

4-8-2013

# Mbwirabumva ("i Speak To Those Who Understand"): Three Songs By Simon Bikindi And The War And Genocide In Rwanda

Jason Todd Mccoy  
*The Florida State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/etd>

---

## Recommended Citation

Mccoy, Jason Todd, "Mbwirabumva ("i Speak To Those Who Understand"): Three Songs By Simon Bikindi And The War And Genocide In Rwanda" (2013). *Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations*. Paper 7498.

This Dissertation - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at DigiNole Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigiNole Commons. For more information, please contact [lib-ir@fsu.edu](mailto:lib-ir@fsu.edu).

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF MUSIC

*MBWIRABUMVA*

(“I SPEAK TO THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND”):

THREE SONGS BY SIMON BIKINDI AND THE WAR AND GENOCIDE IN  
RWANDA

By

JASON T. MCCOY

A Dissertation submitted to the  
College of Music  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:  
Spring Semester, 2013

Copyright © 2013 by Jason McCoy

Jason T. McCoy defended this dissertation on December 14, 2012.

The members of the supervisory committee were:

Frank Gunderson  
Professor Directing Dissertation

Jane Piper Clendinning  
University Representative

Michael B. Bakan  
Committee Member

S. Douglass Seaton  
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members, and certifies that the dissertation has been approved in accordance with university requirements.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation was made possible through the support and encouragement of numerous people and organizations. I am first and foremost grateful to those who were willing to participate in this research by sharing their beliefs, reflections, and memories, who connected me with others who were likewise willing to share, and who acted as interpreters, cultural brokers, and fellow researchers. Regretfully, due to concerns over privacy and security, I can not mention their names, but they have my deepest appreciation and respect, not the least for what many of them suffered and continue to endure. I am especially grateful to those who encouraged me to mindfully present conflicting viewpoints even as they passionately argued for the validity of their own. This was liberating for me. Rather than expect me to defend their arguments while disparaging those of others, they wisely saw the opportunity in this research to enable a needed conversation over controversial matters in Rwanda in which Bikindi and his music are inextricably entangled.

One individual I can mention is Bikindi himself to whom I am thankful beyond words for allowing me to visit with him in prison over the course of three days. He did so in the hopes that I would defend him, but in the name of intellectual honesty I cannot go so far as to proclaim his innocence outright. I hope that he does not see this as a betrayal, but rather that the many points and questions that this dissertation raises are enough to undermine assumptions of his guilt. He and his music deserve another hearing and a more fair-minded treatment free of the political tribalism that is so pervasive in Rwanda.

A relative newcomer to academia, I often fumbled and stumbled as I sought my way through the thickets of scholarly research. There were certainly a few times when I lost heart, unsure if I could bring this work to fruition. Fortunately, I was the beneficiary of a dedicated and caring doctoral committee consisting of Frank Gunderson, Michael Bakan, Douglass Seaton, and Jane Clendinning. They often gave me the pat on the back (and kick in the rear!) that I needed to push forward. Beyond serving on my committee, they were also mentors and role-models throughout my graduate school career, exemplifying the virtues of self-discipline, integrity, curiosity, and compassion that are the marks of outstanding educators and scholars. I am especially thankful to my advisor, Frank Gunderson, who first introduced me to the topic and guided me throughout the research process, often pointing out new and interesting paths of inquiry and providing helpful criticism.

Funding for this research was provided by the Theodore Presser Award for Graduate Research in Music, the Carol Krebs Award for Dissertation Research, and the Florida State University International Dissertation Semester Research Fellowship. I am grateful to the many individuals who manage these funding opportunities and ensure that they continue. I am also grateful to those who served on the adjudicating panels for these organizations and who decided that this research was deserving of funding.

For most doctoral students, writing a dissertation is a physically, mentally, and emotionally taxing process. In this case, the grimness of the topic and its inherent research experiences made things particularly difficult for me at times. I would not have finished it without friends and family who were there to listen and hold me in their thoughts and prayers. I cannot adequately express my gratitude to my wife's parents, Melinda and Ralph Massey, and my own, Mary Nell and Gary McCoy, whose loving support was critical, especially during a certain period of time when I very nearly gave up. Finally, I am thankful with all my heart to my wife Kristin who continued to believe in me and in this work. She risked and sacrificed much because of that belief: enduring long summers apart, worrying about my safety, working hard to keep us financially afloat, and putting up with all the insecurity and self-absorption that tends to go along with writing a dissertation. Thank you, Kristin; we made it.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	ix
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	1
<b>Significance of the Study</b>	14
<b>Review of Literature</b>	16
Historical and Sociological Studies of the Genocide	16
Music and Mass Atrocity	22
Censorship of Music	25
Literature on Bikindi	28
<b>Biographical Sketch of Bikindi</b>	33
Childhood	33
Adolescence	35
Early Adulthood and Professional Life	36
Bikindi the Celebrity	38
Musical and Compositional Approach	39
“Twasazareye” and the Founding of <i>Itorero Irindiro</i>	40
Economic Collapse, Multipartyism, Civil War, and Genocide	41
Personal Impressions	44
<b>Methodology</b>	46
Ethics of Research in a Post-Conflict Region	51
<b>Conceptual Approach</b>	56
Live Texts	57
Polyvocal Ethnography	60
Hermeneutic Phenomenology	62
Ethnography of the Individual	63
<b>Chapter Organization</b>	64
<b>CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE GENOCIDE AND ITS POLITICIZATION</b>	66
<b>General Framework of Rwandan History</b>	68
<b>The Ancient Era</b>	71
The Origins of Hutu and Tutsi	72
<b>The Abanyiginya Monarchial Era</b>	74
Ruganzu Ndori and the Birth of the Abanyiginya Dyansty	74
The Beginning of the Patron-Client System	76
The Expansion and Complexity of the Monarchy	77

Hutu and Tutsi as Occupational and Socioeconomic Identities	79
The Social and Political Inferiorizing of Hutu	80
The End of the Dynasty	81
<b>Colonial-Monarchial Era</b>	81
The Hamitic Myth and the Racialization of Hutu and Tutsi	82
The Colonial-Monarchial Alliance	83
Belgian Colonialism and the Further Racialization of Hutu and Tutsi	84
The Democratic Revolution of 1959-1961	86
<b>The Independent Republic Era</b>	88
<i>Rubanda Nyamwinshi</i> and the Persecution of Tutsi under PARMEHutu	88
Habyarimana and the Second Republic	90
Economic Collapse and Multipartyism	91
War with the RPF and the Arusha Accords	92
<b>The Genocide</b>	94
<b>Concluding Remarks</b>	96
<b>CHAPTER 3: THE TRIAL</b>	99
<b>Purposes in Studying Bikindi’s Trial</b>	100
<b>Chronology and Composition of the Chamber and Counsels</b>	102
<b>Explanation of the Charges</b>	103
Genocide	103
Conspiracy to Commit Genocide	106
Complicity in Genocide	106
Direct and Public Incitement to Commit Genocide	107
Murder and Persecution as Crimes against Humanity	111
<b>Specific Charges and Judges’ Decisions</b>	114
Massacre of Tutsi Prisoners at the Gisenyi Prison	114
Murder of Stanislas Gasasira	121
Murders of Karasira and Family	122
Massacres at Nyamyumba and Incident at Rugerero Roadblock	124
Rape and Killing of Ancilla and Her Daughter	126
Massacres at Camp Scout	127
Murders of Three Women at <i>Commune Rouge</i>	128
Allegations of Sexual Violence	128
Conspiring with Political and Military Leaders and RTLM Personnel	128
Statements Delivered at Political Rallies	130
Statements Delivered on the Road between Kivumu and Kayove	133
Composing Songs with the Intent to Incite Genocide	136

<b>Aggravating and Mitigating Circumstances</b>	138
<b>Verdict and Sentencing</b>	139
<b>The Appeal</b>	139
<b>Bikindi’s Final Statement to the Court</b>	143
<b>Concluding Remarks</b>	146
<b>CHAPTER 4: THE SONGS</b>	150
<b>Claims from the Prosecution, Defense, and Final Judgment</b>	154
<b>Conflicting Interpretations of the Songs</b>	157
Political Allegiances and Conflicting Interpretations	159
Experiences of the Genocide and Its Aftermath and Conflicting Interpretations	160
Perceptions of Bikindi among Hutu vs. Tutsi Participants	161
Perceptions of History and Conflicting Interpretations of the Songs	162
<b>The Spoken and Unspoken in Kinyarwanda Discourse</b>	163
<b>The Historical and Political Role of Rwandan Musicians</b>	170
<b>Notes on Translation Methods and Orthography</b>	171
<b>Concerning Issues of Intellectual Property Rights</b>	176
<b>“Twasazareye” (“We Bade Farewell”)</b>	177
<b>“Akabyutso” (“The Awakening”)</b>	187
<b>“Intabaza” (“Intabaza”)</b>	196
<b>CHAPTER 5: COMMENTARY ON THE SONGS</b>	216
<b>Commentary from Personal Conversations</b>	217
<b>Commentary from the Trial: “Twasazareye”</b>	225
Testimony from Prosecution Witnesses	225
Testimony from Defense Witnesses	231
<b>Commentary from the Trial: “Akabyutso”</b>	236
Testimony from Prosecution Witnesses	236
Testimony from Defense Witnesses	238

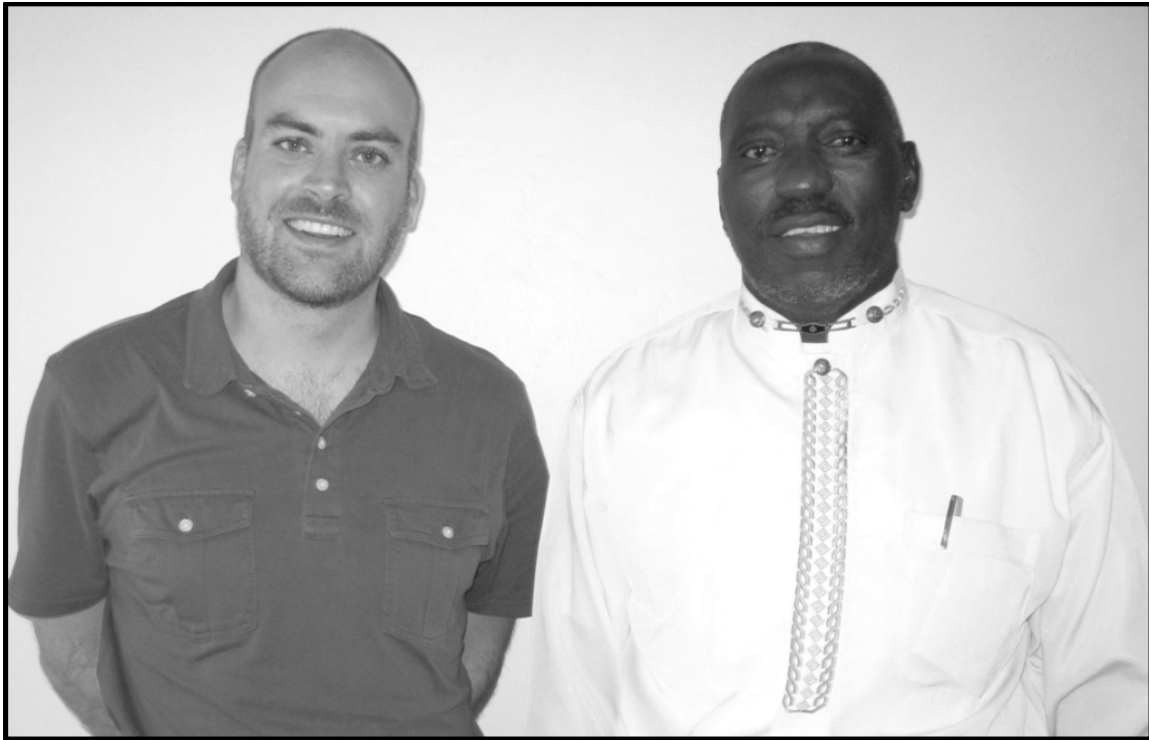


<b>Commentary from the Trial: “Intabaza” (“The Alert”)</b>	246
Testimony from Prosecution Witnesses	246
Testimony from Defense Witnesses	247
<b>CHAPTER 6: RADIO AND THE PROPAGANDIZATION OF THE SONGS</b>	253
<b>From Radio Rwanda to RTLM</b>	255
Radio Rwanda vs. Radio Muhabura	256
The Founding and Format of RTLM	257
RTLM as Voice of the People or Voice of the Government?	259
The Legitimization of RTLM as a Source of Information and Analysis	260
From Respectable Critique to Outright Hatred	267
<b>Arguments Concerning the Effectiveness of RTLM in Inciting Genocide</b>	269
<b>The Workings of Propaganda</b>	271
<b>A Narrative of Victimhood and Victory</b>	276
<b>CHAPTER 7: MUSIC, REMEMBRANCE, SELF-NARRATIVITY, AND HEALING AMONG FIVE GENOCIDE SURVIVORS</b>	283
<b>Case Study 1: Julius</b>	284
<b>Nostalgia for a Nightmare?</b>	288
Nostalgia as Self-Resurrection	290
Music as a Catalyst for Nostalgia	292
<b>Case Study 2: Pierre</b>	295
<b>Case Study 3: Innocent</b>	298
Innocent listens to Bikindi’s Songs	305
<b>Trauma, Self-Narrativity, and Healing</b>	308
Defining and Conceptualizing Trauma	308
The Need to Tell in the Aftermath of Genocide	311
The Need for a Listener	317
The Role of Bikindi’s Songs in Therapeutic Self-Narrativity	321
<b>Case Study 4: Jeanette and Augustin</b>	323
<b>CHAPTER 8: COERCED SELF-CENSORSHIP OF BIKINDI’S SONGS</b>	328
<b>The Sociopolitical Context of Censorship in Rwanda</b>	330

<b>Examples of RPF Indoctrination Processes</b>	334
The National Museum of Rwanda	334
Educational Policies	335
Indoctrination Camps ( <i>Ingando</i> )	336
Compulsory Attendance at <i>Gacaca</i>	337
Censorship of News Media	340
Genocide Memorials	342
The Suppression of Criticism of the RPF	347
Elimination of Political Opponents	349
<b>Why Bikindi’s Songs are Censored</b>	351
<b>Laws Related to Censorship</b>	353
<b>Identity, Suspicion, and Ownership of Bikindi’s Songs</b>	357
The Freedom of Tutsi and RPF Supporters	358
The Concerns of Some Hutu and RPF Critics	359
<b>Coerced Self-Censorship</b>	363
<b>Justifying the Censorship of Bikindi’s Songs</b>	364
<b>EPILOGUE</b>	367
<b>APPENDIX A: E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE DATED 23 MAY 2008 FROM THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS</b>	373
<b>REFERENCES</b>	374
<b>BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH</b>	387

## ABSTRACT

Simon Bikindi was once the most famous and popular musician in Rwanda. In 1993 and 1994, the pro-genocide radio station, RTLM (*Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines*), incorporated a number of his political songs into a propaganda campaign used to incite the genocide of the Tutsi minority. It is unclear, though, that this aligned with the composer's intent as his songs easily lend themselves to more benign interpretations. Bikindi claims that his songs were intended as a call for peace, ethnic equality, fair elections, and good governance. Nevertheless, on December 2, 2008, he was convicted of incitement to genocide and sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment by the ICTR (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda), making him the first professional musician in history to be successfully prosecuted under the Articles of the 1948 Geneva Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. His songs are now *de facto* censored in Rwanda. This dissertation presents an inquiry into the Bikindi's intentions, his trial, the effects of his music on Rwandan audiences both in the early 1990s and today, and the ethical conundrums involved in the censorship of his music. I employ a polyvocal analysis of these issues that weaves together the reactions, reflections, and opinions of around fifty Rwandan research participants, including Bikindi, with whom I conversed and shared the songs. This analysis also incorporates the testimonies of fifty-eight witnesses who testified at Bikindi's trial. This approach shows that a singular, correct interpretation of Bikindi's songs is hardly a settled matter among Rwandans. Instead, views of Bikindi and interpretations of his music tend to correlate with ethnic identity, political allegiances, and perceptions and experiences of the genocide and its aftermath. These findings undermine assumptions of malicious intent on Bikindi's part, but they also evince that the songs played a critical role in inciting genocide. Beyond considering issues of Bikindi's intentions and the effects of his songs as genocide propaganda, this dissertation also explores how engagement with his songs may facilitate healing processes among survivors. The songs serve as a catalyst for remembrance and self-narrativity of survivors' experiences of the genocide, a process that potentially may be therapeutically efficacious.



**Fig. 1:** The author with Simon Bikindi, UN Detention Facility, Arusha, Tanzania, May 20, 2011<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Personal photograph taken by the author's friend with the permission of the prison's Head Commandant.

# CHAPTER 1:

## INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, when a journalist comes to interview me, he asks me a few questions. I tell him the truth of what happened. But he himself, he will also have his analysis of how to deal with the information. Sometimes he misuses the information. For example, a journalist from *New Times*<sup>1</sup> found me here in the prison. He asked me questions and I answered them truthfully. But then, when I read the article that he wrote in the newspaper, there was nothing that we talked about. The headline read, “The Songs of the Genocide.” They took a photo of the skulls that are displayed in the memorials, and they put my photo beside these skulls. That paper, whoever got it and brought it to me—I was hurt. [In English]: It *really* hurt me. [Makes a slashing motion across his chest, continues on in Kinyarwanda]: I wondered, “How could this man be such a bad person?” My picture’s *here*, and the skulls are over *here*, and the headline is “The Songs of the Genocide”?!

[In English]: Please, tell the truth...tell the truth...

—Simon Bikindi, personal interview<sup>2</sup>

A United Nations report estimates that 800,000 Rwandans were killed<sup>3</sup> during the 1994 war and genocide. To grasp the magnitude of this number, imagine thumbing through an English-language Bible and counting every word. Depending on the translation, the total would come to somewhere between 760,000 to 790,000 words, just less than the estimated number of dead. The statistics are even grimmer when considering that this many people were killed over the course of a mere hundred days. The genocide lasted from April 6, the night that Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana’s plane was shot down, to mid-July, by which point the

---

<sup>1</sup> *New Times* is an English-language Rwandan newspaper that is widely circulated throughout most urban areas.

<sup>2</sup> Interview conducted in Kinyarwanda, French, and English, with aid of my colleague and interpreter, Francis. All excerpts from interviews used with express oral permission of the interviewee. See also Appendix A: E-mail Correspondence dated 23 May 2008 from the Florida State University Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects.

<sup>3</sup> Ingvar Carlsson, Sung-Joo Han, and Rufus M. Kupolati. *Report of the Independent Inquiry Into the Actions of the United Nations During the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda* (S/1999/1257, 16 December 1999), p. 3.

Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF),<sup>4</sup> a rebel army of Rwandan exiles led by General Paul Kagame, secured most of the country, seized power, and killed, captured, or ran off most of the *génocidaires*.<sup>5</sup> Of course, not included in the death toll are the estimated two million refugees who fled their homes out of fear of either genocidal violence or retribution from the RPF. Over the next year, hundreds of thousands of these refugees died of cholera, dysentery, starvation, dehydration, exposure, and further violence.<sup>6</sup> It also does not include the estimated six million people who died in the war that ensued in 1996 in eastern Congo, just across Rwanda's border. As Rwandan refugees poured into the region, RPF soldiers followed in pursuit. The RPF also organized and armed a number of Congolese rebel groups in order to kill or capture anyone left who would threaten Rwanda's security.<sup>7</sup> The resulting war, still sputtering on at the time of this writing, is the deadliest since World War II and has claimed more lives than all other mass conflicts and wars combined over the same time period, including the wars in the Balkan states and the Middle East.<sup>8</sup> The vast majority of those tortured and killed have been innocent civilians trapped between the cruel animosities of warring factions. Finally, the genocide's death toll does not account for the countless people who were raped or permanently maimed, yet still live on. All this in a tiny nation that, when the genocide began, only had a population of a little over seven million people.<sup>9</sup>

The statistics are certainly impactful to consider, but they gloss over a more troubling reality which is that victims were often tortured and killed in the most sadistic and agonizing manner one could imagine; the genocide was serial murder carried out on a massive scale. The personal testimonials that this dissertation's participants shared with me are gut-wrenching. A woman told me of being a little girl at the time, hiding in nearby weeds and bushes as she watched a group of men drag her brother out of their family's home, bind up his body in dried

---

<sup>4</sup> Technically, it was the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), which was the paramilitary wing of the political organization known as the RPF. However, Rwandans, international journalists, scholars, etc. all commonly refer to both as the RPF. To avoid confusion, this dissertation will follow suit.

<sup>5</sup> *Génocidaires* refers to those who directly and willingly participated in genocidal violence. While it usually refers to those who killed, it may also refer to willing accomplices and organizers.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed, first-hand account of the refugee crisis, see Marie Béatrice Umutesi, *Surviving the Slaughter: The Ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire*. Trans. Julia Emerson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> To be accurate, there are multiple causes behind the war (really, a series of wars) in the Congo, with the spillover of the Rwandan genocide being one of the most significant (Prunier 2007 and 2011, Reyntjens 2009, and Turner 2007).

<sup>8</sup> The war finally began to de-escalate in 2006, but in April 2012, there were renewed outbreaks of violence, sending tens of thousands of refugees fleeing into Uganda and Rwanda.

<sup>9</sup> With a land area slightly larger than the state of Vermont, Rwanda is the smallest but most densely populated nation in Africa.

banana leaves, and burn him alive. A man told me of hiding in a bean field with his fiancée. They were eventually discovered and thrown to the ground. The man's Achilles tendons were sliced (he pulled down his socks to show me the shiny mound of scar tissue encircling his ankles), an act that not only prevented him from escaping, but had ritual significance too.<sup>10</sup> Crippled and pinned to the ground, he was forced to watch as his fiancée was beaten and hacked to death with machete-like blades called *panga*. He was then also beaten to within a sliver of his life, surviving only because his attackers failed to realize that they had not yet completed the job. Another man told me of being twelve years old at the time. He was rounded up with several other children and marched into the woods so as to avoid the eyes of UN officials monitoring the situation from the crest of a nearby hill, forbidden by the UN's leadership to do anything to stop the massacres taking place before them.<sup>11</sup> The children were lined up shoulder-to-shoulder and told to kneel on the ground. They were then beaten with *ubuhiri*—wooden clubs crowned with an iron nest of nails (the man pointed out the welts that he still bore on his chest and forehead). As the children writhed in pain and cried for mercy, their attackers stood over them and stabbed them with bayonets and knives. The man told me that he was last in line but was spared when the attackers discovered the equivalent of ten dollars in the back pocket of his trousers and so, strangely, decided to let him go. Another told me of being accosted in his home by a death squad who ordered him to either join them or become a victim himself. He joined them, and though he claimed to have never killed anyone, his silence was assent enough. For several days,

---

<sup>10</sup> Christopher C. Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), pp. 99-149. Taylor's general thesis is that the idiosyncratic methods of torture and killing that were routinely employed by *génocidaires* derived from traditional cosmological concepts in Rwanda. According to this cosmology, the land or the world were embodied in the king's body, with the flow of bodily fluids representing the movement of water in the forms of rivers and rain. Divine rituals were necessary to ensure the healthful workings of the king's body in order to ensure proper ecological balance, especially rainfall. From the point of view of the *génocidaires*, Tutsi were inextricably linked with the monarchy, but now despised as they were, their very bodies represented a toxic impurity that defiled the land and its waters. Thus, various methods of torture were employed that represented the obstruction of bodily movement, hence the slicing or Achilles' tendons, or the flow of bodily fluids, especially those involved in reproduction and nursing. The purpose of torture was not only to inflict an exemplary amount of pain and terror, but to inscribe on victims' bodies the message that, through the specific ritual means of torture, they had now been prevented from defiling the land any further. Many victims' bodies were tossed in the Nyabarongo River, believed to be the true source of the Nile River. In this, the *génocidaires* believed that they were purifying Rwanda once and for all.

