that had a chance to stop the genocide."¹² Much of what Peter Uvin describes as "the explosion of writing"¹³ on the Rwanda genocide, has relied on interviews with RPF members to build a case for the remonstrating the 'West.' In this writing, there is a sense of the RPF's self aggrandizement, and an awareness that in the years since the genocide, the efficacy of the organisation's 'moral superiority' in courting sympathy and an uncritical acceptance of the RPF's version of the genocide has not been lost. Linda Melvern for example, whose work attempts to expose the 'betrayal' by the 'West' quotes Paul Kagame; "All those claiming to be civilised had turned their backs, ...I knew that we were alone."¹⁴

¹¹ Phillip Gourevitch. "After Genocide; a conversation with Paul Kagame," *Transition*, 72, 1996, 185

¹² Barnett, *Eyewitness to Genocide*, 15

¹³ Peter Uvin. "Reading the Rwandan Genocide." *International Studies Review*, 3:3, 2001, 76. Or as one reviewer phrased it, the Rwandan genocide has "become something of a cottage industry." Anthony F. Lang. "Global Governance and Genocide in Rwanda," *Ethics and International Affairs*, 16:1, 2002, 143.

¹⁴ Melvern, *A People Betrayed*, 189.



It is here that the convergence between Rwanda's history as promoted by the RPF, and the implicit decontextualisation of the events of 1994 is most apparent. The inauguration of RPF rule after the genocide was seen as a radical break from divisive policies that had been in place since independence. With the RPF having been imbued with 'moral sympathy' due to their previous isolation, the ideology of reconciliation and national unity they promoted was understood as the only rational and viable alternative for Rwandan society. The moral sympathy already extended to the RPF by virtue of stopping the genocide, then extended to sympathy for their attempt to establish reconciliation in the face of the absolute collapse of Rwandan society. Given the vast moral questions seemingly invoked by the presence of genocide, the question of life reconciliation after such an event carries similar weight. By overcoming the division between Tutsi and Hutu through abolition of any mention of racial affiliation on identity cards, installing a government that consisted of both Hutu and Tutsi and was ostensibly based on the 1993 Arusha Accords which demonstrated a commitment to democracy, and by describing reconciliation as the basis for a new Rwanda, the future had been ushered in with the RPF's victory.

Consequently, the problems confronting the new administration were interpreted as problems arising directly from the 'three months' of the genocide. The most important questions about what had occurred in Rwanda were limited to the genocide itself, as the immediate problems facing Rwandan society were implicitly resolved by 'moral superiority' and the ultimate beneficence of the RPF. Any criticism that was voiced of the new regime was seen in the context of the effects of the genocide on Rwanda. Combined with their readiness to explain the situation solely by reference to the genocide, this criticism did not detract from the inherent legitimacy of the RPF, simply because of the enormity of what confronted them.

In years after 1994, the genocide has come to be portrayed as the defining moment in Rwandan history, a culmination of the divisive practices of colonization that were carried on through independence and continued by the Habyarimana regime. With the RPF's victory, 'liberation' had been finally achieved, which permitted a return to an *unproblematic* Rwandan national identity. Yet while there was a mass exodus of refugees who fled from the war and the RPF advance, the circumstances of those Rwandans who remained inside Rwanda displayed "a chilling continuity"¹⁵ with the previous months of war and genocide. Although the genocide in the form of a concerted policy of the 'Interim Government' ended with the RPF's installation on 18 July 1994 of their own 'Government of National Unity,' the killing throughout Rwanda did not. When the RPF finally came to power in July, there was a tendency for its members to call 'meetings.' At these meetings, generally anyone who held a position of authority, who was young and male, or in some cases, every person who attended the meeting, was killed. These meetings became so frequent that in Kinyarwanda, to meet together *kwitaba inama* became known as *kwitaba imana*. (*Imana* is the Kinyarwanda word for God. To die can be roughly translated 'to meet God'). Although the evidence for these abuses by the RPF was initially difficult to document owing to the new government's strict control of movement it is certain now that they were both extensive and deliberate. The lack of prior knowledge of Rwanda of most journalists and commentators was compensated for by the willingness of

¹⁵ Michelle D. Wagner. "All the 'Bourgmestre's' Men: Making Sense of the Genocide in Rwanda." *Africa Today*, 45:1, 1998, 30.



members of the RPF to cooperate in providing an easily understood explanation for what had happened. As Johann Pottier argues, most of the new myths about Rwandan history originate here,¹⁶ through the combination of naivety and horror about what had just occurred. In a similar manner to the massacres that occurred in Burundi in 1972 and 1988, the RPF engaged in the killing of any potential opposition while consolidating control throughout Rwanda. In the years after the genocide, there followed the repeated massacres of refugees who had fled from the RPF advance into Eastern Zaire in 1996.