<sup>11</sup> This is main subject of Gen. Romeo Dallaire's *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2004). Dallaire was placed in charge of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), the initial purpose of which was to oversee the implementation of the Arusha Peace Accords. By most accounts, UNAMIR was a total failure. Once the genocide began, Dallaire and his troops were ordered to resist the use of force to stop the *génocidaires*. Dallaire attests that he could have prevented the genocide if he had been given the permission to use his troops' superior firepower to stop the massacres.

he wandered the town's streets with the squad, looking on as they murdered over forty people. It took the man over a decade, much of it spent in prison, to come to terms with his shame and grief. Another told me of some men who assaulted a group of women near his home, raping them before driving bamboo spears through their genitals until the spears reached their throats, again an act that had ritual significance. Other forms of ritual torture and murder that Rwandans have reported to journalists and scholars include, in the case of males, anal impalement and castration (especially for pre-pubescent boys), and for females, slicing off the breasts and disemboweling fetuses, then forcing their husbands to cannibalize their aborted offspring.<sup>12</sup>

Much of the killing was carried out by soldiers and male members of national youth organizations aligned with various political parties, especially the ruling party, MRND (*Mouvement républicain national pour la démocratie et le développement*)<sup>13</sup>, and its extremist offshoot, CDR (*Coalition pour la défense de la république*). The two most prominent of these youth organizations were *Interahamwe* ("those who work as one"), which was aligned with MRND, and the smaller *Impuzamugambi* ("those who have the same goal"), which was aligned with CDR, though the two groups shared the same agenda and worked in concert with one another. Their numbers were largely comprised of impoverished younger men in their late teens to mid-thirties who, having little formal education or opportunities for social advancement, found in these organizations a sense of prestige, purpose, and identity rooted in nationalist pride, partisan allegiance, and ethnic superiority.<sup>14</sup> Like the majority of Rwanda's population, they were mostly Hutu.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, the RPF was mostly comprised of two to three generations of Tutsi who fled Rwanda between 1959 and the mid-1970s. During this time, the newly independent nation was ruled by Hutu revolutionaries who had embarked upon a pogrom of discrimination and violence

---

<sup>12</sup> Accounts of these actions are found throughout much of the literature on the genocide, but for a summation and explanation of these acts, see Taylor (1999), discussed above (fn.10), and Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Picador, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> MRND stood for *Mouvement républicain national pour démocratie et le développement* (originally *Mouvement révolutionnaire national pour le développement*; the party made the alteration to its name in 1991 during the dawn of multipartyism in order to downplay its revolutionary origins and highlight its democratic appeal). It became Rwanda's sole ruling party in 1973 following a bloodless coup led by Habyarimana.

<sup>14</sup> Alison Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (Human Rights Watch, 1999), p. 14. See also Linda Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide* (London: Verso, 2006), pp.117-18.

<sup>15</sup> The president of *Interahamwe*, Robert Kajuga, was of mixed ethnicity. His father was Hutu but his mother Tutsi. The first *Interahamwe* members were recruited from a local football club. Kajuga was the president of that club and in exchange for cooperating with the formation of *Interahamwe* and the recruitment of his players, the MRND named him president of *Interahamwe* (Melvern 2006, p. 118).



against Tutsi.<sup>16</sup> RPF members and supporters were spread throughout Africa, Europe, Canada, and the United States, but it was centralized in southern Uganda. Founded in 1987 as a political organization, its purpose was to unify these scattered exiles, foster an abiding sense of connection and entitlement to their ancestral homeland, and mobilize them for their eventual return.<sup>17</sup>

The RPF evolved out of the Rwandese Alliance for National Unity (RANU) which was founded in 1979 by those who had fled to Uganda. Two years later, the Bagandan<sup>18</sup> military and political leader, Yoweri Museveni, founded the National Resistance Army (NRA) with the primary goal of overthrowing Ugandan president Milton Obote. Sharing a sense of kinship as political outcasts and dissidents (Obote had been harsh in his treatment of the Rwandan exiles), RANU allied itself with the NRA in what became known as the Ugandan Bush War (1981-1986). RANU members comprised an estimated 20% of the NRA's fighting force<sup>19</sup>, and a few RANU members rose to top positions. Notably, Fred Rwigema, who had long been an ally of Museveni, became his second-in-command, and Paul Kagame became head of intelligence. RANU play a decisive role in achieving victory for the NRA and installing Museveni as president. In return, RANU received military training, arms, and logistical support. Whereas RANU was initially founded as an intellectual and ideological forum, it had now morphed into a military force. In 1987, members voted to rename the organization the Rwandan Patriotic Front, its leadership dominated by veterans of the Ugandan Bush War.

Rather than embrace the RPF, Ugandans began to resent this powerful foreign militaristic presence residing within their borders, consuming their resources, and competing with their businesses. This attitude extended beyond the RPF to the entire Rwandan exile community. Though they had dwelled in Uganda for three decades and had become enmeshed in the shaping of Ugandan politics, the exiles remained stuck in an unsustainable liminal state between full citizenship and foreign occupancy. They increasingly found themselves the target of hostilities

---

<sup>16</sup> A number of Hutu who opposed the MRND also joined the RPF, as did a number of Hutu living in Uganda who, like other Rwandans living there, were marginalized by the Ugandan government. See Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 114-20.

<sup>17</sup> For more involved discussions of the origins, early activities, and goals of the RPF, see Gérard Prunier, "The Rwandan Patriotic Front," in Christopher Clapham, ed., *African Guerillas* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1998), pp. 119-33, and Colin M. Waugh, *Paul Kagame and Rwanda: Power, Genocide and the Rwandan Patriotic Front* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2004), pp. 7-62.

<sup>18</sup> The Baganda are the largest ethnic group in Uganda. Their ancestral homeland, Buganda, is located in southern Uganda where the Rwandan exiles had taken up residence.

<sup>19</sup> Prunier 1995, p. 71.

by their Ugandan neighbors and were barred from enrolling in Ugandan schools or attaining employment. Under pressure to favor his own countrymen, Museveni reneged on his promise to grant citizenship to veterans of the Bush War and their families. He then stripped Rwigema of his title as Deputy Minister of Defense. Due to these developments, the RPF determined that there was no choice but to return home, and on October 1, 1990, Rwigema led an invasion of Rwanda in order to repatriate his fellow exiles and put an end to the ethnic and political discrimination that had driven them out in the first place.<sup>20</sup>

At first, the RPF was repelled by Rwanda's military, the FAR (*Forces Armées Rwandaise*). Undeterred, the RPF continued to assault Rwanda over the next three years. It was ruthless in its campaign. Soldiers killed many innocent Rwandan civilians, which obviously did little to ingratiate the RPF to the greater population.<sup>21</sup> The war between the RPF and the FAR destroyed the remnants of Rwanda's underdeveloped infrastructure and disintegrated its political structure as new parties formed to take advantage of the unstable environment. Throughout 1992 and 1993, the RPF and the Rwandan government entered power-sharing negotiations in Arusha, Tanzania, but both sides were resistant to the compromises offered (as to which side was more responsible for stonewalling the process is a matter of debate). Dissatisfied with the pace of progress, on February 8, 1993, the RPF broke a cease-fire agreement, reinvaded Rwanda, overran much of the northern part of the country, and came within twenty miles of capturing the capital city of Kigali.<sup>22</sup> It became increasingly clear to many Rwandans that the RPF did not just intend to return; it intended to take over.

There had already long been an undercurrent of anti-Tutsi chauvinism among certain factions of Rwanda's political class, an attitude that percolated among a small portion of the Hutu population as well. Because the RPF was associated with Tutsi, the invasion exploded these sentiments, confirming for those already predisposed against Tutsi what they had long suspected: that Tutsi were by nature power-hungry, devious, and conceited, had subjugated Hutu before independence, and now intended to do so again. Political leaders, journalists, and broadcasters on the newly formed radio station, RTL (Radio-Television Libre des Mille

---

<sup>20</sup> Rwigema was killed under mysterious circumstances during the second day of fighting. Some theorize that he was killed by his own men. Kagame, who at the time was studying and training at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, soon returned to Rwanda to take over as the RPF's commander (Prunier 1995, pp. 94-96).

<sup>21</sup> Melvern 2006, p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the background and details of these actions, see Alan J. Kuperman, "Provoking Genocide: A Revised History of the Rwandan Patriotic Front," in *The Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 6, no. 1 (March 2004), pp. 61-84.

*Collines*)<sup>23</sup>, made statements accusing those Tutsi still living in Rwanda of being supporters and secret members of the RPF.<sup>24</sup> There was increasingly talk that Tutsi, commonly referred to as *inyenzi*—cockroaches<sup>25</sup>—needed to be wiped out once and for all. On the local level, *Interahamwe* and *Impuzamugambi* were mobilized into militias by political bosses and military commanders and trained to use guns, grenades, and various melee weapons such as *panga*, hoes, sickles, and bamboo spears—weapons that were otherwise normally used as agricultural tools.<sup>26</sup> By the time President Habyarimana’s plane was shot down (his assassination blamed on the RPF) and all-out genocide commenced, the size of these militias had swollen to include many other Rwandans.<sup>27</sup> As a result, many victims were killed at the hands of people they had known and grown up with: their neighbors, co-workers, and in some cases, even family members. The genocide finally ended in mid-July 1994 when the RPF defeated the FAR and took complete control of the government.

Given the scale and complexity of the genocide and its aftermath, it is not surprising that intense debate has emerged among scholars that calls into question nearly every aspect of how Rwanda’s history, political life, society, and cultural dynamics should be interpreted, understood, and represented, especially as these topics relate to the genocide and the contours of post-genocide recovery. Most scholarship on the genocide is ultimately concerned with addressing one or more of the following five questions: 1) Why did the genocide occur? 2) What actually happened? 3) Who was responsible and how should they be prosecuted? 4) What will help Rwandans to recover, heal, and rebuild? 5) And what will help prevent further ethnic and political violence from reigniting? These are also the fundamental questions with which this dissertation is concerned. So far, scholars have employed multitude approaches that have

---

<sup>23</sup> This translates as “Free Radio and Television of a Thousand Hills,” though there was never any television component. “Land of a Thousand Hills” is Rwanda’s nickname.

<sup>24</sup> For sure, some Tutsi living in Rwanda were supporters of the RPF, though many were not. At first, many Tutsi were upset with the RPF for provoking strife in their country that only intensified anti-Tutsi prejudice.

<sup>25</sup> The usage of this term seems to originate in the initial Tutsi exodus in 1959. It referred at first to small groups of Tutsi militants who attacked Rwanda from outside the country, but by 1994 had come to refer to all Tutsi.

<sup>26</sup> Des Forges 1999, p. 101; Melvern 2006, pp. 26-27

<sup>27</sup> If there is disagreement over the number of genocide victims, there is even fiercer disagreement over the number of *génocidaires*. Estimates range from “tens of thousands” (Jones 2001, p. 41) to around 200,000 (Strauss 2004, p. 95) to “hundreds of thousands.” (Des Forges 1999, p. 2; Mamdani 2001, p. 7; Scherrer 2002, p. 126; Waller 2002, p. 67). The RPF puts the number at around three million (Gourevitch 1998, p. 244; Strauss 2004, p. 95), which, if true, would indict nearly the entire adult Hutu population in 1994 and would mean that there were over three times as many *génocidaires* as victims. Among the Hutu participants in this dissertation, all but one denied direct participation in the genocide. Most were afraid for their own lives. Though Tutsi were the main targets, the *génocidaires* killed many Hutu as well, either because they provided refuge to Tutsi, refused to participate in the genocidal campaign, or possessed houses, land, and other property that the *génocidaires* desired.

yielded valuable insights and controversial arguments. They have provided in-depth analyses of such issues as longstanding cultural myths and attitudes;<sup>28</sup> the conceptualization and role of ethnicity;<sup>29</sup> the impact of colonialism;<sup>30</sup> foreign involvement (or lack thereof);<sup>31</sup> the effects of the RPF invasions;<sup>32</sup> current RPF policies;<sup>33</sup> Rwanda's justice system;<sup>34</sup> the international criminal system;<sup>35</sup> and a wide-ranging host of economic, geographic, and ecological factors.<sup>36</sup> The area on which this dissertation focuses is the complicity of the media in inciting genocide. Already a great deal of scholarly attention has been given to this topic,<sup>37</sup> particularly to the role of RTLM, which served in many ways as cultivator, cheerleader, and coordinator of the genocide.<sup>38</sup> As much as has been said on this, however, little attention has been given to the role of music.

Nearly every sociopolitical movement that had as its ultimate intent the debasement and annihilation of a certain category of people has been accompanied and spurred on by music, from the marching songs of the Hitler Youth to the white supremacist tunes of Johnny Rebel to the revolutionary anthems of the Khmer Rouge. The Rwandan genocide was no different. As RTLM's broadcasters spewed out their anti-Tutsi vitriol, their rhetoric was punctuated and enhanced by the songs of the popular Rwandan musician, Simon Bikindi. Three of the most famous and widely heard of his songs were "Twasazareye" ("We Bid Farewell"), "Intabaza" ("The Alert"), and "Akabyutso" ("The Awakening").

This dissertation will present a polyvocal analysis of the lyrics of these three songs, one that weaves together the reactions, reflections, and opinions of around fifty Rwandans with whom I shared the songs fifteen years or so after the genocide. This group represents Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa, supporters and critics of the RPF, defenders and critics of Bikindi, and diverse experiences of the genocide and its aftermath. It also includes Bikindi, with whom I had the opportunity to visit for a couple of days in May 2011 at the UN Detention Facility in Arusha,

---

<sup>28</sup> See Taylor 1999 and Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Uvin 1999

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Mamdani 2001, Newbury 1988

<sup>31</sup> E.g., Adelman 1999, Barnett 2003, Callamard 1999, Dallaire 2004, Livingston and Eachus 1999, Melvern 2009

<sup>32</sup> E.g., Kuperman 2004, Otunnu 1999

<sup>33</sup> E.g., Waugh 2004

<sup>34</sup> E.g., Corey and Joireman 2004, Kirkby 2006, Rettig 2008, Sarkin 2001

<sup>35</sup> E.g., Peskin 2008

<sup>36</sup> E.g., André and Platteau 1998, Diamond 2005

<sup>37</sup> Chrétien 1995, Thompson 2007

<sup>38</sup> Des Forges 2007, Kimani 2007, Li 2007, Mironko 2007

Tanzania. Along with these personal encounters, this dissertation also incorporates the views and testimonies of fifty-eight witnesses who testified at Bikindi's trial (discussed below).

Most genocide scholars who mention Bikindi in their work assume that he intended to cultivate anti-Tutsi hatred and violence and that he conspired with top personnel in the government and media to develop musical propaganda towards this end. Conversely, the polyvocal analytical approach employed here will show that a singular, correct interpretation of Bikindi's lyrics is hardly a settled matter among Rwandans. This will hopefully encourage more openness among scholars as to different possible meanings, intentions, and usages of the songs. Encountering conflicting views of Bikindi and his songs will also illuminate the social and political schisms that persist in Rwanda today, a topic that Rwandans are generally reluctant to openly discuss. Related to this, an important goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate how musicologists can instigate discourse over controversial songs as an effective strategy for prompting people to reveal entrenched issues of socio-political division that they are reticent to directly acknowledge and address; indeed, they may not be fully cognizant of such issues at all.

Contemplating Bikindi's intentions and the role his songs had in inciting genocide requires an analysis of the social, historical, political, and rhetorical context in which the songs were composed, disseminated, and heard. My analysis affirms that the songs played a significant role in inciting genocide, but it also underscores the fact that they never explicitly called for violence against Tutsi nor denigrated them in any obvious way. According to Bikindi's claims, he had the opposite intent; he composed them, on one level, as a call for self-defense against the RPF onslaught, but more so as a call for peace, selflessness, reconciliation, transparency in government, fair and free elections, power-sharing, ethnic equality, national unity, and patriotism. This brings up two pertinent questions: why did the pro-genocide broadcasters on RTLM see fit to employ them in their attempts to indoctrinate Hutu and provoke them to kill Tutsi and anyone else suspected of supporting the RPF, and why did many of RTLM's listeners interpret the songs as a call for genocide?

Bikindi's lyrics are replete with allusions, metaphors, proverbs, and parables that invite multiple interpretations. Still, throughout his songs he clearly lays out a historical narrative in which Rwandans were subjugated under monarchial and colonial rule only to find liberation through democracy and independence. Bikindi attests that his lyrics address the evils of a

specific political system, not an ethnic group, and that his goal was one of national unity, not ethnic animosity.

What he omits in his songs but is common knowledge is that the monarchy was dominated by Tutsi whose ancestors likely migrated from the north many eons ago. From the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the monarchy's area of control expanded through raids, pillaging, larger-scale military conquests, and the forceful establishment of an oppressive labor system. Though only very few Tutsi were members of the royal family lineage—the rest were themselves peasant subjects—it was Hutu who labored under the harshest diktats of the monarchy even though Hutu comprised the large majority of the population. When Rwanda won its independence from Belgian colonial rule, the monarchy was abolished and replaced by a republican government that was dominated by Hutu. The new government excluded Tutsi from representation, enacted policies that discriminated against them in education and the workforce, and organized massacres of thousands of Tutsi that then prompted hundreds of thousands to flee their homes.

This dissertation will thus show that while one could infer from the songs a noble message, many listeners instead heard a narrative that implicated *all* Tutsi as devious, foreign invaders while championing the majority Hutu as the good, native defenders of their homeland. This narrative of Hutu victimization at the hands of Tutsi was not extracted in an obvious way from the lyrics. Associating all Tutsi with the injustices of the monarchy was instead conditioned by a broader mytho-historical narrative<sup>39</sup> to which many listeners already adhered. Therefore, to understand the role that Bikindi's songs had in inciting genocide, one must analyze them intertextually in that his songs were nested within a broader negative discourse on the history and character of Hutu-Tutsi relations. This discourse was especially prevalent during the time Rwanda was colonized by Germany and Belgium, coming to a full head in the 1950s as Hutu revolutionaries rallied to overthrow the monarchy. Since the time of independence (1962), this anti-Tutsi discourse was ensconced in educational and government policies that discriminated against Tutsi, preventing them from advancing in school, attaining positions of employment, or participating in the highest levels of government. After the RPF invaded in 1990, anti-Tutsi discourse was reinvigorated and routinely voiced in political speeches, rallies, news journals, and radio broadcasts. It should be emphasized that in terms of ordinary, day-to-

---

<sup>39</sup> Malkki 1995.

day living, most Hutu and Tutsi got along just fine; they commonly intermarried, cooperated in farming, partnered in businesses, and so forth. Unfortunately, few alternative voices were able or willing to publicly challenge this antagonistic commentary, and as a result, enough impressionable Hutu came to believe that all Tutsi were indeed their enemies (and vice versa). They then heard in Bikindi's songs a narrative that further justified and intensified their suspicions of Tutsi, even if this may have contradicted Bikindi's intentions.

Issues of intentionality, interpretation, and incitement are necessary to consider in light of the greater issue of justice within the current context of post-genocide recovery. In 2001, while in exile in Leeds, Netherlands, Bikindi was arrested and extradited to Arusha, Tanzania, where he was put on trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), a court commissioned via UN mandate at the request of the RPF to punish those deemed most responsible for the genocide. Bikindi was charged on six counts: 1) conspiracy to commit genocide, 2) genocide, or, in the alternative, 3) complicity in genocide, 4) murder as a crime against humanity, 5) persecution as a crime against humanity, and 6) direct and public incitement to commit genocide. On December 2, 2008, Bikindi was convicted of incitement, making him the first professional musician in history to be tried and convicted under international law.<sup>40</sup> He was, however, not convicted for his music—at least, not directly—but rather for pro-genocide statements he allegedly delivered using a P.A. system while leading a vehicular convoy near his home region of Gisenyi (Bikindi adamantly denies this, and the evidence, as I will later argue, is questionable). The judges clarified in their final ruling that they believed that Bikindi's songs did incite genocide and that this was his intent, but because they were composed before 1994, they fell outside of the temporal jurisdiction of the court.<sup>41</sup> The judges also ruled that Bikindi was not responsible for their broadcast on RTLM, but rather, it was the broadcasters who were ultimately at fault for transforming the songs into pro-genocide propaganda. Though not directly convicted for his musical output, the judges cited Bikindi's status as a celebrity musician as an aggravating factor. That is, because he had achieved such fame as a musician, the judges determined that he wielded enough influence to incite genocide through means of speech.

---

<sup>40</sup> The German conductor, Wilhelm Furtwängler, was tried during the Nuremberg Trials for his affiliation with the Nazi Party. However, he was cleared of all charges. See Sam H. Shirakawa, *The Devil's Music Master* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> With a few exceptions, the ICTR can only convict defendants of crimes committed after January 1, 1994.

Bikindi was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment, retroactive from the date of his arrest. He will be free in 2016, at which point he will be 61 years old.

This dissertation will examine the details of Bikindi's trial in order to critique the judges' ruling but also, and perhaps more importantly, to see what light the details of his trial shed on the issues of intentionality, interpretation, and incitement. In this, I conceive of justice not just within strict legal parameters, but in terms of Bikindi's reputation within the court of public opinion. Was he a bad guy? Did he really hate Tutsi and intend for his music to incite genocide? Are his songs somehow evil? For me, these are the most important questions that this dissertation addresses. While I grieve for the victims of the genocide, both living and dead, and hope to honor them by showing how Bikindi's songs were just one more factor that contributed to their suffering and deaths, my concern is also with Bikindi. I believe that in light of the evidence and with a realization of the context in which he composed, both those who disdain him and those who defend him should perhaps reconsider their opinions, at least to the extent that they remain open to other possibilities.