Either ignored or alluded to in passing – as though the killing was to be expected following such a thing as genocide – this continuity is marginal to the current understanding of Rwanda. Yet it is essential not only for an understanding of the new opposition groups that have formed in exile by the Rwandan government, but for appreciation of the way that the genocide itself has been “put to service in the interests of a powerful minority.”¹⁷ Centering around the RPF, this minority consists largely of those who lived as refugees in Uganda, and whose concerns are tied up with the business and economic interests of the new regime. While the Rwandan genocide has become a discrete object of study, having now been placed alongside other instances of genocide, within Rwanda itself there is a discrepancy between the way it has been utilised and promoted and the actual living conditions of those who survived. Despite the disavowal by the RPF of the divisions between Hutu and Tutsi that have beset Rwanda, the genocide continues to be deployed as a means of legitimizing their rule. The continued emphasis on the genocide through annual commemoration ceremonies reiterates the unspoken “eternal culpability”¹⁸ of the Hutu within Rwanda. Similarly, the victims of the genocide are defined through a corporatist understanding of ‘Tutsi.’ The group set up to represent the survivors of the genocide, *Ibuka*, itself funded by and aligned with the current Rwandan government, released a statement in 1999 saying that the Rwandan genocide should be named ‘The Tutsi genocide.’ Despite the unity and reconciliation that is the ostensible goal of the ‘Government of National Unity,’ construing the genocide as one solely of the Tutsi excludes not only all those Hutu who were killed trying to save Tutsi, but also those who refused to participate, and those killed by the RPF.

While the genocide continues to be equated with the corporatist view of Tutsi identity, in that all Tutsi inside Rwanda were threatened after April 1994, it presupposes that the Tutsi themselves represent a unified group. But those who fled Rwanda following the violence surrounding independence in 1962 had radically different experiences to those who remained in Rwanda. Immediately after independence, the repeated and unsuccessful attempts by the former Tutsi monarchy to overthrow the new government led to reprisal killings of those Tutsi who had stayed in Rwanda. Despite the knowledge that these invasions would lead to further killings, they continued to place those Tutsi inside of Rwanda at risk.

According to Filip Reyntjens, despite the limited opportunities offered by the Habyarimana regime, Tutsi within Rwanda welcomed his 1973 coup. From 1973 until 1990 there was no violence directed towards the Tutsi population, and the question of

¹⁶ Johan Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Rony Brauman, Stephen Smith and Claudine Vidal, "Politique De Terreur Et Privilège D'impunité Au Rwanda," *Esprit* 266-267 (2000): 155.

¹⁸ Rony Brauman, Stephen Smith and Claudine Vidal, 155.



identity itself had become “archaic.”¹⁹ It was immediately apparent after the RPF’s 1990 invasion that the Tutsi inside Rwanda would once again suffer recriminations as had happened less than thirty years earlier. Yet what is also frequently expressed both by the Rwandan government and such projects as ‘Remembering Rwanda,’ is the notion that the genocide started in 1959, just before Rwandan independence. This claim of historical continuity amongst the Tutsi serves to obscure the knowledge that by launching the invasion, the RPF were aware that they were putting the Tutsi population inside of Rwanda once again at risk. Consequently, treatment of the genocide as one of Tutsi alone, “biases the genocide by attributing a moral superiority [to the government] while the victims of the genocide were often the poor Tutsi peasants and the government was formed essentially by former exiles who were never physically threatened.”²⁰