The final part of this dissertation elides the issue of justice with issues of recovery and healing. I observed in a few cases throughout the course of field research that engagement with the songs can engender certain therapeutic benefits among survivors of the genocide. The problem is that it is very difficult for Rwandans to obtain recordings. Though there is no law on the book that explicitly prohibits people from owning, listening to, and enjoying Bikindi's songs, they are nevertheless *de facto* censored. I am told that a few Rwandans still possess cassette recordings, but otherwise, one is hard-pressed to find recordings sold in the ramshackle music stalls located in nearly every bus park and market throughout the country, and they are never broadcast on radio or television.<sup>42</sup> Save for a Rwandan couple living near my home in the U.S. (and of course, Bikindi), not a single participant in this dissertation owned a recording or knew anyone who did. Most had not heard the songs since the genocide.

The RPF has so far maintained relative stability. Most critically, it has abolished the various ethnic codes that have long been the underlying basis for divisionism, discrimination, and violence. ID documents no longer indicate ethnicity. There is no longer an ethnic quota system within the domains of government, employment, and education as there was in the early

---

<sup>42</sup> One participant told me that, occasionally, a short sample of Bikindi's songs will be heard on Rwandan-produced documentaries on the genocide. These documentaries are continuously aired during the Week of Mourning that occurs every year on the anniversary of the genocide.



years of independence. Suppressing ethnic identity has entailed, however, the enactment of policies that severely curb people's freedom to express themselves. In terms of freedom of expression, the RPF is considered by outside human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders to be one of the more repressive regimes in the world. It is taboo and, depending on the situation, outright illegal to publicly discuss ideas about ethnicity in Rwanda. The RPF also demands that the citizenry regurgitate a certain historical narrative and view of the genocide that dismisses any complicity on the part of the RPF, even though there is ample evidence that the RPF broke a cease-fire agreement and RPF soldiers killed many innocent people. Refusal to obey these regulations may result in accusations of divisionism, sectarianism, or of harboring genocide ideology (*ingengabitekerezo ya jenocide*), for which the accused faces steep fines and incarceration. Prominent political opponents have also been imprisoned, exiled, and assassinated. As the RPF attempts to force Rwandans to discard ethnic identity in favor of a singular nationalist identity, it has engaged in a process of historical revisionism that denies people's own personal histories and the experiences and memories on which they are based. Bikindi's songs, on the other hand, present a rather different version of history than the one espoused by the RPF, one in which, for example, there was a time when much of the population was under the oppressive rule of a Tutsi-dominated monarchy. The songs were also intended to encourage people to repel the RPF invasion, something Bikindi does not deny—the RPF did, after all, invade his country without provocation. For many Rwandans who today feel oppressed by the RPF, the songs presciently give voice to their experiences, and as such, they continue to stand as a rebuke of the RPF. For this and other reasons, the RPF and their supporters conclude that the songs espouse divisionist ideology, and therefore, ownership and enjoyment of them may possibly be used as evidence of the crime of divisionist thought.

In spite of this, a number of this dissertation's participants, no matter their ethnicity or political leanings, greatly enjoyed listening to the songs and desired to own them. One reason some expressed for this was that they considered Bikindi's music to be of the highest artistic quality, lamenting that such music is rarely created by the present crop of popular Rwandan musicians. Another reason, they claimed, is that Bikindi's lyrics helped them to better understand their nation's history and what ultimately inspired so many of their fellow countrymen to kill one another. For example, I shared the songs with a well-known pastor of a

large Pentecostal church. The next day he was to give a speech about forgiveness and reconciliation to a gathering of genocide survivors and killers. As we talked, he began copying out the lyrics in order to integrate them into his speech, because he believed that they could be used to teach his audience about the origins of the genocide and how people were seduced into killing. Other participants claimed that listening to the songs helped them to remember and connect with their own past, especially their experiences of the genocide. This process seemed to bring them a sense of resolution and relief. Many trauma researchers theorize that for those who have experienced traumatic events, the opportunity to freely and safely remember and narrate their experiences can be therapeutic. I draw upon this theoretical understanding to suggest that just as Bikindi's songs were once used as weapons of genocide, they potentially may be used as instruments of healing. Bikindi's hope that his music would promote healing and peace may thus come to fruition, though in a way he likely would have never imagined.

### **Significance of the Study**

Bikindi is unique in that he is the only professional musician to have been successfully prosecuted in an international criminal court, yet he is hardly alone among musicians for suffering the suppression of his musical activity due to the views and agenda of a hostile regime. Perhaps the most provocative and poignant idea proposed here is the possibility that his music has been tragically misinterpreted or rather interpreted in a way that he never intended. The main purpose of this dissertation is thus to open up a needed dialogue concerning Bikindi's intentions, the role his songs had in inciting genocide, and the place they have, or ought to have, in post-genocide Rwanda. This will entail a combination of historiographic and ethnographic methods to present a multi-faceted study of Bikindi's life and trial, his music, and the impact it had on Rwandans in the early 1990s and continues to have today. This dissertation thus makes an important contribution to the expanding literature on the influence of media and propaganda in inciting the genocide. It also goes beyond these topics to reflect upon more globally relevant issues of freedom of musical expression and censorship and the roles these have in either aiding or hampering post-conflict healing processes. Situated within the field of ethnomusicology, it offers a compelling case study that exemplifies inherent issues that arise when analyzing the relationship between music and violence. Conceptually and methodologically influenced by hermeneutic phenomenology, this study accentuates the interrelated influences that victimhood

experiences and conflicting sociohistorical narratives of ethnicity in Rwanda have on the reception and interpretation of Bikindi's songs.

Only recently have musicologists begun seriously investigating linkages between music and violence, and so far, the volume of literature is still quite small. Earlier scholarship has focused on the role of music (or more commonly, the role of the music industry) in reinforcing structural violence, for instance, by legitimizing and exploiting negative gender or racial attitudes. But as far as acknowledging and analyzing ways in which music itself can inspire people to commit physical acts of violence or to participate in mass atrocities, relatively little scholarship exists, the one exception being the use of music by the Nazi regime. Bruce Johnson and Martin Cloonan note that particularly among popular music scholars (and broadly defined, Bikindi's songs could certainly be categorized as popular music), there is "a pervasive and often tacit assumption that popular music is inevitably personally and socially therapeutic" (Johnson and Cloonan 2009: 1). They suggest that the reason for this is that popular music scholars are often devotees or sympathizers of the music they study, and as such, "the emphasis is most often on the importance of music...in the emancipative construction of individual space (identity) and collective space (community)." On the one hand, this dissertation diverts from this trend in arguing that Bikindi's music—the quality of which I am a great admirer—did play a role in inciting genocide, even if this was perhaps counter to his intentions. On the other hand, I have also observed that engagement with these same songs can be an opportunity for Rwandans to therapeutically benefit. As such, this dissertation bridges both ends of the spectrum. Whether Bikindi's songs are destructive or therapeutic depends on the context in which they are heard and the perspectives, ideologies, dispositions, memories, and experiences of the listeners.

Finally, this dissertation offers the first widely available critical English translations of the three songs for which Bikindi was indicted. As of this writing, two sets of translations may be found in the ICTR archives (one each in the experts reports for the Prosecution and Defense). These translations, though, were translated from French translations which, in turn, were not translated directly from Bikindi's original Kinyarwanda lyrics but from transcriptions rendered by ICTR personnel and expert witnesses as they listened to recordings. Some of the song lyrics are difficult to understand, even for native Kinyarwanda speakers, and the transcriptions contain numerous gaps and errors. The French translations duplicate these errors while adding more, and the English translations duplicate these errors and add more still. Bikindi personally provided

me with copies of his original Kinyarwanda lyrics. The translations for this dissertation have been rendered with the assistance of seven Rwandans, including Bikindi, a group that represents divergent political allegiances, ethnic identities, conceptions of the genocide, and interpretations of the lyrics. To facilitate better access to audio recordings, translations, and related trial documents, including full English transcriptions of all trial testimony save for that which was classified or redacted, I have developed a website accompanying this dissertation at [www.jasonmccoy.org/bikindi](http://www.jasonmccoy.org/bikindi).

## **Review of Literature**

This study of Bikindi's life and work as it relates to the war and genocide in Rwanda encompasses a wide range of broadly interrelated topics. These include the potential causal relationship between music and mass atrocity; international criminal law; the politicization of historiography; traumatic memory, self-narrativity, and healing; music censorship; and methodological approaches based on polyvocality and hermeneutic phenomenology. Much of the relevant literature on these topics will be discussed within their respective sections throughout this dissertation. For now, the following review of literature looks at a number of publications that broadly situate this dissertation and have influenced my conceptual engagement with Bikindi's work. I begin with historiographical and sociological studies of the Rwandan genocide. I then move to works dealing with music and mass atrocity, especially the use of music by the Nazi regime—so far the only relevant case study that has received ample scholarly attention. I then move to works that focus on music censorship and then conclude with works that demonstrate the prevalence of negative attitudes towards Bikindi.

### **Historical and Sociological Studies of the Rwandan Genocide**

Gerard Prunier's *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (1995) was among the first detailed accounts to appear after the genocide. At the time of its publication, it was an important work for English-speaking readers. Many such readers knew of the genocide only from the generally pitiful Western news coverage, which, when it actually did cover the unfolding nightmare, tended to oversimplify and distort its causality as the result of longstanding 'tribal'

conflict.<sup>43</sup> Prunier's exhaustive data collection and careful analysis<sup>44</sup> revealed the deep social, historical, and political complexities in Rwanda to an otherwise unknowledgeable foreign audience. Particularly important to this dissertation is Prunier's discussion of the "racialization of consciousness"<sup>45</sup> that developed under Belgian colonial rule, such that the political advantage that Tutsi enjoyed over Hutu, and which defined their identities in relation to one another, became ideologically sanctioned and entrenched under European race theory. Prunier follows his treatment of colonial Rwanda with analysis of the maneuverings of independent Rwanda's major political figures and parties. His analysis confronts a sophisticated political machine that seized upon the 1990 RPF invasion as a pretext for the demonization of Tutsi in order to consolidate and bolster power. This knowledge undermines widespread Western conceptualizations at the time of the genocide as the culmination of "ancient, tribal hatreds." Prunier, however, presents matters mainly from a top-down perspective. He has thus been criticized for overemphasizing the political dimension of the genocide at the expense of other important issues, particularly the experiences and ideas of Rwandans who were largely distanced from the political sphere.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast to Prunier, Mahmood Mamdani offers a more theoretically grounded study of the genocide in his work, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (2001). His main purpose is to explain the identities of Hutu and Tutsi and their relationship to one another. Noting their historical fluidity and overlap before Belgian rule, he concludes that these were mainly political identities: Tutsi were historically defined as those who were closer to the centers of political power, which, in turn, conferred upon them certain socioeconomic advantages. This critiques the notion that the two identities were primarily rooted in occupational categories (i.e., Hutu farmers vs. Tutsi cattle breeders). Mamdani then argues that it was under colonial rule, with European and Tutsi scholars working in collusion, that Tutsi were reinvented as a foreign race and Hutu as a native race that had long ago been conquered and civilized by Tutsi. Thus, their identities were far from transhistorical realities, but were continuously reconceptualized depending upon their relationship to shifting political realities, from Tutsi-dominated monarchial rule to indirect colonial rule to the Hutu-dominated

---

<sup>43</sup> See works compiled in Thompson 2007, pp. 12-19, 145-261.

<sup>44</sup> Prunier is credited with arriving at the number of 800,000 as the estimated death total officially used by the United Nations (Prunier 1995, pp. 261-65).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>46</sup> See LeMarchand 1997, Sommers 1998, and Waters 1996.

independent republic. This is where Mamdani's ideas are especially valuable to my work. One way to read Rwandan political history is that it has been shaped by a continual endeavor to define the identities of Hutu and Tutsi such as to legitimize the authority of those in power and the structures they employed to exert their control. This entailed the construction of historical narratives—myths, really—from which these identities emerged and were reproduced. Like Prunier, however, Mamdani is primarily writing a political history from a top-down perspective (even as he criticizes this approach and claims to do otherwise; see pp. 7-9). Readers still do not get to the heart of the matter as to how ordinary Rwandans psychologically inhabited their identities as Hutu or Tutsi.

An important work (and one I believe has yet to receive the recognition it deserves) that better addresses this is Christopher Taylor's *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994* (1999). Whereas Prunier and Mamdani are historians who focused on the political dimension of the genocide, Taylor is an anthropologist and takes a more culturally-oriented approach. He illuminates culturally symbolic markers that historically distinguished Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa long before the colonial encounter. These included dietary differences, religiously-encoded differentiation, differences in divisions of labor, and inequalities in political power. Taylor is one of the few authors to note the significance of the longstanding disenfranchisement of Twa, demonstrating that discrimination was entrenched in Rwanda well before the arrival of Europeans. This is not to say that he dismisses the meddling role of colonialism (to do otherwise would require a total denial of historical factuality), but he balances this with an understanding of the mechanisms and attitudes that were already in place that colonizers then seized upon to control the population. Based on his research throughout the 1980s on traditional Rwandan conceptualizations of medicine and the body, Taylor explicates the genocide as a ritual performance intended to purify the nation of contaminating substances or blockages. In pre-colonial Rwandan cosmology, there was preponderant attention on the healthy flow of fluids, both within one's body and in the external environment. The king, believed to embody the land, was responsible for "keeping the fluids of production, consumption, and fertility in movement."<sup>47</sup> Taylor sees this as reason why genocide victims' organs that were associated with the flow of fluids—genitalia, breasts, the heart, uterus, intestines, etc.—were often destroyed, as well as why victims' bodies were routinely thrown into rivers that flowed out of Rwanda. As he

---

<sup>47</sup> Taylor 1999, p. 121.

puts it, these methods “betrayed a preoccupation with the movement of persons and substances and with canals, arteries, and conduits along which persons and substances flow” (p. 128). Taylor’s observations and analyses more fully reveal the substance of the mythologization of ethnicity in Rwanda. Taylor also offers one of the early gendered accounts of the genocide, an approach that is still much needed. Surprisingly, however, for an anthropologist who was so close to the situation (he lived in Rwanda in 1994 and had to be evacuated; his wife at the time was Tutsi), Taylor includes very little firsthand ethnography to support his conclusions. Nevertheless, Taylor’s elucidation of Rwandan cosmology contributes to an understanding of the rationale behind the killings and the methods killers employed. Still, Taylor does not discuss the extent to which *génocidaires* were consciously aware of their motives in this regard, and therefore, it is difficult to ascertain how deterministic this cosmology really was.

Paul Kagame’s ascendancy to the presidency in March 2000 brought with it a dramatic increase in stability and security, and with that more openness and accessibility for foreign scholars. Since this time, many *génocidaires* now residing in prisons have offered their perspectives to scholars, leading to much fruitful analyses of their motivations and rationale. This has also led to new critiques of the methodologies employed in studying the genocide. Standing out amongst these newer works is Scott Straus’ *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (2006). Straus conducted oral questionnaires with 210 convicted *génocidaires*. Based on their responses, Straus asserts that pre-existing intra-ethnic animosity was not the primary motivating factor for most *génocidaires*. Instead, he outlines three alternate factors that drove people to kill. The first was fear and uncertainty resulting from the RPF invasions that began in 1990 and culminated with the assassination of President Habyarimana in 1994, which the national media blamed on the RPF. The second factor was coercive pressure from above by hardline Hutu political and military leaders. Upon taking hold of all major leadership positions by executing any opposition, these hardliners disseminated via local officials the message to wipe out Tutsi. Local officials then used threats to mobilize citizens within their respective districts and communes. There was no passionate commitment to some ethno-nationalist ideology on the part of most *génocidaires*; rather, given the choice to kill or be killed, many *génocidaires* simply acted out of self-preservation. The third factor was the system of ethnic classification that provided the framework for defining Tutsi as the enemy of the state. Regarding this, however, Straus stresses that most *génocidaires* claimed to have no prior feelings

of animosity towards Tutsi. He is thus dismissive of the influence of propaganda, particularly the radio, in inflaming intra-ethnic hatred. He argues that propaganda was aimed more at urban elites and made little inroads among the rural peasantry. I disagree with his overall understanding of the influence of propaganda; if anything, his findings demonstrate even more the power of the media in its ability to seduce minds and hearts in such a fairly short amount of time (see Chapter 6). Nevertheless, his point that ethno-nationalist ideology was not a significant motivational factor is important to consider. On one level, I would agree with Straus that such was likely not at the forefront of consciousness for most *génocidaires*. However, I would assert that to claim that ethno-nationalism played little part as a motivational factor is to have an oversimplified understanding of nationalism. The 1959 Revolution, for instance, that resulted in the Hutu-dominated independent republic was not only recalled in various propaganda practices leading up to and during the genocide, it had been regularly and formerly celebrated throughout the four decades between the revolution and the genocide. Thus, *génocidaires* were perhaps not conscious of ethno-nationalist ideology, because they had been living out this ideology throughout their entire lives. It was taken for granted. This is often the long-term result of nationalist endeavors, that the ideologies contained therein become so ingrained they are rarely noticed within everyday life. Straus' theories also do not explain the reasons behind the extreme brutality in which victims were killed, nor the taunting and other mind games that *génocidaires* employed to terrorize victims, nor the preponderance of sexual violence. If *génocidaires* were primarily acting out of fear of both the invading RPF forces and their own national and local leaders, then why did so many of them torture, rape, and kill with such relish? As much as Straus would like to dismiss the importance of ideology, something more than mere pragmatic self-preservation was going on in the minds of many *génocidaires*. This also highlights important considerations in how to deal with the testimonials of *génocidaires*, survivors, and others who bore witness to the genocide. How, for instance, do present circumstances shape memories of the genocide? While Straus is interested in discovering what motivated the *génocidaires* to carry out their horrific actions, he would do well, in the first place, to demonstrate an awareness of the motivations that *génocidaires* had to speak with Straus and represent themselves in the manner that they did. To me, his respondents seem overly eager to blame their leaders and position themselves as innocent pawns. Straus' work is valuable in giving voice to the *génocidaires* and for offering a fair-minded critique of those who would



overly credit the role of propaganda and ideology. However, his work also exemplifies the limits of a sociological survey approach to studying genocide. Besides amassing numbers of respondents, further insight would come from spending more time with fewer people in a less formal, more conversational context.

Rounding out this section are a number of books that may not be considered works of scholarship in that they contain no footnotes, scholarly references, indices, and so forth. Nevertheless, they are important in bringing readers closer to the horror and magnitude of the genocide. These works include General Roméo Dallaire's *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (2004), Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish To Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families* (1998), and a trio of books by Jean Hatzfeld: *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak* (2005 [2003]), *Life Laid Bare: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak* (2006 [2000]), and *The Antelope's Strategy: Living in Rwanda after the Genocide* (2009 [2007]).

Dallaire was the commander of UNAMIR (United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda), a tiny contingent of United Nations troops sent to Rwanda in 1993 to reinforce a newly brokered peace treaty and power-sharing agreement between the RPF and the Rwandan government. Once the genocide began, Dallaire pleaded with UN authorities to allow him to intervene. Citing "rules of regulation," he was rebuffed and ordered to ensure the protection and safe evacuation of foreign residents and guests.<sup>48</sup> His story of a conscience ripped apart as he agonizes over whether to follow orders or save lives is heart-rending.

Gourevitch and Hatzfeld, both journalists, traveled to Rwanda several years after the genocide and conducted dozens of informal interviews with survivors, *génocidaires*, and others who experienced the violence from a variety of vantage points. Just as there was no singular causal factor behind the genocide, these testimonials reveal that neither was there any singular experience. *Génocidaires* did not all share the same motivations, emotions, and moral perspectives concerning their actions. Survivors did not all share the same level of fear, sadness, and loss. In post-genocide Rwanda, this disparity continues. Some who killed have come to terms with what they did, repenting to those they harmed and whose loved ones they killed. Many have found forgiveness and have been invited to return to their communities. Others have

---

<sup>48</sup> In fact, when Dallaire asked if his troops could use force to protect Tutsi victims being killed right before their eyes, he was told only that they were allowed to shoot the many stray dogs that were roaming the streets in search of human remains.

anchored themselves even more firmly to their hatreds, certain of the justice of their actions. Still a great many others are confused and bewildered, struggling to make sense of what they did, why they did it, and who they are as a result. So it is with survivors. Some are steadfast in their hopes for a peaceful future, others not so much. Asked to forgive those who raped, tortured, and killed their loved ones, many are unsure if they can—or if they should. A staggering number of Rwandans, on the other hand, have transcended their past suffering to heal and rebuild their communities. Others, though, are still haunted by their memories and loss and find themselves mired in desolate apathy or despair.

### **Music and Mass Atrocity**

A study of Bikindi's music and its relationship to war and genocide is relevant to a small but growing body of research concerning music that is implicated in mass atrocity. Bruce Johnson and Martin Cloonan's *Dark Side of the Tune: Popular Music and Violence* (2009), presents an encyclopedic overview and theoretical analysis of the relationship between music and violence generally. Johnson and Cloonan set out to answer the simple, straight-forward question: Can music cause violence? Given the implications this has for the censorship of music, it is an important question to ask. The value in their work is their broad argument that when recognizing a connection between music and violence, it is important to distinguish between causality and adjacency (p. 122). To this end, the authors outline four categorical relationships between music and violence: 1) music that merely accompanies violence, 2) music that incites violence, 3) music that arouses violence, and 4) music that expresses violence. The distinction between incitement and arousal may be difficult to discern. According to them, the difference is that incitement involves the intentions of the composer, while arousal involves the audience's response (p. 95). As discussed in Chapter 3, this distinction comports with international law, a problematic definition of incitement that some scholars, notably Susan Benesch, have sought to address. Her well-taken argument is that if incitement does not arouse violence or has little potential for doing so, then it should not be criminalized. Inversely, if music arouses violence but the intentions of the composer were benign or cannot be ascertained, then this should not be criminalized as incitement either. Interestingly, Bikindi's music obviously accompanied violence and, as I argue, it helped to arouse violence. In most cases, one would think such music would also express violence and would have been intended to incite violence, but this is not so

certain in the case of Bikindi's songs. Johnson and Cloonan do not deny that music has the capacity to arouse violence, but they nuance this in an important way, writing, "Does music that vilifies and incites leads to acts of violence?", is more usefully expressed if the last phrase is rewritten as 'to *further* acts of violence'.<sup>49</sup> This dovetails with my understanding of the way propaganda generally works in that it rarely changes belief but instead rationalizes and emotionalizes extant belief to the point where it erupts into action—actions that are often already underway.