Aware of the previous ignorance about Rwanda, and the tendency to accord genocide great significance, when the RPF took control of Rwanda in July 1994 they began to “preserve the memory of the genocide”, and to accord those killed “the dignity of memory and truth.”²¹ Initially, this consisted of leaving undisturbed the remains of those killed at the numerous massacre sites throughout Rwanda. The establishment of more permanent memorials began in 1997, with both the exhumation and display of skeletal remains. In Gigonkoro, desire to preserve the supposed physical evidence was such that bodies were exhumed from their mass graves in order to be displayed. To stave off the process of decay, the remains were cleaned and treated chemically. Subsequently, they were laid out and displayed inside the school.²² Although this practice has generally been understood as a unique and fitting response to the preservation of the memory of genocide, a similar display of corpses and skeletal remains exists in Uganda.²³ It is difficult to establish whether the RPF deliberately adopted the same policy as Yoweri Museveni or whether the decision was a continuation of their previous experiences under Museveni. Yet unlike the memorial sites in Uganda, which have declining significance, and no longer serve to justify the NRA’s war, in Rwanda these memorial sites have attained an iconic status. Not only are they intended to reinforce the ultimate legitimacy of the RPF’s struggle against the Habyarimana dictatorial regime, but also to serve as a reminder of the international indifference to the genocide. Considering how frequently these memorial sites have been visited, and how frequently they have been described in the numerous written accounts of the genocide, it seems that the policy of maintaining these sites has thus far been effective.

¹⁹ Audition de M. André Guichaoua, 26. 24 mars à 5 mai 1998, Assemblée Nationale, "La Mission D'information de la Commission de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées et de la Commission des Affaires Étrangères, sur les opérations militaires menées par la France, d'autres pays et L'ONU au Rwanda entre 1990 et 1994," (15 décembre 1998): 31.

²⁰ *Audition de M. Prunier. Compte rendu analytique des auditions: Mercredi 11 juin 1997*, (Commission d'enquête concernant les événements du Rwanda. Senat de Belgique, Session Ordinaire 1996-1997.)

²¹ Republic of Rwanda. *Recommendations of the Conference held in Kigali from November 1st to 5th 1995 on 'Genocide, Impunity and Accountability: Dialogue for a National and International Response.'* (Kigali: Office of the President, 1995), 26, 29.

²² Didier Lauras. "Rwanda preserves bodies of 1994 genocide victims for memorial," *Agence France-Presse*, 25 July 1997; Jean Baptiste Kayigamba. "Rwanda: Communities turning churches into shrines," *Inter Press Service*, 16 September 1997.

²³ "Uganda Collects Skulls and Bones of Massacre Victims," *Associated Press*, 20 April 1988; "Museveni Leads Tour Of Site Of Alleged Atrocities," *Associated Press*, 11 February 1986. "For those who are not yet conversant with RPF political gimmick" Rassemblement pour le Retour des Réfugiés et La Démocratie au Rwanda (RDR), *The Rwanda Crisis: the Other Side of the Story*, (Brussels, July 1996), 3.8.



Although the massacre sites are often seen as the ultimate symbolic representation of the Rwandan genocide, in that nothing else can more ‘poignantly’ demonstrate the reality of what occurred in 1994, they in effect exist solely to provide an opportunity for ‘reflection’ (in whatever form) for foreigners. Few Rwandans themselves have either the means or the desire to visit these sites. The policy of ‘memory preservation,’ is limited practically to the few foreign visitors to Rwanda.

Coinciding with the discernable policy directed towards outsiders consolidated around these few ‘memorial sites’, each anniversary of the genocide is commemorated in ceremonies held throughout Rwanda. Beginning on 7th April, the date seen to mark the beginning of the genocide (and the day following the killing of the then Rwandan President, Juvenal Habyarimana), these week long genocide commemoration ceremonies consist of extensive radio and television programmes dedicated solely to the genocide. Throughout the week of commemoration or ‘mourning,’ graphic news footage, documentaries, and especially composed songs are repeatedly broadcast. Even more necessary to the anniversary ceremonies is the reburial in newly consecrated mass graves of exhumed remains, which serve to memorialize the genocide as the defining event in Rwandan history. During these reburial ceremonies, a speech is given by the President which stresses the distinction between the divisive practices of the Habyarimana regime that led to the genocide, and the unity which has become a possibility for Rwanda since then. The theme of Rwandan unity also continues throughout the week of commemoration in local meetings held at various administrative levels, which generally involve discussions about the question of the colonial construction of the Hutu/Tutsi division that ultimately led to the genocide. Combined with a new flag and national anthem adopted in 2001, as well as the removal of agricultural implements from the Rwandan national symbols (as these were seen to be the main weapons used to carry out the genocide), the intensive process of memorialisation suggests that the genocide remains an inveterate feature of life in Rwanda, and is what Rwanda has now come to be known for. The emphasis on the genocide through these ceremonies does not represent the extreme individual suffering for those who lived through the months of genocide and years of war, but represents an event that is vital to a sense of national identity. This sense of identity remains contingent upon the genocide. Yet whether these commemorations have the desired “beneficial effect”²⁴ for the survivors of the genocide is hard to ascertain.