Very little literature exists that specifically analyzes case studies in which there may be a causal relationship between music and mass atrocity. A notable exception is the use of classical and popular music by the Third Reich to instill an ideology of Aryan-German superiority *vis-à-vis* the defiling and destructive presence of minorities, especially Jews.<sup>49</sup> Peter Wicke, in his article, "Sentimentality and high pathos: popular music in fascistic Germany," analyzes the total annexation of the music recording industry by the Nazi regime in order to cut off any channels of expression, particularly jazz, that might somehow subvert its goals. The irony, as observed by Wicke, is that Nazi leaders disapproved of jazz because of its close associations with "Negro America" and with an American recording industry that was run by a large number of Jewish Americans. Yet the regime also encouraged German radio hosts to broadcast jazz records, while omitting or masking song titles and musicians' names, because it recognized the appeal of jazz, particularly swing, and viewed it as a means of normalizing their fascistic message and gathering a larger and more receptive audience. Popular music was also used to lighten people's mood so that they were more capable of persevering through the hardships of war. RTLM employed similar tactics in its incorporation of American popular music, though unlike Nazi radio, its broadcasters saw no reason to disregard the creators of that music. Quite the opposite, the symbolic association with Western cultural hegemony only helped to normalize and mitigate the extremity of their call for genocide.<sup>50</sup>

Pamela Potter's *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich* discusses how musicologists and conductors under the Third Reich rarefied the music of Germany's favored sons—Bach, Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms,

---

<sup>49</sup> E.g., Lidtke 1982; Potter 1996, 1998, 2007, et al; Potter and Applegate 2002; Wicke 1985; Zwerin 2000.

<sup>50</sup> Jason McCoy, "Making Violence Ordinary: Radio, Music, and the Rwandan Genocide," in *African Music* vol. 8, no. 3 (2009), pp. 85-96.

and Wagner, among others—in a way that promoted Aryan-German superiority. What I gain in combining insights from Wicke’s and Potter’s work is that Wicke, in his focus on popular music, stresses novelty and modernity while Potter emphasizes continuity and tradition, two forces that worked symbiotically in the cultivation of Aryan-German racial and nationalist pride.

In *Music as Social Life: the Politics of Participation* (2008), Thomas Turino provides an elaborate but lucid theory of the effects of the Nazi’s use of music.<sup>51</sup> His analysis, situated within a broader treatise on how music attains social and cultural meaning, draws upon and adapts Charles Sanders Peirce’s work on semiotics (1955). He outlines three types of semiotic meaning in music. The first is iconic, referring to musical sounds that imitate extra-musical sounds, images, or ideas (e.g., the sound of thunder or the form and rhythm of a piece imitating a poetic form and meter). More relevant here are the second and third categories of semiotic meaning. These are indexical signs (indices) and symbols, both of which refer to music that becomes associated with extra-musical ideas, feelings, images, and so forth. The difference is that indices are more specifically referable while symbols are more generalizable. Without getting bogged down in the technical distinctions between the two, the important point is that music’s semiotic associations develop through discourse and experience layered one on top of the other over a person’s life, what Peirce called “semiotic chaining processes.” Music is simultaneously experienced with something extra-musical, for example, a certain emotion or event. The memory, sensation, and perception of these emotions or events are then recalled and transformed whenever that particular music is experienced or even simply discussed within a new context. Over time then, that music is then infused with new or further meaning. It was important, therefore, for the Nazi regime to control the consumption of music such that the superiority of non-Jewish German composers and performers was continually reinforced. Only music that met the regime’s approval could be permitted to inhabit both public and private life. The ill-reputed but apparently advantageous stylings of jazz and swing had to be discursively disassociated from its black roots, thus necessitating the omission of titles and musicians’ names. These practices were employed towards a goal that Turino refers to as “strategic essentialism,”

---

<sup>51</sup> See Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: the Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008), pp. 190-210.

which he defines as “the conscious use of a few aspects of identity for political ends or social advancement.”<sup>52</sup>

### **Censorship of Music**

A number of encyclopedic accounts of music censorship are available, including *Taboo Tunes: A History of Banned Books and Censored Songs* (2004), by Peter Blecha; *Shoot the Singer!: Music Censorship Today* (2004), edited by Marie Korpe; and *Popular Music Censorship in Africa* (2006), edited by Michael Drewett and Martin Cloonan. The plethora of case studies are informative and demonstrate the different modalities by which censorship is enacted, whether it occurs as the result of official censorial boards or more subtly through market forces or religiously-based coercive practices. Especially relevant to this dissertation are case studies in which songs are censored because a government or other hegemonic institution views them as advocating treason, insurrection, or revolutionary action, even though this cannot be obviously deduced from either the words, imagery, or performative practices of artists themselves. In these case studies, artists cleverly manipulate the ostensibly apolitical possibilities of artistic expression to make powerful yet indirect political statements and/or to mobilize political sentiments into action.

Christopher Dunn’s *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* (2001) is one of the few scholarly sources on this major aesthetic and philosophical movement that emerged in the Brazilian state of Bahia in 1967-68. Tropicália referred both to a genre of music as well as to the larger movement in which it was embedded, a movement that also incorporated poetry, dance, and visual art. One of the main purposes of the movement was to bring more self-awareness to the consumption of cultural material in order to foster greater agency in the construction of self-identity within a politically oppressive situation. Tropicálists were influenced by the writings of the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade who argued in his 1928 publication, *Manifesto Antropofago*, that one of the great strengths of Brazilian culture was its ability to subversively appropriate or “cannibalize” European cultural idioms, and by doing so, assert its own autonomy in the face of European colonialism. Representative of this was the pun penned by de Andrade, “Tupi or not Tupi.” The reference to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* also referenced an indigenous Brazilian ethnic group who, before their

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

decimation at the hands of Portuguese settlers, cannibalized their enemies. This sort of wry appropriation was prevalent in the music that embodied this movement. Important in this regard were composers such as Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, and Tom Zé, singers such as Gal Costa and Nara Leão, bands such as Os Mutantes, and lyricists such as Torquato Neto and Capinam. Their music incorporated elements of rock, pop, avant-garde, and Afro-Brazilian styles, juxtaposing in somewhat surreal fashion notions of traditionalism with modernity, foreign with indigenous, and “high” with “low” forms of cultural expression. Tropicália accompanied a larger resistance movement against the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964-1985. Because of its association with the resistance movement, many of the main figures within the movement were forced into exile and their creative output censored under the 1968 enactment of The Fifth Institutional Act which outlawed all political opposition. Tropicálist lyrics, however, rarely directly criticized the government, instead relying on allegorical references to make its political points. One of the main ways lyricists did so was to invoke ideas of Brazil as a tropical paradise, only to subvert such notions with veiled references to violence and subjugation. Tropicálists also found themselves criticized and harassed by supporters of the resistance movement, because they intentionally did not articulate a plainly coherent political ideology.

Much of Michael Drewett’s work deals with musical censorship in late-Apartheid South Africa (See Drewett 2004 and 2006, as well as his 2002 documentary film, *Stopping the Music*). Beginning in 1963 with the passage of the Publications and Entertainment Act (Number 2), but occurring especially in the late 1970s and 1980s as anti-Apartheid resistance was reaching its apex, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) began censoring any music it deemed to be subversive of Apartheid. In response, many musicians devised coded ways of criticizing the government. The singer-songwriter Carte Blanche, for example, changed the word “policeman” to “please man” in his lyric sheets. Shifty Records released a compilation album of protest songs titled *A naartjie in our sosatie* (Afrikaans for “a tangerine in our kebab”), which sounded similar to “anarchy in our society.” The record company was able to fly under the censorial radar, because tangerines and kebabs were common to Afrikaner culinary culture and thus the censors regarded the album as politically innocuous. Apartheid-era musicians would also utilize allegory to bring awareness to their plight and to mobilize opposition. The band Juluka released on their album, *Universal Men*, a song sung in Zulu about a battle between a large bull and a small bull, with the smaller one emerging victorious—a clear symbol of the

resistance movement's anticipated triumph. Another strategy by which resistance singers were able to produce and distribute their work was by producing and distributing so many records that the censors were hard-pressed to keep up. Musicians would also cover well-known popular songs from abroad, for example, The Kalahari Surfers' rendition of "These Boots Were Made for Walking," which took on new meaning and significance within the context of anti-Apartheid resistance.<sup>53</sup>

Musicians in the above cases stood in opposition to repressive governments. When Bikindi wrote his music, though, he supported his government and called for resistance to the invading RPF. Unfortunately for him, the RPF is now in power in Rwanda, and the *de facto* censorship of Bikindi's music is one of many modalities by which the new regime represses political dissent. The RPF publically considers Bikindi's songs as a form of hate speech, and similar to the situation in post-Holocaust Germany, uses this as a reason to suppress the songs. The songs also have the potential to cause great discomfort for survivors of the genocide. A similar parallel to this is the longstanding decision on the part of the Israeli Philharmonic to refuse to play Wagner. This was not only due to the composer's anti-Semitic views and because his music was appropriated by the Nazi regime, but because it too might provoke distress for Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Lili Elyon writes:

The question is not whether Wagner's music is of high or low quality, nor is the argument about how deep-seated was his antisemitism really relevant. There is no doubt that there have been other composers who were no less antisemitic. While it cannot be maintained that Wagner was directly responsible for German national socialism, there is no doubt that he was a powerful symbol in the Nazi era, and his music held a singular importance in the Nazi psyche. Thus, for Jewish survivors of the Nazi horrors, Wagner's music represents a vivid reminder of that regime.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> See Michael Drewett, "Remembering subversion: resisting censorship in apartheid South Africa," in Marie Korpe, ed., *Shoot the Singer!: Music Censorship Today* (London: Zed Books, 2004), pp. 88-93.

<sup>54</sup> In 2001, the Israeli Philharmonic lifted the ban for a one-time performance of *Tristan and Isolde*. The event sparked a great deal of controversy among many Israelis. See Lili Elyon, "The Controversy over Richard Wagner" (Jewish Virtual Library, 2010). Available at: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/Wagner.html>.

I regard the censorship of Bikindi's music in post-genocide Rwanda as coerced self-censorship in that there is no law that explicitly forbids Rwandans from owning and listening to the songs. Instead, the censorship of his music is subsumed under laws intended to prevent divisionism, sectarianism, and the dissemination of genocide ideology, all of which carry heavy punitive measures. As such, it is only those Rwandans who are afraid that they might be suspected of these crimes, whether this suspicion would be merited or not, who are likewise afraid to own, listen to, or display appreciation of Bikindi's songs. I discovered that many Rwandans, notably Tutsi survivors, were quite at ease with owning and enjoying the songs.<sup>55</sup>

Similar to this dynamic is the self-censorship on the part of radio broadcasters, record producers, DJs, musicians, and journalists in Zimbabwe who must utilize their own judgment in ensuring that they do not promote music that would constitute criticism of the repressive Mugabe regime. Failure to do so may result in unemployment and harassment. This is the topical focus of Banning Eyre's *Playing with Fire: Fear and Self-Censorship in Zimbabwe* (2001). Radio broadcasters and DJs also face a similar dynamic in Ethiopia; see Gezahegn Teji Bahirtas' *Music Censorship in Contemporary Ethiopia: the Case of Ethiopian Radio and FM Addis 97.1* (2009).

### **Literature on Bikindi**

Numerous publications on the genocide mention Bikindi, and in almost every instance, he is portrayed negatively. Few of these scholars and journalists, though, have critically engaged his life and music on any level, instead assuming an anti-Tutsi ideology and intentions on the basis that his songs were aired on RTLM. Following are several works and articles that discuss him and his music in more detail. These works are well-known and widely cited by genocide scholars and have thus contributed to Bikindi's notorious reputation, but their claims concerning Bikindi should be regarded with skepticism. In most cases, these authors have not examined his lyrics in full and are working from incomplete transcriptions or, worse yet, insufficient translations rendered by others of a few choice, decontextualized excerpts. They also have never spoken to Bikindi or conducted in-depth, relevant interviews with Rwandans who would offer

---

<sup>55</sup> Though not specifically related to music consumption and reception but still relevant here, Robin E. Sheriff stresses the importance for ethnographers to attune themselves to selective silence on the part of informants in ethnographic discourse. See "Exposing Silence as Cultural Censorship: a Brazilian Case," in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 102, no. 1 (March 2000), pp. 114-32.



further insights into Bikindi's background and work. Their perspectives of Bikindi are thus decidedly one-sided, based more on presumption than evidence.

The first extensive study of the media's role in inciting genocide was Jean-Pierre Chrétien's *Rwanda: les médias du génocide* (1995). The bulk of his research focuses on newspapers and the radio, which he claims were largely responsible for inciting the genocide. It was Chrétien who introduced the iconic image of the *génocidaire* as a young man holding a *panga* in one hand and a radio in the other. Chrétien makes several references to Bikindi's music. Though he has little to say about the composer himself, he notes that his music was repeatedly aired on the radio and asserts that the songs' references to the harshness of the monarchy resonated with RTLM's goal of mobilizing Hutu to kill Tutsi.<sup>56</sup> Chrétien presents a Kinyarwanda transcript of "Twasazareye,"<sup>57</sup> but it contains a number of minor spelling and grammatical errors. Also, the way he formally organizes the lyrics is incorrect in that he groups the first verse with the refrain and groups several other verses together into single verses. He also does not include a transcription and translation of the rapid declamatory "warrior's ode" (*icyivugo*) heard in the middle of the song, which he describes as "incomprehensible."<sup>58</sup> Most importantly, he published three photographs of Bikindi.<sup>59</sup> The first showed Bikindi performing at a rally in the background behind Col. Tharcisse Renzaho, a prominent organizer of the genocide; the second showed him shaking hands with President Habyarimana; and the last showed him hanging out the sidedoor of a van, microphone in hand, surrounded by young men whom Chrétien claims were *Interahamwe*, though they could just as well have been members of Bikindi's troupe. The Prosecution attempted to use these photographs during the trial to prove that Bikindi conspired with government officials to incite genocide. The judges threw out this evidence, ruling that the photographs proved nothing.

Alison de Forge's *Leave None to Tell the Story* (1999) is widely considered to be one of the most authoritative accounts of the genocide. As praiseworthy as her research has been in bringing to light the causalities and complexities of the genocide, she disparages Bikindi without citing any evidence, claiming simply that the composer was "best known for his virulently anti-

---

<sup>56</sup> Chrétien, Jean-Pierre. *Rwanda: les médias du génocide* (Paris: Karthala, with Reporters sans Frontières, 1995): 199, 203.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pages containing photographs are not numbered but are found between pp. 128-29.

Tutsi songs.”<sup>60</sup> She goes on to inform readers that he was one of fifty founding members of RTLM, implying that these founders intentionally formed RTLM as a means of spreading anti-Tutsi propaganda. Many of the founders, though, may have had little idea of what RTLM would become. Bikindi, in fact, was not a founder but one of over a thousand initial investors, and only bought one share at a cost of 5,000 Rwandan francs (less than ten U.S. dollars). He claims that he did so because he regarded RTLM as a new channel of publicity. Des Forges briefly analyzes a short lyrical sample from “Intabaza” (which she wrongly titles “Bene Sebahinzi”) in which she states that Bikindi sings, “If Tutsi win, they would not just reverse all the political changes of the [1959 Revolution] but also reclaim all the property that had once been theirs, leaving many Hutu destitute.”<sup>61</sup> Bikindi never sang any such thing. Less implicating of Bikindi but illuminating of the relationship between his music and the genocide is that one of Des Forges’ informants states that “when patrols went out to kill, they went off singing the songs...of the popular Simon Bikindi.”<sup>62</sup> In my conversations with Rwandans I asked whether they had ever heard *génocidaires* singing Bikindi’s songs as they embarked upon their killing sprees, and none said to ever heard them doing so, but if what Des Forges’ informant states is accurate, it demonstrates Bikindi’s popularity among *génocidaires*.

Dylan Craig and Nomalanga Mkhize submitted a chapter on Bikindi and RTLM titled “Vocal Killers, Silent Killers: Popular Media, Genocide, and the Call for Benevolent Censorship in Rwanda” for *Popular Music Censorship in Africa*.<sup>63</sup> Craig and Mkhize describe Bikindi as a “folk singer” whose “culpability” in inciting genocide is “without question.”<sup>64</sup> They go on to write: “Bikindi’s actions in support of the *Interahamwe* leaves little doubt as to his personal sympathies. An active recruiter and mobilizer at the grassroots level, he exhibited the drive and authority of a government official.”<sup>65</sup> They characterize the songs as “hate speech” in that they call “on the colonial-era stereotypes of Hutu and Tutsi identity.”<sup>66</sup> The two scholars, though, never describe exactly what these stereotypes were and how Bikindi evoked them. They claim

---

<sup>60</sup> Des Forges 1999, p. 59; similar statements found on pp. 86 and 373.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>63</sup> Dylan Craig and Nomalanga Mkhize, “Vocal Killers, Silent Killers: Popular Media, Genocide, and the Call for Benevolent Censorship in Rwanda,” in Michael Drewett and Martin Cloonan, ed., *Popular Music Censorship in Africa* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishers, 2006), pp. 39-52.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-40.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

that “‘Twasezereye’ [sic]<sup>67</sup> ... must be thought of as a beginning of a new career, turning from simple hate speech to a demonstrable element of a consciously deployed call to genocide.” Yet they do not explain how the song constitutes hate speech. They then go to state, “This was a career no longer incontestably tied to the intention of the author, and this prompts a shift in culpability from Bikindi to the medium of radio broadcast and RTLM in particular.” As such, they regard Bikindi as a “‘conduit’ of a particular message rather than a perpetrator.”<sup>68</sup> They conclude that Bikindi’s supposed anti-Tutsi ideology expressed in his songs were “symptoms” of larger sociohistorical forces rather than causes of them. Craig and Mkhize recognize that for a genocide suspect to be convicted of incitement, the Prosecution must establish a specific and direct link. “In the case of Bikindi,” they write, “such a link has never been hard to establish, owing to his physical proximity to several slayings, as well as his complicity in murders committed by his associates.”<sup>69</sup> As for their evidence for these assertions, they cite “unknown sources” that were cited in the Prosecution’s Indictment.<sup>70</sup>

Craig and Mkhize’s work is emblematic of a potential problem with research that relies on ICTR documents as a credible source of facts of what happened before and during the genocide. First, they fail to treat these documents critically, taking the information contained within at face value. An indictment, for instance, is obviously going to be biased towards the Prosecution’s favor, omitting any information that would harm their case and containing allegations yet to be proven. Second, they published their work prematurely, well before Bikindi’s trial had even commenced. Judges are (hopefully) neutral arbiters. It is their job to determine the credibility and relevance of evidence and testimony. When it came to Bikindi’s verdict, the judges determined that none of the accusations brought forth by Prosecution witnesses, save for one charge of incitement, had any merit, including charges of murder and complicity. Had Craig and Mkhize waited until the completion of the trial so that they could study the Final Judgment, they may have arrived at different conclusions.

Regrettably, I am guilty of a similar mistake. In 2009, I published an article titled “Making Violence Ordinary: RTLM Radio and the Rwandan Genocide” in the journal, *African Music*. My chief argument was that the presence of Western popular music on RTLM helped

---

<sup>67</sup> The proper spelling is “*Twasezereye*.” The authors also mis-translate the title as “We said goodbye to the feudal regime”—the title properly translates simply as “We bade farewell.”

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-6.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

mitigate the extremity of the message and the actions it called for, but I also discussed the content of Bikindi's songs. Fortunately, I refrained from commenting on Bikindi's intentions or alleging that Bikindi was complicit in attacks on Tutsi. My main regret is that, like others mentioned above, I did not have complete transcriptions of the songs and relied instead on a translation rendered by the Prosecution's expert witnesses. These excerpts were not so much damning of Bikindi as much as they were simply poor translations, all the more so in that they were decontextualized from the rest of their respective songs.

In *The Graves Are Not Yet Full: Race, Tribe, and Power in the Heart of Africa* (2002), journalist Bill Berkeley writes:

From a crackling transistor radio behind me I could hear [RTL], the state-allied broadcasting arm. "Defend your rights and rise up!" a voice on the radio was singing. There were drums and a guitar in the background. A popular crooner named Simon Bikindi was beseeching his fellow Hutu—the *bene sebahinzi*, the sons of cultivators—to carry on the slaughter without delay. "Defend your rights and rise up against those who oppress you!" The drumming and strumming had an oddly intimate effect. Bikindi was singing in riddles, addressing *mbira abumva*—"those who can understand." His voice was soft, gently cadenced, almost lyrical. He was warning his listeners of the malign intentions of the *bene sebatunzi*, the sons of pastoralists—the Tutsi. "The Tutsi are ferocious beasts, the most vicious hyenas, more cunning than the rhino," he cooed. "The Tutsi *inyenzi*—cockroaches—are bloodthirsty murderers. They dissect their victims, extracting vital organs, the heart, liver, and stomach."<sup>71</sup>

Berkeley does not indicate that he speaks Kinyarwanda, and since very few Western scholars and journalists speak the language, I have my doubts that he knew what was being said on the radio. None of the lines Berkeley attributes to Bikindi appear in his songs. I would wager that Berkeley has instead uncritically reported what a Rwandan informant told him.

Another journalist, Donald T. McNeil, published a brief but more evenhanded article on Bikindi in the *New York Times* titled "'Killer Songs: Simon Bikindi Stands Accused of Writing

---

<sup>71</sup> Bill Berkeley, *The Graves Are Not Yet Full: Race, Tribe, and Power in the Heart of Africa* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), p. 2.

Folk Music that Fed the Rwandan Genocide” (2002).<sup>72</sup> Though he dubiously claims that Bikindi, while working at the Ministry of Youth and Culture, orchestrated “North Korea-style song-and-dance displays,” he conscientiously presents Bikindi’s side of things, emphasizing that his second wife, Angeline Mukabana, was Tutsi, that he adopted her son who was conceived with another Tutsi, and that he defended his Tutsi neighbors during the genocide. McNeil also refrains from commenting on the ideology expressed in the songs and the intentions that may have been behind them, instead reporting the views of others whom he interviewed. In fact, he was permitted an interview with Bikindi and Mukabanana shortly after the musician’s arrest in the Netherlands. In the article, Mukabanana suggests that her husband’s main failing was that he was “a romantic opportunist, too eager to please.” McNeil quotes her as saying, “After he wrote [‘Akabyutso’]...I asked him: ‘Why did you write that? What if the RPF wins the war?’ He said: ‘The government obliges me to write these songs. If I hear the RPF is coming to Kigali next month, I’ll write a song for them.’” During his trial, Bikindi denied that the government directed him as to what to include in his lyrics.

### **Biographical Sketch of Bikindi**

The following overview of Bikindi’s life is based on ICTR documents, trial testimony,<sup>73</sup> and personal conversations with Bikindi and former members of his most famous troupe, *Itorero Irindiro*.

#### **Childhood**

Bikindi was born on September 28, 1954 in Rwerere commune,<sup>74</sup> located in the far northwest part of the country near the large town of Gisenyi. Like most Rwandans, his was a peasant family, living off the food they reaped from the land surrounding their home. His father, Pierre Manzi, also worked as a blacksmith, and both parents brought in some income as musicians. Manzi could play *inanga*, a trough-shaped zither-like instrument found throughout much of Sub-Saharan Africa and especially popular in Rwanda. When not working on his farm

---

<sup>72</sup> Donald T. McNeil, “Killer Songs: Simon Bikindi Stands Accused of Writing Folk Music that Fed the Rwandan Genocide,” in *The New York Times Magazine* (17 March 2002), pp. 58-9.

<sup>73</sup> See Simon Bikindi, ICTR Testimony (T.), 31 October - 6 November 2007.

<sup>74</sup> A commune refers to one of the smallest partitions of Rwanda’s political geography. In this case, many would think of Rwerere as a rural village.

or at his forge, Manzi entertained friends and guests at gatherings and festivals. A precocious boy, Bikindi learned to play *inanga* from his father and soon achieved a level of mastery. The instrument would be featured in many of his later recordings, including “Akabyutso.”

It was his mother, Marie Nyirakamondo, however, who was his greater influence. She was a popular singer and dancer throughout the local area, invited regularly to perform at parties, dowry rituals and weddings, funerals, birth celebrations, and harvest festivals. Bikindi wistfully described to me his mother’s talents as follows:

If you had ever listened to her, you would love her. Not many people had a voice like hers. She would receive many gifts because of her talent. Her voice was so beautiful, it was not surprising that some men would give her gold or a cow...I am sure that I was inspired to love music because of my mother.<sup>75</sup>

When Nyirakamondo performed, she took her son along with her, pointing out other musicians and dancers whom she considered to be especially skilled, then instructing Bikindi as to what made them so good. When they returned home, she would then have her try to imitate what he observed. It was so important to her that Bikindi learn to dance and perform music that she allowed him to skip chores as long as he spent the time practicing. Bikindi inherited from his mother a vast repertoire of *imigandi*, long narrative poems interspersed with songs. Through the local Catholic bishop, she found Bikindi a drumming instructor. He also learned to play other traditional instruments and became especially fond of the single-stringed fiddle called *iningiri*. Around the time Bikindi was in his second year of primary school (about age 7 or 8), a local male dance-music troupe known as *intore*<sup>76</sup> formed in his area and Bikindi was chosen as its first member.

The various features, styles, techniques, and themes of traditional Rwandan (and for that matter, much African) music and dance in which Bikindi was deeply immersed as a child would later provide a rich pool of inspiration for his own original work. These include, in no particular order, the use of traditional instruments, though often blended with electric guitar, bass, and

---

<sup>75</sup> Personal interview, 19-20 May 2011.

<sup>76</sup> “*Intore*” (“The Chosen”) are traditional Rwandan male dancers whose costumery and spectacular choreography are meant to imitate warriors/hunters. The dancers don grass headdresses resembling lions’ manes and carry shields and swords. Their movements, which are at once both graceful and aggressive, suggest hunting and fighting poses. In the middle of dance sequences, dancers will often stop to rapidly boast of their deeds and exploits (*icyivugo*).

drum set; archaic poetry and proverbs that are often difficult for even Rwandans to discern; a heavy emphasis on historical narrativity, especially stories about the deeds and successions of various kings and other rulers; dramaturgy, in which songs feature an unfolding plot relayed by various characters narrating and dialoguing with one another over musical accompaniment (e.g., “Intabaza”); moral didacticism; call-and-response sections between soloist and choir, oftentimes such that the choir symbolizes society as a whole; the use of certain meters, especially 5/8 (e.g., “Twasazareye”), characteristic of much traditional music; pentatonicism; cyclical forms; and heavy use of ostinato.

### **Adolescence**

In 1967, around the age of 13, Bikindi was chosen to participate in a professional troupe that was slated to tour in Canada, but prizing formal education as he did, he declined the opportunity in order to prepare for entrance exams to secondary school. He went on to attend *Collège Inyemeramiho* in Gisenyi where he earned the favor of one of the teachers, Valens Kajeguhakwa. Kajeguhakwa recognized Bikindi’s talents, not just as a musician and dancer, but also as an actor. He took Bikindi under his wing, provided him further training, and placed him in the main roles in school plays. Over forty years later, Bikindi still feels much gratitude and affection for Kajeguhakwa, telling me that “without him, it would not be the same.”

After three years, Bikindi transferred to *Groupe Scolaire*, a secondary school in the far northern town of Byumba. Though he took his studies seriously—“I was a sharp guy,” he says—he continued with his artistic pursuits. After classes, he would entertain his peers with musical performances. He joined a group of musicians from among his classmates with whom he performed and shared ideas. They soon came to regard Bikindi as the group’s leader. He began to record a number of songs. A few of these, such as “Marigarita,”<sup>77</sup> a song about his friend’s attempts to woo a girl, became local hits.<sup>78</sup> He also produced plays for the community, employing his friends as actors and costume and set designers.

By his third year at *Groupe Scolaire*, he formed a more official theatrical organization called EJC (*Equipe des Jeunes Collaborant*, or “The Collaborating Youth Team”). The

---

<sup>77</sup> The song was co-written with his friend, Charles Bunan.

<sup>78</sup> A rather sweet moment occurred during our interview when Bikindi began discussing “*Marigarita*.” As he started singing it, my friend and interpreter, Frank, recognized it and began singing along. Frank was quite surprised to find himself now sitting in front of the person who had composed and recorded this beloved song.

formation of EJC provided Bikindi with invaluable organizational and administrative experience that would serve him well throughout his career. Bikindi scoured the school's library to find plays to produce, and soon EJC was producing a play every quarterly term. The troupe quickly rose to popularity throughout the northern and central regions of Rwanda, much in part because their productions were used to teach people French. They were invited to perform at schools in other towns<sup>79</sup> and, on one occasion, were asked to perform at the *Centre Culturel Franco-Rwandan*, an event that Bikindi claims did much to boost his reputation.

He noticed, however, that there needed to be something to entertain audiences during intermissions, and so he organized a dance-music troupe from among his classmates. The student body was comprised of students hailing from various regions and clans throughout Rwanda, each of which featured its distinctive styles of dance. Bikindi purposefully chose students representing different regions and clans in order to display their styles of dance for one another and for their audiences. This foreshadowed an important feature of Bikindi's later artistic output in that his lyrics and choreography would explicitly transcend regional and clan favoritism, a salient dynamic of Rwandan political life that Bikindi has long believed to be one of the main instigators of political division and violence.

### **Early Adulthood and Professional Life**

Bikindi spent four years at *Groupe Scolaire*, after which he enrolled in the prestigious National University of Rwanda, located in the southern town of Butare. He chose to focus on linguistics, geography, and history, but around the time he was preparing for his first term's exams, he became severely ill (Bikindi has suffered from health-related problems throughout much of his life and was eventually diagnosed with diabetes). He was allowed to take the exams in bed, after which he was rushed to the hospital and nearly died. Sadly, he failed his exams and had to drop out of school. Considering all that he had previously accomplished at *Groupe Scolaire*, the school's director, Yongen Mansuy, extended an invitation to return and take on a paid faculty position, teaching music, dance, and theater to the older students.

In 1977, while performing for a government conference held in the school's auditorium, Bikindi earned the recognition and admiration of the recently appointed Minister of Youth and

---

<sup>79</sup> Specifically, *Rwaza école normale*, in Ruhengeri, *École scientifique Musanze*, also in Ruhengeri, and *Lycee Notre Dame de Citeaux*, in Kigali.



Culture,<sup>80</sup> Siméon Nteziryayo. The previous year, in efforts to bolster support for the new Habyarimana regime, instill nationalist pride and unity among the citizenry, and bring wider international attention to Rwandan culture, the Ministry of Youth and Culture formed a national dance-music troupe called *Urukerereza*.<sup>81</sup> The troupe already had a director, Jean-Baptiste Nkurikiyinka, but Minister Nteziryayo requested that Bikindi come and assist in its training. On October 2, 1977, Bikindi assumed his new post at the ministry where he was assigned to the Division of Folklore and Ballet. Besides assisting in the training of *Urukerereza*, he was given the job of supervising prefectural and communal troupes from which the most outstanding members would be chosen to participate in *Urukerereza*. He was also put in charge of overseeing various student and community organizations committed specifically to either dance, choral, drumming, or other types of instrumental performance. In 1980, Bikindi then took a two-year hiatus from his work and traveled to Cameroon where he studied business administration.

1985 was an especially important year for Bikindi. He was promoted to supervisor of cultural activities. 1985 was also hailed by the United Nations as International Youth Year. Conferences, festivals, and other activities were held throughout the world in an effort to promote peace, civility, and good citizenship among young people. Inspired by this, Bikindi decided to form a junior national troupe called *Indangamirwa*.<sup>82</sup> He especially hoped to recruit homeless youth and orphans, though he selected anyone whom he deemed to be remarkably gifted. He organized a group of six to eight talent scouts who traveled from region to region and school to school to hold tryouts. Those who were chosen spent several months a year under Bikindi's direction at a government-sponsored training facility located in the *urukari*, the old monarchial palace in Nyanza. They lived together in dormitories, had all their food provided for them, and continued to receive schooling when not practicing and rehearsing for upcoming performances. Under Bikindi's leadership, *Ndangamirwa* soon developed into a topnotch group, touring internationally to places like Italy and Côte d'Ivoire.

---

<sup>80</sup> Also referred to as the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

<sup>81</sup> "*Urukerereza*" translates literally as "the one that causes you to delay," the idea being that the troupe is so astonishing that when watching them, people will be spellbound and will not be able to carry on with their other activities.

<sup>82</sup> Literally, "the ones who receive the attention."

## **Bikindi the Celebrity**

In order to raise interest in the performing arts among Rwanda's youth, Bikindi organized numerous competitions and cultural festivals. To garner wider participation, he took to advertising on the radio, opening up a new career path which he used not just to promote these events, but his own performances as well. Some of his ads were quite straightforward. One radio ad, for example, simply said: "Bikindi hereby announces to the people of Kigali that he's organizing a performance of *Irindiro* ballet at the *Centre Culturel Franco-Rwandan* on the first of July!" But many of his ads were quite novel in how he drew upon his experience in theater to create short dramas that piqued his audience's interests. He described one of his ads to me as follows:

There is Mr. X or Mrs. X who goes and meets Mr. or Mrs. Y and asks, "Why are you in a hurry? Why are you in a rush?"

He acknowledges him and says, "Hello."

"But why are you in hurry?"

"No, I am going to buy the ticket to go and watch the performance of the ballet at the national centre, the *Irindiro* ballet, and I don't want to miss that show."

"Oh, so the *Irindiro* ballet is performing on that date? Oh, really? Well, since I'm on my way to the market, I will also go first and buy a ticket before I go to the market later on."

Bikindi also deployed more metaphorical language in some of his ads. For example, in one ad, he talked about a tree that was "twisted" and therefore its wood not fit for use. The insinuation was that the youth were like that twisted tree, but if they would attend the cultural festivals, they would be "straightened out" and better able to contribute to their community in positive ways.

Bikindi developed a reputation as a masterful publicist, receiving a special award from Radio Rwanda for his creative methods of advertising. He is still very proud of this recognition, exclaiming to me, "I was *the first* person to make this kind of 'dynamic publicity' in Rwanda!" Soon, businesses sought out Bikindi and paid him to produce radio ads on their behalf. To help meet the increasing demand, he employed the well-known musician, actor, and Radio Rwanda

associate, André Sebanane,<sup>83</sup> to assist in his productions. The two developed a close friendship and professional alliance that lasted until the genocide. Sebanane was Tutsi and was murdered during the genocide, an event that still deeply grieves Bikindi.

### **Musical Output and Compositional Approach**

Bikindi estimates that he composed between forty to sixty songs throughout his career. His music is influenced by both traditional and contemporary popular musical idioms. He is also both an intellectually and emotionally driven composer. For inspiration, Bikindi says he draws upon his personal feelings, experiences, and analysis of society and politics, striving to attain just the right musical and poetic form that he believes will be the most effective in expressing himself. When asked during his trial what inspires him to compose, he replied:

I can classify inspiration under two points—well, not strictly under two points, but principally under the following points. The inspirational process can stem from what I feel inside me, an emotion that takes hold of me. When I talked about my friend [Sebanane], I was overcome by such an emotion, and this is not the first time I am composing a song in his honor. So, inspiration can stem from an inward form of suffering or distress that might be given rise to by an external factor or an event that is lived—an event which is lived at the moment in time we are talking of, or at a previous moment in time. If I sing “Marigarita,” if I were to describe how—well, I would refer to that person’s behavior that I appreciated greatly when we came together and met, but also there will be other factors contributing to my songs that will come from my personal mindset.

The second origin of the inspirational process might come from the outside and might affect me very profoundly in such a manner that it gives rise to a reaction that, in turn, elicits within myself emotion. I don’t quite know how this occurs for other people, but for a musician, I feel the need to express myself. And the feelings, the words with which to express those feelings, can come out immediately. And that is how an artist comes to compose a song. It might be that such a state of mind does not come about immediately and that I might keep this inside myself and let it mature so that

---

<sup>83</sup> Radio dramas called *ikinamico* were a favorite form of entertainment at the time. Sebanane was a favorite actor often featured on these dramas.

subsequently I might externalize this emotion, and the words for expressing it will then come easily.

### **“Twasazareye” and the Founding of *Itorero Irindiro***

Bikindi composed “Twasazareye” in late-1986, the first of three songs for which he would be indicted. He wrote the song for a competition held in January 1987 to commemorate Rwanda’s silver jubilee. The jury awarded first prize to Bikindi and selected his song to be performed at a national celebration held on July 5 at Amahoro Stadium in Kigali, the grandest stadium in Rwanda. Troupes from throughout Rwanda, altogether consisting of 1,500 dancers, singers, and instrumentalists, were chosen to perform.

That same year, an elderly dancer who had participated in the jubilee celebration approached Bikindi with the idea of forming a private troupe. He was from Shyorongi, a commune just northwest of Kigali, and he told Bikindi that there were many talented performers near his home who would like to participate in a professional-quality troupe. There were few privately run troupes in Rwanda at that time. Most were affiliated with local schools and communities. The idea of having a private troupe, not beholden to anyone else’s agenda, was an intriguing prospect, and in 1989, Bikindi and a few others formed *Itorero Irindiro*<sup>84</sup> (also *Irindiro ballet* or, simply, *Irindiro*), with Bikindi serving as its president.

In early September 1990, Pope John Paul II visited Rwanda. According to a former member of *Irindiro* who spoke with me under condition of anonymity, the senior national troupe, *Urukerereza*, was invited to perform, as was Bikindi; however, the junior troupe, *Indangamirwa*, of which Bikindi was still in charge, was told to stay home. I was unable to confirm this with Bikindi, but if true, it would have been a major insult. In a tiny nation where the vast majority of the population is Catholic, a visit from the pope—especially John Paul II, who was revered by many Africans for his attentiveness to the continent—was a very special occasion, and the opportunity to perform before him was a great honor. Bikindi remained employed in the Ministry, but he began to focus his attention less on the national troupe and more on *Irindiro*, which now included members of both *Urukerereza* and *Ndangamirwa*. Bikindi paid the members of *Irindiro* 200 Rwandan francs (roughly 35 cents) for each day they spent in

---

<sup>84</sup> *Itorero irindiro* means “the ones that keep watch” or “the ones that guard over,” the idea being that they would ensure the preservation of Rwandan culture.

rehearsals and performances.<sup>85</sup> *Irinidiro* quickly became the nation's favorite troupe and Bikindi one of its favorite musicians. One United Nations official went so far as to characterize him as "Rwanda's Michael Jackson."<sup>86</sup>

### **Economic Collapse, Multipartyism, Civil War, and Genocide**

Bikindi's work began to take on a more overtly political tone as Rwanda descended into political and economic chaos during the early 1990s. In 1991, he composed a set of eight songs denouncing the RPF and calling on the military to defend the country. From March to April 1993, a month after the RPF had broken a cease-fire agreement, Bikindi composed and recorded a triptych of songs. The first was "Akabyutso" ("The Alert"), then "Intabaza" ("The Awakening"), followed by the brief "Mbwirabumva" (roughly translated as "I speak to those who understand"). He recorded these and a few other songs at Audiotex, a studio in Kigali, and released them on cassette. Around six months later, he followed up this album by composing and recording "Amahoro" ("Peace"), a song in which he begged Rwandans to come together and cease with violence. Not being able to afford boom boxes, most Rwandans heard Bikindi's songs on Radio Rwanda or the more recent RTLM, which began broadcasting on July 8, 1993. "Akabyutso," "Intabaza," and "Twasazareye" led to Bikindi's indictment; the rest of Bikindi's musical output in which he pleads for peace and unity was ignored by the ICTR's Prosecution team n.

During field research, I met separately with three former members of *Irinidiro*: a female Tutsi singer, a Hutu drummer, and a Twa dancer. In my conversations with them, I attempted to find out how Bikindi treated members of the troupe and if he ever favored Hutu or discriminated against Tutsi. Both the Hutu drummer and the Twa dancer denied that Bikindi did. The dancer stated as follows:

I don't see Bikindi as a tribalist. He was a realist. [With us], his only consideration was whether you knew how to sing well, whether you knew how to dance well—that's all he

---

<sup>85</sup> Bikindi may have paid some of his performers more, based on their skill level and importance to the performance as well as how much the troupe took in for certain performances. 200 Rwandan francs is the amount that this former member stated they received during his membership in *Irinidiro*.

<sup>86</sup> McNeil 2002.

saw. If you messed up, you were punished because of your mistake, not because of your tribe.<sup>87</sup>

The Tutsi singer likewise denied that Bikindi displayed any overt discrimination. She claimed that he treated her kindly, but as the social and political situation deteriorated and anti-Tutsi propaganda began to spread throughout the early 1990s, several Hutu members began harassing and threatening the Tutsi. According to this woman, Bikindi did not want these tensions to disrupt the troupe's activities, but rather than clamp down on the behavior of the bullies, he encouraged the Tutsi members to leave. I was unable to corroborate her claims with anyone else.

Bikindi's activities from late 1993 through the genocide constitute the crux of his trial, and therefore more detailed attention will be given to this period of his life in Chapter 3. For now, I would add that on April 4, 1994, just two days before Habyarimana was killed and the genocide began, Bikindi took twenty members of *Irindiro* on tour in Europe. They broke off their tour when they learned of the massive violence ravaging their nation but were unable to return to Rwanda till mid-June.

On July 14, 1994, by which time the RPF had taken over Rwanda, Bikindi and his first wife's family fled with hundreds of thousands of other Rwandans to the Mugunga refugee encampment in Goma, Zaïre.<sup>88</sup> It was a miserable place, but Bikindi continued his musical activities, forming choirs and dance troupes, performing for the orphanage that had been set up in the camp, and doing what he could through music and drama to lift people's spirits. Several years later,<sup>89</sup> he was approached by document forgers from Côte d'Ivoire who, in exchange for a large sum of money, offered to forge papers for him that would allow him to travel to and settle in Europe. Desperate to escape the encampment, Bikindi took them up on their offer. Since it is much easier for refugees to find safe haven in other countries if they have family already living there, Bikindi believed that if he could take up official residence in Europe, his family would soon be able to join him. In April 2001, he flew from Abidjan to Paris, then took a train to the Netherlands where he spent two or three nights at a refugee resettlement center in Zwolle. While

---

<sup>87</sup> Personal interview, June 2008; in Kinyarwanda with aid of interpreter.

<sup>88</sup> Zaïre was renamed the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 17 May 1997.

<sup>89</sup> From the available trial documents, it is not clear the exact year that this incident occurred, though it was probably sometime in 2000 or early 2001.

there, two French journalists who were preparing a documentary on the genocide approached him and informed him that he was being accused of genocide for his songs and that the RPF was searching for him. Soon after that, he was transferred to a refugee center in Leiderdorp where, on July 12, 2001, he was arrested by Dutch police and handed over to ICTR officials.

As for his immediate family, Bikindi has two wives. He married his first wife, Apolline Uwimana, on February 13, 1980. She was a civil servant in the Ministry of Planning as well as a proprietor of a bar and grill in Byumba where the couple had a home.<sup>90</sup> It is not clear from trial documents how many children they had and I did not have a chance to ask Bikindi, but Uwimana's testimony mentions three children who were injured during the war. On the evening of April 7, 1994, with her husband away on tour, Uwimana took her children and fled from Byumba to Kigali. President Habyarimana had been killed the night before. The news was that violence was rapidly spreading and that the RPF had launched a new offensive in the northern region where Byumba was located. She was unaware that things were just as bad in Kigali. By April 13, the RPF had Kigali under siege and were shelling the capital with mortars. One exploded very close to where they were taking refuge at a friend's home, injuring the children. Wounds to two of the children were minor, but her daughter, Anita Kankindi, suffered a dangerous skull fracture that required immediate evacuation to Central Hospital-Kigali. The RPF soon began shelling the hospital as well. As soon as Anita was stabilized, Uwimana took her children to Nyundo, a village near Gisenyi. The region had not yet fallen to the RPF, and so they waited there for their father's return while Anita received treatment at a local hospital.

Uwimana is Hutu. Bikindi's second wife, Angeline Mukabanana, is Tutsi. In 1979, she was employed at the Ministry of Youth and Culture as an archivist. Later, she worked under Bikindi as one of his talent scouts. The two fell in love, but because the Catholic Church does not endorse polygamy, they never formally married though still considered one another as husband and wife. She had a child from a previous marriage and then bore two more children with Bikindi. Uwimana accepted the new marriage and was friendly with Mukabanana and her children. They lived near one another in Byumba.

During the genocide, Mukabanana lost her parents, siblings, and many friends. She too was beaten and nearly died. After the genocide, she decided to return to Kigali and continue working for the Ministry of Youth and Culture, now under the control of the RPF. Being a Tutsi

---

<sup>90</sup> Specifically, their home and Uwimana's bar and grill were in Gatenga, a commune located within Byumba.

survivor of the genocide, she felt she had little reason to fear any repercussions, but almost immediately upon her return, while still in a state of shock of recovery, she was imprisoned by the RPF and interrogated about her husband. She asserted his innocence. In her ICTR testimony she stated, “I told [my interrogators] that if Bikindi had ever dared to kill Tutsis, then there was no way I could forgive him for that. I told them that I had never seen him display hatred against anyone, and it was not the time to start ascribing things to him he had not done.” Mukabanana was released from prison. She went back to work in the Ministry, but her colleagues began harassing her. At the time, the Ministry was preparing to publish a book in which Bikindi would be denounced. Her superiors questioned her about her husband, and again, she asserted his innocence. As a result, she was dismissed from her job. She was then imprisoned a second time, though only for a day. After the 2003 presidential elections, she was then imprisoned a third time, claiming that it was because she did not vote for Kagame even though voting was supposedly done through secret ballot. Finally, on March 15, 2006, she fled Rwanda and settled in Kampala.