Despite the difficulty in appreciating the situation for those who survived both the war and the genocide, the continued reference to the ‘genocide memorial sites’ set up by the RPF epitomises the decontextualisation of what occurred in Rwanda. Phillip Gourevitch’s book, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We will be Killed with our Families* not only met with critical acclaim, but its publication was fortuitous. By then it had become widely recognised that the UN had failed to uphold the Genocide Convention. Both Kofi Annan and Bill Clinton had acknowledged this failure, invoking the culpability of not just the United Nations but also of all humanity for failing to intervene to stop the genocide. In his book, Gourevitch describes a visit to Nyarubye, in the south west of Rwanda, one of the main ‘memorial sites’. The bodies of those killed had been left there under the orders of the RPF. When Gourevitch arrived in late 1995, he described both his motivation for the visit and the scene that confronted him.

²⁴*La précarité des conditions de vie des rescapés du génocide au Rwanda.*
 (<http://www.ibuka.org/fra/rescapes.htm>).



Perhaps in examining this extremity with me, you hope for some understanding, some insight, some flicker of self-knowledge – a moral, a lesson, or a clue about how to behave in this world: some such information. I don't discount the possibility, but when it comes to genocide, you already know right from wrong. The best reason I have come up with for looking closely into Rwanda's stories is that ignoring them makes me even more uncomfortable about existence and my place in it. The horror, as horror, interests me only insofar as a precise memory of the offence is necessary to understand its legacy. The dead at Nyarubye [a memorial site in Kibungo province] were, I'm afraid, beautiful.²⁵

Even though there was evidence emerging about the nature of the RPF rule in Rwanda from as early as 1995, they still enjoy an unprecedented uncritical acceptance internationally. Gourevitch's belief that "when it comes to genocide, you already know right from wrong," forms the basis for much of this acceptance. The absence of critique about the way these memorial sites have become the focus of international attention is evidence of the aesthetic affection that has come to predominate discourse about Rwanda. Aware of this tendency, the RPF has been able to cultivate a representation of the genocide that precludes their own responsibility in what occurred. This also allows the continuing refusal of the RPF to acknowledge that their invasion in 1990 that precipitated the genocide. Filip Reyntjens believes that not only are the RPF "politically co-responsible"²⁶ for the genocide, but that the extent of their own crimes, both during the war and after the genocide, is immense. Given then the lack of any substantial critique of the 'Remembering Rwanda' project so far, and of the planned commemoration ceremonies next year, it seems that the RPF's policy of exploiting the way genocide is understood has succeeded. While genocide did occur in Rwanda, intrinsic to the RPF's success is the aesthetic affection with which Rwanda is interpreted. In contrast to the urgent need to preserve the memory of the Rwandan genocide as a means of reconciliation, questions of impunity and historical objectivity would seem to matter little.²⁷

²⁵ Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families : Stories from Rwanda*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1998), 19.

²⁶ Filip Reyntjens, quoted in "Tutsi-led party shares blame for Tutsi genocide: witness." *Agence France-Presse*, 14 October 1997.

²⁷ "Without compassion and rehabilitation for all the victims, without judgement of the authors of these two categories of crimes, there exists little chance of fighting against impunity, and little chance of reconciliation." James K. Gasana and Nkiko Nsengimana. *Contributions au combat contre le négationnisme de génocide et la délation politique* (Lausanne, juin 1999), 1.5.