When asked during the trial if Bikindi belonged to *Interahamwe*, Mukabanana responded, “If ever I had seen any sign in his home giving me the impression that he was *Interahamwe*, I would never have lived with him and I wouldn’t be testifying today.” Besides Mukabanana, the family’s housemaid, Mariya, was Tutsi. In the Mugunga refugee encampment, Bikindi adopted a 10-year-old orphaned girl, Chantal, also Tutsi. Later, it was discovered that Chantal’s mother and grandparents were still alive, and Bikindi and Uwimana were able to help the young girl reunite with her family. When the home of a Tutsi neighbor was looted by *Interahamwe* members, Bikindi tracked down the thieves and convinced them to return her property. Bikindi’s troupes have always included Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. During the genocide, he checked in on those who were near where he and his family were staying in Nyundo. Even before the genocide, he took several Tutsi members into his household to care for them.

### **Personal Impressions**

Standing at least six feet tall and with a barrel-chested frame, Bikindi was probably once a rather imposing figure, but now coming into his late 50s and suffering from a number of health problems, he has grown frail. He has a bulging disc in his lower spine that causes him a great



deal of discomfort. During our final morning together, he was swooning and clammy, a recurring symptom of a his diabetic condition.

No doubt, he has a head for business and is shrewd and opportunistic. Before agreeing to be interviewed, he requested that I buy him a laptop, which I did. I also found him at first to be defensive and cautious—understandable given that he has spent a decade in prison and his reputation has been shredded. He required that I sign a notarized contract stating that I would not directly financially benefit from our interview without his consent. The consequence of this is that if I adapt this dissertation into a book, I am prohibited from receiving royalties without Bikindi’s permission. In speaking to a lawyer about this, I was told that the contract is not legally binding. Nevertheless, it is ethically binding, and it was a price I was willing to pay to get Bikindi’s side of the story out into the public.

As wary and calculating as Bikindi was initially, once we finished our negotiations he was disarmingly charming, polite, and accommodating. It was easy to see why there was a time when he so beloved among Rwandans. The first afternoon of our visit, I provided him a copy of the translations I had made of his songs. The next morning, he returned with numerous corrections and a copy of his own original Kinyarwanda lyrics as well as a French translation that he had rendered. He also provided me with Xeroxed copies of a few photographs, a brochure on *Irindiro*, and a written defense of his songs.

Throughout our conversations, Bikindi was passionate and animated, laughing one moment, lamenting the next. He seemed bewildered and emotionally wrecked by his circumstances, as much by the views people now have of him as by his imprisonment. Indeed, the reason he agreed to meet with me was because he believed that I would let others know that his songs have been misinterpreted and that I might help rehabilitate his reputation. At the conclusion of each interview session, he would embrace me, the first time muttering, “*komera, komera*”—“be strong, be strong.”

Several times, he mentioned his concern for homeless children and orphans and the things he has tried to do through the performing arts to help them. He seems to have been an attentive and caring husband and father. From his trial testimony, our conversation, and his lyrics, he also seems to have agonized over the societal collapse that resulted from partisan and ethnic violence and the RPF invasions. While in the Mungunga refugee encampment and later in prison, he wrote a number of songs expressing his sorrow. He also composed a song in prison

calling for remembrance of the genocide and the reconciliation of Rwandans, a song he performed at the conclusion of his appeal hearing. These are a few of the reasons I find it difficult to believe that Bikindi advocated genocide. If anything, he seems to be an anti-revolutionary who recoils from social upheaval. I view him as a conservative (in the classic sense of that term) in that he values tradition, the law, and the political and social institutions which enabled him to achieve so much professional success and personal satisfaction. If so, the same criticisms can be made of him as of conservatism in general, that it tends to ignore or dismiss the ways in which tradition, law, and political and social institutions and structures may promulgate injustice, marginalization, and social unrest, but this hardly means Bikindi despised Tutsi and wanted them eliminated.

## **Methodology**

Remain neutral, don't choose sides. Go slowly, go carefully. Just listen.

—advice from former Hutu refugees, Jeanette and Augustin,  
before I first departed for Rwanda

Field research in Rwanda was carried out during the summer months from 2008 to 2011. In 2010, my trip was cut short when, the day after I arrived, my closest Rwandan colleague and friend, Francis, was involved in a terrible car accident that resulted in a serious concussion to himself and the death of a mutual friend. The emotional turmoil and legal issues that ensued made it impossible for us to carry on with our work, and so after attending our friend's funeral a week later, I flew back to the U.S. to recover. I then returned in May 2011, at which time Francis and I were able to travel to Arusha and meet with Bikindi in person. The policies at the UN Detention Facility allow only two hours for interviewing prisoners. Fortunately, the prison commanders relaxed this rule for us so that, altogether, our visit spanned two afternoons and a morning for a total duration of about six hours.

As I attended to my teaching duties during the fall and spring semesters, I met regularly with a Rwandan couple, Jeanette and Augustin, who lived near my home in Tallahassee. Former refugees (now U.S. citizens), they fled Rwanda because Augustin's life had been threatened by the RPF for reasons that are still unclear to them (their story will be discussed in Chapter 7). At

first, our visits were mostly dedicated to language study, but over time, as our relationship deepened and we became more comfortable with one another, our conversations turned more and more to their views on Bikindi, ethnic and political issues in Rwanda, and Rwandan history in general.

Given the amount of time we spent together and the quality of our friendships, Francis, Jeanette, and Augustin were the most valuable contributors to this project, much in part because they resided in opposing corners in the debate over Bikindi's music. After many talks with Jeanette and Augustin, I would embark for Rwanda, certain that Bikindi was innocent and had been unfairly defamed, only to leave Rwanda, after many talks with Francis and his friends, sure of Bikindi's guilt. In constantly oscillating between these two poles, it became clear that, rather than trying to reason my way towards one side or the other, the debate itself was what needed to be presented. Not only did it reveal the complexity of Bikindi's lyrics and the conflictive yet reasonable ways listeners could interpret them, it also illuminated the deep ethnic and political cleavages that persist in Rwanda. I noticed early on in my field research that people's views of Bikindi and his music usually correlated with their ethnic identity and political affiliation. Jeanette and Augustin are Hutu who perceive themselves as persecuted by the RPF. Francis is Tutsi and a strong supporter of the RPF. He was born and grew up in an exile settlement in southern Uganda. Orphaned at an early age, he was fostered by various family members, all of whom were RANU/RPF loyalists. Highly intelligent, resourceful, and charismatic, by the time he was in his teens, he found work as a speaker at RPF-sponsored gatherings of his fellow exiles where he sermonized on the need to support the RPF and return to Rwanda. After the RPF seized control of Rwanda, he resettled in the country. He was later elected to head up the local defense force in Butare<sup>91</sup> and is thus fairly well-connected to the local military and political establishment.

Beyond the insights that Francis, Jeanette, and Augustin provided, they were responsible for putting me in contact with most of the other participants in this project. My logistical base in Rwanda was a guesthouse in Butare managed by a Christian evangelical organization. The organization was jointly founded and run by several Rwandan church leaders and an American missionary couple whom I knew through my parents (the husband was the pastor of my parent's

---

<sup>91</sup> Midway through my research, the government renamed Butare by its pre-colonial name, Huye, though most still referred to it as Butare. In keeping with this convention, I will continue to call the town Butare.

church, and it was his wife, in fact, who was killed in the car accident). Besides his work as head of the local defense force, Francis is one of the organization's directors. Through him, I soon befriended the half-dozen other directors and employees. They would then introduce me to other friends, family members, and acquaintances who were willing to listen to Bikindi's songs and share their views. With a few exceptions, most of these participants were Tutsi supporters of the RPF and had an antagonistic view of Bikindi.<sup>92</sup>

Jeanette and Augustin, on the other hand, connected me with friends and family who were more supportive of Bikindi. Because of the RPF's repressive policies and practices, people were hesitant to voice opinions that went against RPF orthodoxy. As such, this group of Bikindi's defenders was significantly smaller than that of his critics. Among roughly fifty participants, only seven criticized the RPF and defended Bikindi outright, and four of them, including Jeanette and Augustin, lived in the U.S. where they were well out of reach of any danger posed by the RPF. Several other participants were ambivalent and lukewarm in their comments, never clarifying exactly what their positions were.

I had to be cautious and patient. I could not simply walk up to random people and inquire as to their views. It was necessary instead to take time cultivating trust. Along with all the little things people normally do to foster relationships—taking new friends out to eat and drink and so forth—I tried to ingrain myself in the local community. I participated in monthly community labor projects, for example, spending a day carrying jugs of water from the river up the hillside to where others were using the water to make bricks. I also engaged in ministry with Christian friends, speaking in their churches when asked, or carrying groceries with them to people who had contracted HIV and were too weakened by their medication to walk to the store. I was able through these efforts to converse with people representing a wide variety of social stations: wealthy bankers, small-business owners, RPF politicians, military leaders, common soldiers, university professors, college students, peasant farmers, Pentecostal pastors, Catholic and Anglican priests, teenagers, the elderly, well-known popular musicians, traditional musicians (one of whom served in the court of Rwanda's last king), women, men, people who were in Rwanda during the genocide, people who arrived after the genocide, and refugees living in the U.S.

---

<sup>92</sup> I would clarify that in no way did this organization endorse my work, but simply provided lodging and food for a reasonable fee. Francis and other employees and associates who participated in this research also did not endorse my arguments or conclusions.

My one major disappointment was that Francis and I were never able to gain admission to prisons to speak with inmates convicted of genocide. No doubt, their input would have been most helpful, but try as he might to take advantage of his connections, Francis was never able to break through the bureaucratic barriers. In recent years, the RPF has become increasingly suspicious of outside scholars performing research among genocide convicts, as a few of the resulting works have criticized the government and presented inmates in a more sympathetic light (see Chapter 8).

A lesser disappointment is that I had hoped to share Bikindi's music with about seventy-five people, but due to the sociopolitical climate in Rwanda and the need to work slowly and cautiously, the total number of participants was, as I said, closer to around fifty. It is difficult to provide an exact number, because while many conversations took place within the context of a more formal interview, much relevant discourse arose through informal conversations held over dinners, on bus rides, or while relaxing at the sauna. Others took place in group settings where some members were more vocal than others. There was also much overlap in the comments expressed, and so rather than presenting everything that was shared with me, I focus mainly on a smaller number of key discussions that effectively articulated the various responses, arguments, and counter-arguments that I encountered.

In more formal interview contexts, I invited participants to listen to the songs and share their thoughts, feelings, and reactions. No two conversations unfolded the same way. Sometimes participants would listen to only one song or even just a part before declaring that they had heard enough and were ready to share. Others listened to the same song over and over. Some wished to share their thoughts and experiences before listening to the songs, others afterward. Usually, they listened to the songs on my iPod, allowing them to skip ahead or repeat songs or sections as they wished while preventing others from overhearing. The idea was to hand the songs over to participants for the duration of our visits so that they could control their engagement with them.

I tried to frame my questions in a manner that was simple, direct, but open-ended enough to allow for conversations to go in any number of directions. They included the following:

- What do you think of Bikindi?
- What do you think of this/these song(s)?

- Do you remember hearing the songs before and during the genocide?
- Have you heard them since?
- Do you think they incited genocide?
- If so, do you think that was Bikindi's intent?
- Do you think that his punishment was fair?
- Do you think the songs should be censored?
- Do you think people should be free to listen to them today?
- How does listening to these songs make you feel?
- Does it bring up any memories when you listen to them now?

I realized that the questions regarding emotions and memories might themselves provoke a process of feeling and remembering that otherwise would not have occurred. Still, with this awareness, I found the responses to be relevant. Whether a person was really feeling or remembering anything or not, what they felt and remembered once my questions prompted these processes was nevertheless revealing.

I also asked several participants to share their experiences of the genocide. This methodological approach was inspired by an encounter I had within the first couple of weeks of field research. A Tutsi genocide survivor named Julius had come to spend a week at the mission guesthouse in Butare in order to lead a theological seminar. The first morning of his stay, I shared Bikindi's songs with him, and as soon as he heard the first song, he burst into uncontrollable laughter. When I asked him why he was laughing, he responded that the music brought up memories of his life just before and during the genocide—memories that his mind had long since shuttered away. The force of these memories was so overwhelming that he could not help but laugh. This encounter will be discussed more in Chapter 7, but the point for now is that it suggested to me that people's experiences of the genocide and post-genocide situation influenced their reactions to and interpretations of Bikindi's music and their opinions of him. This would become an important avenue for exploration. After my encounter with Julius, I began inviting participants to share their story of the genocide, so long as they felt comfortable doing so. As I said, some preferred to share before listening to the songs and others afterward. I found that this had little impact on people's interpretations and opinions, but it did impact their emotional responses. When people listened to the songs before sharing their experiences, they

usually seemed rather ambivalent—the songs provoked little emotion—but when they listened after sharing, there was often more of an emotional response. None ever fell apart, but through a heavy sigh, a shaking of the head, a slumping of the shoulders, a slight tearing up—or laughter—it was evident that there was some emotional response. As the capstone to their story of surviving the genocide, the songs seemed to reconnect participants to the emotional and cognitive reality of what they went through, an phenomenon that could be positive or negative depending on the individual.

### **Ethics of Research in a Post-Conflict Region**

The RPF has succeeded in propagating throughout the wider international community an image of Rwanda as a newly progressive, lawful, and peaceful haven, where human rights are revered, Hutu have confessed and apologized for the genocide, Tutsi have forgiven them, and all have shed their ethnic identities in favor of a unified Rwandan identity, living together as one great family. President Kagame regularly tours throughout the globe, speechifying to Rwanda's accomplishments under his leadership. The covers of tourist brochures and coffee table books feature newborn gorillas or gleaming *intore* dancers.<sup>93</sup> Throngs of international missionary groups arrive every summer to spend a couple weeks doing charity work and evangelical outreach. They hear a few carefully selected testimonials from genocide survivors about how they have overcome the past and forgiven those who killed their families. These mission groups then return home to tell their churches of the miracle of Rwanda, and the myth continues. This is not all bad. Such a soft-focus portrait may not accurately convey the full sociopolitical reality of life in Rwanda, but it perhaps serves as an edifying vision towards which the nation can orient itself. Considering what occurred in 1994 and that the genocide was the culmination of a long bloody history between rival political factions who manufactured and exploited ethnic hierarchies, the relative peace that has since endured is indeed astounding. President Kagame and the RPF should be credited for this. And truly, many Rwandans do have inspiring stories to share. I have been deeply moved by the personal testimonies of friends and acquaintances who have overcome profound trauma and loss to lead lives of tranquility and compassion.

Rwanda is now quite safe as long as one obeys the laws and exercises common sense. Laws are enforced and corruption is minimal, a dramatic contrast in relation to Rwanda's

---

<sup>93</sup> See fn. 74 above for a description of *intore*.

neighbors. Nevertheless, the mistrust, paranoia, and resentment, sublimated as it is under so much shiny propaganda, becomes palpable after spending a significant amount of time in the country. Prominent RPF opponents have a way of disappearing. Many Hutu, such as four brothers of a friend of mine, have been arrested and incarcerated without fair trial on trumped up charges of genocide-related crimes. The *gacaca* community courts, established in 2001 to efficiently prosecute the hundreds of thousands of suspected *génocidaires*, have entailed a number of problems that lay bare the social fissures in Rwanda. Mainly, they provide a forum where false accusations are used to settle old scores, and there are few mechanisms in place to protect witnesses, opening the door for extortion and blackmail. One afternoon, I was strolling through a village with my friend Erick in order to bring a bag of soap, sugar, and rice to a friend of his who was weakened from his anti-HIV medication. As we walked together, he pointed out a couple of homes adjacent to each other and informed me that during the genocide, members of one of the households had killed members of the other. Now fearing that they would be accused and brought to trial, they had recently tried to poison some of the other surviving members. It may have only been a rumor, but it illustrates the fear that continues to seize society. Erick is a fairly well-known leader in his local community and a fervent supporter of the RPF. Years before, someone had attempted to poison him. After swallowing a bite of banana, he noticed a strange taste and immediately vomited it up. Looking down at the banana, he noticed that it was laced with a fine, white powder. In 2011, one of the translators with whom I worked was arrested for his role in a grenades smuggling operation that led to attacks in Kigali's main bus park, killing several people. The purpose of the attacks had been to destabilize the 2010 elections and undermine people's trust in the ability of the RPF to maintain security. In addition to these anecdotes, most Rwandans live within minutes to a few hours of eastern Congo, site of the world's most violent conflict of the last sixty years, a war in which their government and military is inextricably entangled.

Over the last two decades, there has been a marked increase in ethnographic research conducted in conflict and post-conflict regions,<sup>94</sup> and the resultant literature has brought to light the security issues, logistical hurdles, and ethical dilemmas that confront and challenge

---

<sup>94</sup> Kevin Avruch, "Notes Toward Ethnographies of Conflict and Violence." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 30, no. 5 (October 2001), pp. 637-48.



ethnographers. Elisabeth Jean Wood, who conducted ethnographic research for twenty-six months in El Salvador during its civil war, writes:

...The ethical imperative of research (“do no harm”) is intensified in conflict zones by political polarization, the presence of armed actors, the precarious security of most residents, the general unpredictability of events, and the traumatization through violence of combatants and civilians alike. As should always be the case, researchers in developing their research design and methods should take account of ethical imperatives from the beginning of the project’s development.<sup>95</sup>

The two chief ethical imperatives in my case were, first, to protect the privacy and safety of participants, and second, to be transparent in regards to the goals of my study so that people could make an informed decision as to whether or not to participate. Though all gave me explicit permission to use the contents of our conversations for this study, and most said it was fine to identify them, I have chosen as an extra precaution to use pseudonyms to identify all participants (the obvious exception, of course, being Bikindi). Supporters of the RPF and critics of Bikindi (usually one and the same group) have little to fear at this point in time. The same cannot be said of those living in Rwanda who would publicly criticize the RPF. In their cases, I refer to them in only the vaguest of terms, going so far as to switch gender identities. Three participants who were loyal to the RPF—one a high-ranking military commander, another a former local politician, and the other a well-known political figure—also requested that I guard their identities so that they could speak freely without jeopardizing their reputations or livelihoods. The former politician, however, gave me permission to share his story of what he went through during the genocide. In general, I relied on Francis’s advice and guidance as to what approaches and actions to undertake.

I described the goals of my research in simple but honest terms. I informed participants that, as an American, I did not know yet what to think of Bikindi and his music, and so I wanted to know what different Rwandans believed so that I could better understand his intentions, his music, and the possible role it played in inciting genocide. I let people know that I was

---

<sup>95</sup> Elisabeth Jean Wood, “The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones,” in *Qual Sociol* 29 (2006), pp. 373-74.

politically neutral, and that my purpose was not to criticize or defend Bikindi, but to present various arguments from the perspectives of Rwandans. Local authorities in Butare were informed of my work.

It is conventional practice to have participants sign permission forms, but that would have been highly problematic in this case. At best, participants would have found it strange, perhaps even suspicious, and it thus would have undermined our mutual trust. At worst, it could have compromised their privacy and security, and so out of respect for these issues, I only sought oral permission.<sup>96</sup>

Most participants with whom I conducted more formal interviews agreed to allow me to record our conversations with a voice recorder, the exception being the three officials mentioned above. Other than the military officer, I was still allowed to take notes. After my conversations with participants, I would transfer the audio and/or written data to my laptop where it remained password-protected.

Ethnographers working in conflict and post-conflict regions, especially those that provide detailed accounts of violent acts, have been subject to sharp criticism from their peers. Of the several ethical accusations levied against us, the two that trouble me most are that we pursue violent topics either because we are mere thrill-seekers or because we believe that we can exploit the inherent shock and emotional drama of our research (what Cynthia Mahmood and others have referred to as the “sexiness” of these topics<sup>97</sup>) as a means of garnering attention and acclaim. At times, these accusations may be merited. Michael Taussig, for example, has admitted that he is “a kind of violence junkie,”<sup>98</sup> though to be fair, he was self-reflexively drawing upon his lurid fascination with colonial violence in order to better understand the human motives behind it. I, on the other hand, am not “a violence junkie.” The things I witnessed and experienced in Rwanda, and even more so, the stories people shared with me were disturbing to the extent that they triggered depressive episodes that prompted me to seek professional treatment.

---

<sup>96</sup> Because field research mainly consisted of an oral history project, this dissertation was granted exemption from a thorough review by Florida State University’s Institutional Review Board for research involving human subjects.

<sup>97</sup> Cynthia K. Mahmood, *Fighting for faith and nation: Dialogues with Sikh militants* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

<sup>98</sup> Quotes in Emily Eakin, “Anthropology’s Alternative Radical,” in *New York Times* (12 April 2001), p. A15.

Due to such criticisms, I feel some need to explain why I chose to pursue this study. My reasons may be traced back several years. My academic background is in music composition, but as I was pursuing a master's degree in composition, I found myself feeling more and more constrained and bored by a singular focus on music of the Western classical tradition. My parents are former missionaries, and so growing up overseas, I have long been interested in matters of cultural diversity, thought, and expression. In 2001, I accompanied my parents on a three-week mission trip to Kenya. There, I befriended a Congolese Hutu refugee who with his family fled when RPF-backed forces invaded their town and killed eleven members of his extended family. We kept up our friendship via e-mail and worked with my church and a local refugee resettlement organization to help get him and his family out of the refugee camp and resettled near my home in Fort Worth. Through my ongoing friendship with this family, I developed an interest in the conflict between Hutu and Tutsi. Meanwhile, I was listening to more and more music that fell into that marketing category so denigrated by ethnomusicologists: world music. Upon completing my master's degree in 2003, the obvious step was to pursue a doctorate in composition, but given my changing interests, I realized that this would have been the wrong move. In 2005, I instead began pursuing studies in ethnomusicology at Florida State University.

At first, I wanted to research the role of music in fostering and integrating communities of healing in refugee camps such as the one in which my friends once resided. But during my first semester of studies, I took a course in African music taught by Frank Gunderson (now the chair of this dissertation's committee). When it came time to write my final paper, I met with him to discuss possible topics. I told him of my interest in the Hutu-Tutsi crisis. Mulling this over for a few moments, he remembered that he had read something about "this guy...Simon...Simon something-or-other" who was in prison for his role in inciting genocide. That was seven years ago. Bikindi's trial had not even begun yet. I could not find any recordings of his music. I could not even locate lyrics, and therefore, I had no plans to make him and his music the center of my dissertation. I would soon commence work on my master's thesis on a topic, Southern Gospel music, that had nothing to do with Bikindi or the genocide. Still, I continued to follow Bikindi's trial. Eventually, the ICTR began preserving its archives on an on-line database, allowing me to locate lyrics and other trial documents. When I obtained

recordings from Jeanette and Augustin, whom I befriended in late 2007, I began to realize the possibilities of a larger-scale study.

Yes, of course I found the topic compelling; the Rwandan genocide *is* compelling, but I did not choose this topic purely out of a desire for adventure or acclaim. Rather, like most genocide scholars, my decision sprang from a moral conviction regarding a fundamental need for justice and truth, as simplistic and naïve as that may be. The more I researched Bikindi's alleged role in the genocide, the less convinced I became of his guilt. He and his work deserved another hearing, free of political tribalism. As a musician, my choice to research this topic also sprang from another moral conviction, that of the imperative for musicians and artists to understand and take responsibility for the influence of their creative work, and for audiences to develop an awareness of how malleable they are in the face of such work. These convictions, along with my personal connection to the Hutu-Tutsi crisis, are what guided my decision to pursue this study.

### **Conceptual Approach**

Since around the mid-1980s, ethnomusicology, as with its related fields and disciplines, has been marked by a rapid move from a more scientifically-based epistemological orientation to something more open-ended, processual, self-reflexive, and subjectively experiential and interpretative.<sup>99</sup> In this vein, the purpose of scholarship is not so much to conclusively answer questions, but to raise them in the first place in order to prompt imaginative thought and reflection as to new possibilities of understanding.<sup>100</sup> Whereas at one time, researchers carefully prepared their methodologies with the purpose of challenging or proposing some preconceived theory, theoretical analysis tends to emerge *post hoc* from methodological discovery. Ethnomusicologists may no longer even conceive of methodology or theory in a rigorous, systematic manner. Instead, many take a living-and-learning approach, with their methodologies unpredictably unfolding throughout the field research experience, and their theories, if they can

---

<sup>99</sup> Though this epistemological direction is still very apparent within ethnomusicological discourse, in recent years there seems to be a return to a more scientific or empirically-oriented mode of analysis. This is exemplified in the dramatic rise in interest in topics related to the origins of musical practices, therapeutic benefits of music within and across various cultural milieux, and what neuroscientific research reveals about musical experiences. Ethnomusicologists are now paying close attention to clinical studies and, in some cases, conducting such studies themselves. See, for example, Benjamin Koen, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>100</sup> Timothy Rice ponders this trend in depth. See "Toward a Mediation of Field Methods and Field Experience in Ethnomusicology," in Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley, ed., *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 101-20.

even be called that, more a reflective meditation on those experiences. Whatever parameters exist are structured mainly by the subject of interest (which may not yet be clearly defined), alongside the expectation that researchers share their findings and thoughts in some organized, sensical manner.

Frankly, I had no clear methodological strategy or theoretical orientation in mind when I first embarked on field research. My methodology, as described above, was to spend my summers in Rwanda, make friends, and share Bikindi's songs with as many people as I could. I did carry with me some vague theoretical notions, holdovers from recent coursework related to issues of memory, nationalism, and identity, which I thought might prove useful in elucidating whatever information I acquired (and prove persuasive to the panels presiding over my grant applications). The truth is, though, that I had little interest in exploring or challenging some matter of post-modernist social or critical theory. Hundreds of scholars have published hundreds of thousands of pages on the theoretical relationship between memory, nationalism, and identity. Within ethnomusicology, this is also well-tread ground. What more could I possibly contribute? My concern was with a person, not abstract explanations of sociocultural phenomena. I wanted to know if Bikindi was as evil as the press made him out to be, and I figured that the only way to really find out was to speak with Rwandans who experienced the genocide from different vantage points and remember him and his music during that time.

### **Live Texts**

Through hindsight and further engagement with relevant literature, however, I saw my methodology more clearly for what it was, that what seemed driven by intuition and a certain "going with the flow" was, in fact, more systematic and would yield theoretical insights. I approached the analysis of Bikindi's lyrics as what anthropologist Bob W. White refers to as "live texts."<sup>101</sup> This terminology is White's way of assessing how the meanings of popular song lyrics fluctuate depending upon the broader historical, social, and political context, and more specifically, the performative-receptive context. White spent a year from May 1995 to June 1996 (with sporadic trips between 1996 and 2004) researching and performing with popular music bands in Kinshasha, Congo, a musicultural stream that is similar in many ways to what

---

<sup>101</sup> Bob W. White. *Rumba Rules: The Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu's Zaire*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

one encounters in Rwanda, especially in terms of musicians' relationships to state power, music's didactic function, and its complexly interpretative quality. Throughout his field research, White observed that song lyrics were composed with the intent of giving advice, political persuasion, or teaching people something about society but doing so through provoking an interpretative process. Though songs had a didactic function, it was up to listeners to ponder the lyrics and decode the meaning for themselves. A song about heartbreak and longing for the love of a certain woman, for example, might refer to political and economic turmoil and a longing for better governance.

White never explicitly contemplates the reasons as to why composers engaged in this practice, why they did not just "come right out and say it." When it comes to Bikindi's songs, I would suggest two reasons for this. In Rwanda, the popularity and influence of composers has traditionally been determined much in part by their ability to wield metaphors and other allusional references in ways that are intriguing, evocative, and sustain attention. Many Rwandan audiences believe that this ability reflects a composer's intelligence and wisdom, thus legitimizing his or her authority to advise or teach their audiences. Sometimes, the more obscure the lyrics, then the more the composer is revered. Related to this, I suggest that another reason is because composers intuit that when their audiences engage in an interpretative process, whatever meaning they ultimately infer is believed and felt to be all the more true, undeniable, and personally relevant. There comes with interpretation a sort of satisfaction, an "a-ha moment," as when solving a puzzle. The listener feels clever for having decoded the lyrics, and as a result, the meaning is all the more embraced. The trick of a talented composers is thus to subtly guide listeners to the supposedly correct interpretation while making it seem for their audiences as if they have figured it out for themselves. One response that I commonly heard from this dissertation's participants was to remark on how ingenious Bikindi was in his ability to mask the "true meaning" of his songs, while at the same time, they would assuredly claim to know "the true meaning." As one friend exclaimed when I met with him several days after I provided him a recording, "Oh, man! *You* [meaning me, as an American] cannot know what he is singing about! *You* cannot know!" He then proceeded to tell me just what Bikindi was singing about.

White claims that song lyrics, as live texts, are "are capable of mobilizing social relations outside of the music."<sup>102</sup> To some extent, this is true—certainly in some cases more than

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 166-67.

others—but there also needs to be an emphasis on social relations that have already been mobilized “outside of the music,” by forces far more powerful than music. Lyrics can articulate social relations, beliefs, and attitudes. Musical sound can give them emotional thrust which may further entrench those beliefs and attitudes. Musical styles can bring people together or divide them depending on what those styles represent to any given individual or group. Dances, concerts, bars, and worship services are musical forums where performers and audiences ritually express and act out social relations, and in the process, negotiate and reinforce them. But those relations are usually already in place. Hutu did not listen to Bikindi’s songs and suddenly fear and hate Tutsi and want to go out and kill them. If they inferred from the songs a justification for violence against Tutsi, it was because such hatred was already in their hearts, cultivated by their perceptions and experiences of victimhood alongside a long, sweeping discourse that placed Hutu and Tutsi in historically adversarial positions.

Therefore, when confronting listeners’ interpretations of song lyrics, there needs to be an awareness of the various social relations, attitudes, and political agendas that are involved. Johnson and Cloonan write, “Popular music is always mercenary. That is, musical energies can be appropriated by mutually consenting power blocs, and simultaneously so, as the actual site of conflict.”<sup>103</sup> According to this, when it comes to controversial songs, people praise or disparage them based on whether they believe the songs promote their personal self-interests and the self-interests of whatever sociopolitical group with whom they affiliate. Self-interests here should be broadly understood. It is not only material or political self-interests at stake, but psychological self-interests as well. Interpretation results from how it comports with people’s existing beliefs, ideologies, experiences, memories, social affiliations, personalities, dispositions, *habitus*, desires, needs—in short, their identities. For people to be willing to question their interpretations, they have to be willing to practice self-reflection, self-criticism, even self-denial. For many people, this is too uncomfortable a task, especially when there is as much at stake politically, materially, and psychologically as there is in post-genocide Rwanda.

As this applies to the issues at hand, I argue that one reason the RPF and its supporters, a group that includes all of the Tutsi participants in this dissertation, denounce Bikindi and his songs as intentional pro-genocide propaganda is not because the songs were actually composed as such, but because the songs imply a critique of the assumed righteousness of the RPF. Most

---

<sup>103</sup> Johnson and Cloonan 2009, p. 4

of the Tutsi participants have benefited under the RPF, especially those who arrived in Rwanda after the RPF took control of the country. Therefore, it is more advantageous to regard the songs as purposefully malicious propaganda than to have to confront ideas that undermine the RPF and the benefits its supporters enjoy. When they listen to Bikindi's songs, they thus hone in on certain terms, phrases, and sections that semantically validate their preconceived notions of the songs while ignoring those terms, phrases, and sections that contradict them. On the other side, some of the Hutu participants have been victimized by the RPF. To them, the current regime is anything but the great savior its supporters believe it to be. The warnings about the RPF implied in Bikindi's songs have come true for them. The songs ratify their experiences of victimhood, and they view the denouncement of Bikindi as part of a larger ploy to squelch anti-RPF dissent.

There are many merits to White's concept of live texts, but one problem is that it suggests that interpretation is a more self-aware activity than it often is. People are usually not aware of the hermeneutic lenses through which they interpret song lyrics. Rarely do they consciously engage in a thorough process whereby they carefully identify all the factors that influence their interpretations. They fail to realize how their own experiences, dispositions, ideologies, biases, agendas, and self-interests impact their interpretation, that they are actually *imputing* personally resonant meaning to a text. Psychologists have coined a variety of terms for this and similar phenomena: "confirmation bias," "epistemic closure," "motivated reasoning," to name a few. There are nuanced distinctions between these, but as they would apply here, they refer to the general tendency in humans to fail to recognize the eisegetic quality of their interpretations of the world around them and to instead presume that they are constantly capable of and involved in an exegetic process; that is, seeing things as they "really" are. When participants shared their views of Bikindi and his songs, most did not seem to realize that they were engaging in an interpretative process at all. To them, the meaning of Bikindi's songs was immediately clear; it was right there in the text, even if it took a bit of decoding to unravel it. They interpreted the songs in a way that confirmed their *a priori* assumptions.

### **Polyvocal Ethnography**

A polyvocal ethnographic approach is an effective means of analyzing song lyrics as live texts, because to understand different ways a song can be interpreted, it obviously helps to speak



with different people.<sup>104</sup> Polyvocal ethnography's chief characteristic is the admission of numerous voices, often in disagreement, of which the ethnographer is but one. Polyvocal ethnography has been a mainstay in ethnomusicological and anthropological scholarship for over two decades. Its genesis is often traced to the mid-1980s work of James Clifford and George E. Marcus.<sup>105</sup> At the time, there was much concern among anthropologists over the issue of epistemological authority, summarized by the question: Who has the right to speak for whom? Or more precisely, who has the right to represent and critique another person's or another group's uniquely situated ideas and experiences? Polyvocal ethnography was seen as a way of de-centering authority so that numerous people were given more or less equal say (though whether the ethnographer invariably remains the primary voice is an important matter to consider). As this applies to an analysis of song texts, in the words of Gunderson, this means that there is "no one interpreter, no one meaning, no complete or 'correct' version."<sup>106</sup> Gunderson conducted a polyvocal analysis of over three hundred Sukuma labor songs, and he "discovered that a song could make a kind of sense to one person, and an entirely different kind of sense to another, and that both could illuminate aspects of deeper meaning."<sup>107</sup>

A polyvocal analysis of song texts tends to dwell on discursive congruency and conflict. It not only enriches one's appreciation of the possible meanings listeners may impute to a song, but it also says something about those listeners and their worlds as they perceive and experience them. There is particular emphasis on semiotic meaning, on what a song text signifies and symbolizes beyond its surface-level meaning, especially in how the semiotic content articulates and shapes social and political relationships. Polyvocal ethnography can be used to identify the hermeneutic conflict over a song's semiotic content, and then situate this conflict within the field of social and political hierarchies. Thus, the purpose of polyvocal ethnography is not only to subvert the authority of the ethnographer, but the authority of all the various interlocutors. This bears critical implications for this study. Giving voice to and validating diverse reactions,

---

<sup>104</sup> Unlike White's experience, none of this dissertation's participants ever observed Bikindi performing live. They all heard his songs on the radio or on cassette, indicating that this was the case with most Rwandans. Attention will be given, then, to the role of radio broadcasts in how they influenced the meaning listeners inferred from the songs.

<sup>105</sup> Clifford and Marcus credit much earlier ethnographies, namely James Walker's *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Sioux* (1917) and Godfrey Lienhardt's *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka* (1961), though they point out how exceptional these works were for their time (Clifford and Marcus 1986, pp. 15-19).

<sup>106</sup> Frank Gunderson, *Sukuma Labor Songs from Western Tanzania* (Lieden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2010), p. 1.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

interpretations, and opinions of Bikindi and his music may not prove his innocence, but it does undermine assumptions of his guilt.

### **Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Polyvocal ethnography is all the more enlightening when it incorporates a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, one that explores correlations between people's lived experiences and their interpretations of social texts.<sup>108</sup> I found especially that interpretations of Bikindi's lyrics tended to correlate with experiences of victimhood. Generally speaking, those who were victimized during the genocide had a negative view of him and his music, while those who have since been victimized under the RPF had a more positive view.

Songs, though, are more than discursive objects, and the meaning listeners impute to them is not only discursive in nature but is often a felt or embodied experience. One of my main purposes in employing a polyvocal analytical approach was thus to explore non-discursive meanings that emerged for participants as they engaged with Bikindi's songs. Specifically, I focused on the phenomenon that for many participants, the songs were tangible mementos of their experiences of the genocide, and given the pain and terror of this episode of their lives, listening to the songs resulted in a variety of cognitive and emotional responses, depending on the individual.

This is important to consider in relation to issues of censorship and the place Bikindi's songs ought to have in Rwanda today. If some listeners merely object to Bikindi's lyrics—that is, if the problem is only discursive in nature—then that is one thing. If, however, they are not just offended, but psychologically harmed—if, for example, Bikindi's songs have the potential to induce great sadness or anxiety—then that is another matter entirely and should be taken into account when considering the issue of censorship. The right to free expression must be weighed against the need for healing. A number of listeners, on the other hand, experienced joy and pleasure when listening to the songs, and a few genocide survivors even found some measure of healing through their engagement with them. Such phenomena should also be taken into account in determining the availability of the songs.

---

<sup>108</sup> My interest in applying hermeneutic phenomenological methods to polyvocal analysis has been inspired much by the work of Jeff Todd Titon. See especially *Powerhouse for God: Speech, Chant, and Song in an Appalachian Baptist Church* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988).

## **Ethnography of the Individual**

Polyvocal ethnography within ethnomusicology usually centers on a body of songs, a performative practice, or some other aspect of musical experience, but not on a single musician. In contrast, this dissertation combines polyvocal ethnography with another mode of ethnography that has likewise now become a mainstay of ethnomusicological research: ethnography of the individual. Ethnographies of individual musicians tend to pit their subjects against the social, cultural, and political milieu in which they create and perform. The purpose is to demonstrate how musicians and their work are both products and producers of these same social, cultural, and political forces, raising questions concerning the autonomy and agency of individuals as they confront their changing worlds. Such a mode of analysis is relevant here as well. In many ways, Bikindi was acting as musicians had long acted in Rwanda—praising the country’s leaders, denouncing their enemies, and trying to politically unify the population—but by the early 1990s, he was also negotiating the realities of war and a collapsing society and government.

Jesse D. Ruskin and Timothy Rice (2012)<sup>109</sup> outline several ways in which ethnographies of individual musicians are rendered. These include monologic accounts of a musician’s life and work (biography), assisted autobiographies, various forms of dialogic presentation, analyses of texts and performances, and polyvocality. Each of these approaches are incorporated into this dissertation at various times and in various ways. Ruskin and Rice regard polyvocality as a form of ethnography of the individual, because it is essentially an ethnography of numerous individuals. Likewise, I provide different ethnographic accounts of experiences as described by participants, especially their experiences of victimhood, and then relate these experiences to their views of Bikindi and the meanings his songs have for them. This work is thus an ethnography of numerous individuals commenting on an individual musician. With Bikindi standing in the docks, I have conceived of this dissertation as a way of orchestrating my own trial, with myself serving as both prosecution and defense, the various participants as the witnesses, and the reader as the judge and jury.

---

<sup>109</sup> Jesse D. Ruskin and Timothy Rice, “The Individual in Musical Ethnography,” in *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 56, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2012), pp. 299-327.

## Chapter Organization

The remainder of this dissertation spans seven chapters and an epilogue. Chapter 2 provides an overview of Rwandan history and the genocide's background, information that is necessary to understand the many historical references made throughout Bikindi's songs. I especially focus on the politicization of this history, discussing how the RPF and its supporters and critics represent this history in ways that respectively legitimize or subvert the current political structure. I also outline the evolution of ethnic identity in Rwanda, keying in on debates surrounding its origins to show that while ethnic identity is a fact of life, it has hardly been universally conceptualized throughout history.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed study of Bikindi's trial. It examines the accusations levied against him by the ICTR's Prosecution team. One of the main purposes here is to discover what actions Bikindi took just prior to and during the genocide in order to better assess his intentions when he composed the songs. If, for example, it was proven that he murdered Tutsi, then this would suggest that he composed his songs for the purposes of inciting anti-Tutsi hatred and violence. The second part of the chapter discusses the one crime, incitement to genocide, for which he was convicted. I begin this section with a critique of how incitement is presently defined in various international laws and the implications this has for rights to free expression. Throughout this chapter, I present numerous excerpts from the trial's transcripts to try and evoke a sense of the trial's atmosphere and highlight the sort of evidence that the judges confronted.

Chapter 4 presents the song lyrics with English translations. I first introduce the main arguments concerning the songs' intended meaning. I also discuss what I refer to as cultural linguistic self-essentialism. By this, I mean the prevalent belief I encountered among Rwandans that they are by nature secretive and that when it comes to controversial issues, they rarely say what they really mean but instead disguise their message. The relation this has to Bikindi's lyrics is that such self-essentializing belief encourages an assumption that, even when the composer calls for peace and equality, he is really hiding some dark message. Finally, I note some of the difficulties in translating Kinyarwanda to English.

Chapter 5 then presents commentary related to the songs drawn from personal conversations and trial testimony. In the first part of this chapter, commentary from personal conversations is used to demonstrate the polarized views people have of Bikindi and his music and to situate these views within their own life experiences of the genocide and its aftermath.

The second part presents trial testimony. The debates that emerged from the trial were quite elaborate and detailed, and I draw upon them to show how specific words, lines, and passages from the lyrics may be interpreted in different ways.

Chapter 6 discusses the propagandization of the songs in the hands (or mouths rather) of RTLM's broadcasters. Here, I situate the songs within a broader discursive and experiential context, focusing on how these broadcasters and other political and media elites constructed a narrative of Hutu victimization that resonated with the experiences of many ordinary Hutu. I then draw connections between the lyrics and this narrative to show why many heard Bikindi's songs as justification for genocide.

Chapter 7 presents encounters I had with five participants whose engagement with the songs I found especially remarkable and touching. Three of the participants were Tutsi who barely survived the genocide and witnessed unimaginable horrors. Each responded to the songs in a positive manner, for the first participant, because the songs provoked feelings of nostalgia, and the other two because they found some measure of healing or relief through listening to them and discussing the memories stirred up by the songs. The other two participants are Jeanette and Augustin, the former refugee couple who have contributed so much to this dissertation. After four years of sharing our thoughts and feelings about Bikindi, they expressed that they too had found some measure of healing and comfort in engaging with the songs, helping them to detach from their pain in a way that helped them to confront their past with more ease.

Finally, Chapter 8 discusses how Rwandans are prevented access to the songs through a mode of censorship referred to as coerced self-censorship. While the RPF does not explicitly forbid ownership of the songs, it has enacted a number of policies that discourage many people, especially Hutu, from listening to Bikindi out of fear of being accused of harboring and spreading sectarianism, divisionism, and genocide ideology. The first part of the chapter works through a series of ethnographic vignettes to show how the RPF has been attempting to erase ethnicity and, more especially, any complicity on its part in instigating ethnic resentment and violence. I then situate the coerced self-censorship of Bikindi's music within this repressive climate. The second part of this chapter then discusses the specific laws related to the crimes of sectarianism, divisionism, and genocide ideology, problematizing them and arguing that the ways in which they are worded and have been implemented are counter-productive and may actually encourage ethnic and partisan resentment.

## CHAPTER 2:

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE GENOCIDE AND ITS POLITICIZATION

Bikindi was an earnest student of Rwandan history and his compositions reflect this. Therefore, a general knowledge of this history is necessary in order to understand the historical references made throughout his songs as well as to know something of the context in which he composed, the factors that possibly motivated him, and the reasons why many perceive the songs as pro-genocide propaganda. However, like any nation, the history of Rwanda is vast and complex. Moreover, any given phase of this history is the target of intense scrutiny and disagreement among both Rwandans and foreign scholars. Depending on who has ruled, this history has been subject to revisionism that has served to either legitimize or challenge political authority. As C. Lévi-Strauss wisely observed, “History is never history, but history-*for*. It is partial in the sense of being biased even when it claims not to be.”<sup>1</sup> The scholarship of colonial historians, for example, was once used to legitimize Tutsi political dominion only to be later co-opted by Hutu revolutionaries to inspire the rise of Hutu Power and justify anti-Tutsi discrimination and persecution. Today, the RPF disavows any scholarship that brings to light its own commission of human rights abuses, affirming instead only scholarship in which the regime is presented as one of liberation and progressivism.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars have thus become well aware of the dangers of being used as unwitting political brokers and propagandists, but rather than reaching consensus, the wariness of these dangers has only led to more argumentation, some of it quite heated. In certain corners of the scholarly community, simply using the term “genocide” to characterize the mass killings committed in Rwanda will elicit no shortage of seething criticism.<sup>3</sup> This is not necessarily a bad thing.

---

<sup>1</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 257

<sup>2</sup> This will be discussed further in Chapter 8. Over the last several years, a few scholars whose research criticizes the RPF have been harassed and forced to leave the country.

<sup>3</sup> A recent example of this involves a combative e-mail exchange between the two famous activist intellectuals, George Monbiot and Noam Chomsky. Chomsky refuses to use the term “genocide” to characterize the violence in Rwanda because he believes the term has become a political tool wielded by Western leaders to deflect attention away from human rights abuses committed by their own administrations and abuses embedded in their nations’ histories. Several prominent genocide scholars swiftly joined Monbiot in denouncing Chomsky’s denial of genocide. See <http://www.monbiot.com/2012/05/21/see-no-evil/>. In a book that has earned the scorn of much of the genocide scholarly community, Edward S. Herman and David Peterson have attempted to lend credible support to

Particularly for new students of Rwandan history who are not yet so invested in any one viewpoint, confronting this conflict encourages a much needed skepticism, a lack of certainty, and an epistemic humility that resists the endorsement of any one historical narrative, the ideology it tends to give rise to, and the social antagonisms that potentially result.

My purpose in the following is not to try to reconcile different historical narratives in order to present some incontrovertible grand narrative of Rwandan history. It would be silly to try, especially in the brief span of thirty or so pages. Rather, I have three main purposes. The first is to provide a basic framework of Rwandan history, imperfect as it may be, in which to situate various references made throughout Bikindi's songs. The second is to highlight this very conflict over interpreting Rwandan history, a conflict that tends to align with political affinities and experiences of the genocide and its aftermath. Those supportive of the RPF often espouse a narrative quite at odds with those critical of the RPF. To understand Rwandan history, one needs to understand what Rwandans think of their history, because how people regard their history is profoundly consequential in terms of how they perceive their relationship to state power and to one other, all the more so when issues of political and ethnic inequality and conflict enter the picture. In addition, how Rwandans regard their history also tends to correlate with how they interpret Bikindi's songs. The following discussion of Rwandan history is thus extracted from scholarly sources combined with information gathered from personal conversations with Rwandans. Finally, the third purpose is to emphasize that the criteria by which Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa have been constituted has changed throughout time and varied by region. These identities were not a primordial given.<sup>4</sup> Depending on how ethnicity is defined, using the term to categorically refer to Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa can radically distort the historical quality of these identities and their relationship to one another. The term is commonly used in Western scholarship on Rwanda as a matter of verbal economy, because it is the Western term<sup>5</sup> that comes closest to describing these identities. But in doing so, it is at the same time imperative that the concept of ethnicity be interrogated rather than assumed. An awareness of this is critical when contemplating Bikindi's intentions, for when he seemingly references ethnicity, the

---

genocide denialism. In fact, Chomsky wrote the foreword, provoking the exchange with Monbiot. See *The Politics of Genocide* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> An excellent discussion of this issue is found in Dominique Franche, *Généologie du génocide rwandais* (Brussels: Tribord, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> In Francophone scholarship, the similar term *ethnie* or *ethnique* is commonly used.

question should arise as to what conceptualization of ethnicity he has in mind—or if he is actually referencing ethnicity at all.

## General Framework of Rwandan History

Rwanda's history is conventionally divided into five major eras: the ancient era (likely as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century to ca. 17<sup>th</sup> century), the Abanyiginya monarchial era (ca. 17<sup>th</sup> century to late-19<sup>th</sup> century), the colonial-monarchial era (late-19<sup>th</sup> c. to 1962), the independent republic era (1962 to 1994), and the post-genocide era (1994 to the present).<sup>6</sup> Each era may then be subdivided. The ancient era comprises over a thousand-year period during which various kinship groups (*imiryango*) entered and settled the region, eventually consolidating into larger clan-like alliances (*ubwoko*). The Abanyiginya monarchial era comprises a succession of Tutsi kings (*abami*), each of which altered geographic boundaries and used various means of subjugation to transform the dominant power structure.<sup>7</sup> The colonial-monarchial era began in 1884 when the Berlin Conference awarded Ruanda-Urundi to the German East Africa Company, though the Germans did not encounter the Abanyiginya court until nearly ten years later when Count Gustav Adolf von Götzen arrived with a small retinue of soldiers. Permanent occupation did not begin until 1898.<sup>8</sup> In 1919, following Germany's defeat in World War I, the League of Nations stripped Germany of its colonies and awarded Ruanda-Urundi to Belgium. During both the German and Belgian occupations, but especially during the latter, a distinction between Hutu and Tutsi as separate racial groups was formulated and hierarchically reinforced. In 1961, Belgium divided Ruanda-Urundi into the nations of Rwanda and Burundi, and granted each its independence. Burundi became ruled by the multi-ethnic but Tutsi-dominated UPRONA party (*Union pour le Progrès national*), led by the Tutsi prince, Louis Rwagasore. In total contrast, Rwanda became ruled by the exclusively Hutu PARMEHutu (*Parti du mouvement de l'emancipation Hutu*), founded by Grégoire Kayibanda. Kayibanda and other Hutu

---

<sup>6</sup> These phases are commonly termed the pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial, and post-genocide phases. This is problematic in that European colonialism becomes the primary referent for conceptually orienting Rwanda's history (for that matter, all African history). As forceful of an impact as it has had on the history of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Rwanda, colonialism was but a small part of African history taken as a whole. Furthermore, such terminology suggests that colonialism eclipses the ultimately more significant role that Rwandans have had in determining their history.

<sup>7</sup> Kings and kingdoms certainly existed in Rwanda before the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but this date marks the beginning of the Abanyiginya dynasty, the most powerful and influential kingdom to emerge in the region.

<sup>8</sup> The colonial administration was based in Bujumbura, now the capital of Burundi. At first, the colonial occupation was much more entrenched in Burundi earlier than Rwanda.



revolutionaries led a popular uprising that resulted in the deposition and exile of the king. The revolt included the massacres of thousands of Tutsi; this then led to hundreds of thousands more fleeing. Those who settled in southern Uganda eventually formed the RPF. The era of independence is subdivided into the periods of the First and Second Republics. The First Republic was led by Kayibanda and PARMEHutu,<sup>9</sup> but in 1973, General Habyarimana and his loyal soldiers ousted Kayibanda in a bloodless coup. Habyarimana founded the MRND party, still dominated by Hutu, and declared all competing parties illegal. Habyarimana remained in power until he was killed in 1994, his death instigating the genocide. When the RPF took over, it then banned the MRND party and has since retained control of the government. Though the RPF was dominated by Tutsi, the first post-genocide President was the Hutu, Pasteur Bizimungu, with Paul Kagame serving as his Vice-President. Bizimungu was a holdover from the Habyarimana administration but had been an outspoken critic of its extremist elements. The RPF, therefore, strategically installed him as a way of smoothing over the transition to the new government and deflecting accusations that the RPF favored Tutsi. By the late 1990s, however, the relationship between Bizimungu and Kagame had soured. Kagame ascended to the Presidency in 2000 when Bizimungu resigned amid allegations of corruption, treason, divisionism, and threatening national security. In 2004, he was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment, but in 2007, Kagame issued him a full pardon. Kagame was formally elected in 2003 in the first national elections held since the genocide. He received over 95% of the official vote. He was then re-elected in 2010, this time with 93% of the vote.

While few Rwandans would dispute this basic framework of history, the main disagreement is over the criteria by which ethnicity was constituted, the character of ethnic and political relations throughout each era, and who or what was ultimately responsible for the genocide. I generally encountered two clashing historical narratives, each standing in near negative relief of the other. One could be called the pro-RPF narrative, as it is the one espoused by most RPF officials and their supporters and is considered to be what is politically correct. Arguing against this narrative in today's Rwanda can result in criminal charges. Of the participants who adhered to this narrative, almost all were Tutsi who either survived the genocide or were raised in the exile settlements in Uganda or Burundi and later moved to

---

<sup>9</sup> Mbonyumutwa served officially as Rwanda's first President, but it was only of a provisional nature. Deeply unpopular, his time as President lasted all of nine months, and he was replaced by Kayibanda.

Rwanda after the RPF takeover. A summary of the pro-RPF narrative is found on the government's official website. It begins as follows:

For centuries, Rwanda existed as a centralized monarchy under a succession of Tutsi kings from one clan, who ruled through cattle chiefs, land chiefs and military chiefs. The king was supreme but the rest of the population, Bahutu, Batutsi, and Batwa, lived in symbiotic harmony. In 1899, Rwanda became a German colony and, in 1919, the system of indirect rule continued with Rwanda as a mandate territory of the League of Nations, under Belgium. From 1959, Batutsi were targeted, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths and sending almost two million of them into exile. The First Republic, under President Grégoire Kayibanda, and the second, under President Juvenal Habyarimana, institutionalized discrimination against Batutsi and subjected them to periodic massacres. The Rwandese Alliance for National Unity (RANU) was formed in 1979 by Rwandan refugees in exile, to mobilize against divisive politics and genocide ideology, repeated massacres, statelessness and the lack of peaceful political exchange. In 1987, RANU became the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF). On 1 October 1990, the RPF launched an armed liberation struggle that ultimately ousted the dictatorship in 1994 and ended the genocide of more than one million Batutsi and massacres of moderate Bahutu who opposed the genocide.<sup>10</sup>

Notice that the subjugation of Hutu under the monarchy is never mentioned, only the oppression of Tutsi under the republic. The RPF also presents itself as a heroic force, utterly without blame. In opposition to this narrative, several of this study's participants and numerous scholars adhere to what I refer to as the anti-RPF narrative. Of the participants, all were Hutu who perceived themselves as having been victimized to some degree by the RPF.<sup>11</sup> The following historical review will specify areas of disagreement between the two sides, then pore through the historiographic literature in order to provide further details, especially those related to ethnic and political conflict.

---

<sup>10</sup> "Brief History of Rwanda." Official Website of the Government of Rwanda. Available at: <http://www.gov.rw/History>.

<sup>11</sup> See Mamdani 2001, p. 41, who makes a similar point. Instead of referring to the two narratives as the pro-RPF and anti-RPF sides, he refers to them, respectively, as the Tutsi and Hutu narratives.

## The Ancient Era

Most agree that Rwanda was first inhabited by people who hunted and foraged in the dense forests and rugged piedmonts of the western region. Their descendents were eventually known as Twa, and today, they constitute a very small minority (less than 1%) of Rwanda's population.<sup>12</sup> The disagreement arises over the origins and relationship between those who later became known as Hutu and Tutsi. The pro-RPF side claims that Hutu and Tutsi originated from the same stock of people and migrated together to Rwanda. The terms evolved as a way of designating occupation: Hutu were mainly involved in farming and Tutsi were mainly involved in cattle breeding. The anti-RPF side claims that Hutu, who at the time did mainly subsist on farming, arrived first as a distinct group, and that Tutsi, who mainly subsisted on cattle breeding, arrived much later, often invading Hutu farmlands so that they could use them to graze their herds. Because cattle were the main indicator of wealth and status, Tutsi eventually established social, economic, and political dominance over Hutu. This theme of Tutsi as foreign subjugators became one of the ideological embers that later fueled the genocide, and it reflects the perceptions many Rwandans, especially peasant Hutu farmers, have of the RPF today, since the RPF also invaded from outside the nation and is mostly comprised of Tutsi. One can see why the RPF would desire to revise this.

Both sides are surely correct to some extent. According to Jan Vansina, Rwanda was settled by numerous large kinship groups called *imiryango*. Each was comprised of several smaller lineage groups called *umuryango*. *Umuryango* were then further subdivided into multiple *inzu*, the smallest kinship unit, comprised of grandparents, parents, and children (*inzu* means "house" or "household"). As the number of *imiryango* increased, they forged alliances in order to protect themselves from enemies and secure their lands and means of producing food and gathering resources. Through these alliances, the population eventually consolidated into about fifteen *ubwoko*, a number that eventually grew to around twenty. *Ubwoko*, in this context, is usually translated as "clan" (this will change under colonial rule), but unlike the conventional understanding of clanship, members of the same *ubwoko* were not necessarily blood-related but rather were united by common geopolitical and economic interests. Individual *imiryango* and *inzu* could, depending on their own interests, break off from one *ubwoko* and join another or, if

---

<sup>12</sup> Twa tend to live in isolated communes and have long been marginalized by the rest of Rwandan society. Recently, their plight is receiving more attention as efforts are being made by the government and charity organizations to increase their status.

powerful enough, form a whole new *ubwoko*.<sup>13</sup> In the song, “Intabaza,” Bikindi references several prominent *ubwoko*, for example, the Abasindi, Ababanda, Abega, Abazigaba, Abaguyana, Abagesera, and others. The most important geopolitical unit was the hill or mountain (*umusizi*). The most powerful leaders of an *imiryango* or *ubwoko* made their household at the peak, with the less and less powerful living at lower and lower elevations. “Intabaza” references several prominent hills as well, especially Mwima and Mushirarunugu at the crests of which resided the leaders of the most powerful *ubwoko* in Rwandan history, the Abanyiginya.

### **The Origins of Hutu and Tutsi**

The precise origins of Hutu and Tutsi are a mystery. Vansina maintains that the names denoted a blend of occupational affiliation and social, economic, and political status. The term “Hutu” was not widely used until the monarchial era. Those who subsisted off of farming practices—that is, the great majority of the population—would have been referred to by their *ubwoko*, *imiryango*, *inzu*, or by locality. Only a minority primarily bred cattle, and they were called either “Hima” or “Tutsi.” The usage of these terms varied by region; for example, in southern Uganda and northern Rwanda, “Hima” was used. In central and southern Rwanda and northern Burundi, particularly in the central Nduga region (roughly corresponding today with the regions surrounding Kigali, Nyanza, and Gitarama), both terms may have been used, but “Tutsi” referred not to all cattle breeders, but only to the elites—those who owned abundant herds, bountiful reserves of food, much land, and therefore wielded significant influence among their peers.<sup>14</sup>

Vansina’s theory would thus seem to affirm the pro-RPF narrative that Hutu and Tutsi evolved out of the same stock of people who migrated to Rwanda together. There is some evidence, though, that challenges this. For one, while appearances alone do not necessarily distinguish Hutu from Tutsi, clear differences exist at the far ends of the spectrum. A Rwandan who is quite tall and thin, with sharp, angular facial features and a longer, pointier nose is almost certainly a Tutsi. These are traits typical of Nilotic peoples. One of several ancestral population

---

<sup>13</sup> Jan Vansina, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya Kingdom* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), pp. 30-31. See also David Newbury, “The Clans of Rwanda: A Historical Hypothesis,” in *Africa* 50 (1980), pp. 97-111.

<sup>14</sup> Vansina 2004, pp. 36-38.

clusters in Africa, Nilotes historically inhabited the regions of Ethiopia, Somalia, southern Sudan, and parts of Uganda and Kenya.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, most Hutu display the blunter facial features and carry the stockier builds that are characteristic of Bantu peoples (as do many Tutsi).<sup>16</sup> The Nilotic features of some Tutsi therefore suggest that they descended from people who migrated from the north. Vansina does not neglect this apparent genetic diversity but argues that it extends back millennia rather than centuries.<sup>17</sup> According to this, Nilotic peoples likely migrated to Rwanda a very long time ago, bringing with them their cattle-herding way of life. Some Tutsi descended from these early migrants, but by the time the term “Tutsi” was in use, there had been so much intermarriage throughout the generations that genetic difference was less relevant than other factors in defining ethnicity. “Tutsi” still primarily referred to a combination of occupational, political, economic, and social status—not a genetically defined group. Walter Rodney (1971), whose work was widely read by RPF members and incorporated into their ideology,<sup>18</sup> argued that Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa did not descend from separate origins. To account for their morphological differences, he theorized that this was due to longstanding differences in diet. Because Twa foraged in the forests and hunted small game, they ate more sparingly and a very lean diet at that, thus accounting for their small stature. Hutu, as farmers, consumed a diet rich in starch and carbohydrates, thus their larger, stockier build. Tutsi consumed milk, honey, and beef, a diet rich in protein and calcium, thus their taller, leaner frame. In an earlier work, Luc de Heutsch (1966) saw dietary differentiation as evidence of separate origins, arguing that it reflected cultural practices that would likely have evolved only in isolation. If Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa had originated together, there would not be so much difference in their dietary ways of life. J. C. Desmarais (1978)<sup>19</sup> theorized that Tutsi elites applied their knowledge of cattle breeding to themselves. They purposefully paired up those who were tall and who possessed refined facial features because these were considered the marks of noble bearing. Whatever the merits or

---

<sup>15</sup> There is much controversy over the extent to which these categories are genetically unified. They originated in colonial racial discourse as Europeans observed morphological traits that broadly distinguished the inhabitants of various regions. Much of this was discarded in the anti-colonial movement in scholarship from the 1970s onward. Recently, though, DNA testing has begun to confirm certain colonial observations that African populations were comprised of genetically distinct groups. See Tishkoff, Reed, Friedlander, et al, “The Genetic Structure and History of Africans and African Americans,” in *Science*, vol. 324, no. 5930 (22 May 2009), pp.1035-44. The main problem with colonial scholarship was not the observations themselves; it was the hierarchical valuations that colonial scholars ascribed to different groups of people.

<sup>16</sup> See also J. Hiernaux (1956) and A. Froment (1998), cited in Vansina 2004, p. 235.

<sup>17</sup> Vansina 2004, pp. 37-38.

<sup>18</sup> Mamdani 2001, p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> See the discussion of these scholarly works in Taylor 1999, pp.71-75.

shortcomings of Desmarais' theory, one will observe that even today, many Rwandans consider these features to be highly attractive, and men will often seek out Tutsi women who have inherited them.

### **Abanyiginya Monarchial Era**

The precise origins of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa will likely long be debated without resolution. What is clear is that throughout the rule of the Abanyiginya dynasty, these identities took on a political and economic dimension with the highest levels of power, prestige, and privilege reserved for Tutsi. The pro-RPF side claims that under monarchial rule, while it was often violent, there was no conflict along the Hutu-Tutsi axis. There were certainly wars and rivalries, but these were due to the ambitions of various *ubwoko* and kinship groups vying for land, resources, and power. The anti-RPF side claims that the monarchial era was a time when Hutu were eventually all but enslaved by Tutsi kings and chiefs and forced to toil in misery.

### **Ruganzu Ndori and the Birth of the Abanyiginya Dynasty**

Inequalities in power and wealth coalesced over the centuries into the establishment of a few major kingdoms and multiple smaller chiefdoms. Some of these chiefdoms were autonomous, while others submitted to the greater authority of a kingdom. Some kings and chiefs were Hima or Tutsi cattle breeders, but others (likely not yet referred to as Hutu) derived their power and wealth from ownership of large tracts of farmland. Sometime during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, a new dynasty arose out of a relatively new *ubwoko*, the Abanyiginya. Its founding leader was Ruganzu<sup>20</sup> Ndori. Vansina believes that he was likely a Hima whose family migrated from the north and settled in the southern-central region of Nduga. Ndori possessed a large herd,<sup>21</sup> and through scrupulous business practices, he cultivated a loyal following from among his neighbors. This new clan flourished, and as head of it, Ndori was regarded as a Tutsi. With his vast wealth and increasing influence, he developed a well-organized and powerful standing army, an important innovation for the time, which he used to raid and plunder other territories

---

<sup>20</sup> "Ruganzu" translates as "The Great."

<sup>21</sup> In general, Hima herds were much larger than Tutsi herds. This was mostly due to geography. Southern Uganda, where Hima flourished, is much flatter than Rwanda and covered by grasslands. As one travels into Rwanda, the landscape becomes suddenly more mountainous, not ideal conditions for herding cattle. However, the relative scarcity of cattle makes them a more valuable commodity, and thus owning cattle becomes even more a mark of wealth and prestige.

and to protect his burgeoning kingdom. Indeed, Ndori regarded himself as a king (*umwami*). As no kingdom was considered legitimate without its own heraldic drum (*ngoma*), Ndori took as his standard the mighty *Kalinga*, which he and his successors decorated with the desiccated testicles of their fallen opponents. References to *Kalinga* are found in two of Bikindi's songs, "Twasazareye" and "Intabaza." A true king was also deified by his subjects. They believed that the king embodied the land and through the very workings of his body was responsible for promoting ecological balance, especially rainfall. To ensure the king's health, safety, and success in this role, it was necessary to regularly observe divine rituals performed by a loyal group of court ritualists called *abiru*. These rituals also encouraged solidarity throughout the kingdom by requiring the participation of subject chiefs and other important court members. Therefore, to cement his legitimacy as a king, Ndori sought the acknowledgment and fealty of three nearby kinship groups, the Kono, Tsobe, and Tege, whose members were known for their divine abilities to oversee these rituals.<sup>22</sup>

Through cunning diplomacy, keen military organization, cattle raids, the *Kalinga* drum, and the loyalty of the *abiru*, Ndori established the Abanyiginya kingdom and birthed a powerful dynasty that would last for over two centuries. His court was located at Nyanza, in the heart of Nduga. At first, the Abanyiginya kingdom was relatively small, but by its apex in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, its boundaries would encompass most of present-day Rwanda.<sup>23</sup> As the focal character in the creation of much dynastic poetry and other oral literature, Ndori evolved into a figure of legend. Vansina describes him as, "Above all...the protagonist in an epic story, the hero of a great cycle of marvelous tales, some of which are endowed with great formal beauty. Above all he, like Sunjata [Keita] or Alexander [the Great], is the heroic founder of a state."<sup>24</sup> Bikindi's songs make several references to Ndori as well, but in his songs, Ndori is not a hero but a villain—a devious, greedy scoundrel who laid the foundation for centuries of injustice and oppression.

---

<sup>22</sup> Vansina 2004, pp. 44-66.

<sup>23</sup> As C. Newbury (1988) has convincingly shown, the Abanyiginya's domain of control was not nearly as widespread as scholars once believed. Kingdoms and chiefdoms in the northern and western regions remained largely independent until the Belgium colonial administration brought them under the centralized power structure of the monarchy.

<sup>24</sup> Vansina 2004, p. 44.

## The Beginning of the Patron-Client System

Vansina acknowledges that already by the time Ndori came to power, an unevenly reciprocal labor system had developed between Tutsi elites and others (usually less wealthy cattle breeders) known as *ubugabire*.<sup>25</sup> The cow was the primary unit of currency, used for all manner of economic transactions. Under *ubugabire*, a patron (*shebuja*) would lend to a client (*umugaragu*) one or more heads of cattle.<sup>26</sup> The client would then offer the firstborn of each calving in exchange. More importantly, the client was then bound to work for the patron until the deal was dissolved, usually at the time when the initial cow or cattle finally died. While *ubugabire* involved an unequal power relation, it could be mutually beneficial and was usually entered into voluntarily. If the client was shrewd with his loan, he could ascend to higher levels of status.

*Ubugabire* evolved into other patron-client arrangements. There continues to be much confusion, misunderstanding, and contradiction among scholars regarding these arrangements. What matters for the present purposes is that these arrangements effected both social integration and social cleavage. They could bind individuals, families, and larger social groups together into economically and politically reciprocal relationships, but they could also be quite exploitative, engendering resentment and rebellion. Among the harshest of these arrangements was *ubuhake*. According to Vansina, it was Ndori who first introduced *ubuhake*.<sup>27</sup> Unlike *ubugabire*, *ubuhake* involved a lifelong contract. Furthermore, it was hereditary, meaning that a client's descendants were also subservient to the descendants of the patron. In return, the patron offered protection of the client families and their herds. Military protection was important because raiding and pillaging was common; indeed, Ndori was perhaps the most successful raider of all during his time. The only way out of the deal was for client families to give up their entire herds to the patron, condemning themselves to a life of poverty and insecurity. *Ubugabire* first mainly involved an arrangement between the king or his officials and lesser rulers or cattle breeders, but other forms of remission on the part of the client that did not involve cattle later developed, often hoes or armlets and other decorative items. Non-cattle breeders could thus also become *ubuhake* clients. Catherine Newbury, in contrast, while making no claims as to the precise origins of *ubuhake*, states that it was an arrangement between individuals, not lineages. According to her

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 33, 47.

<sup>26</sup> Occasionally, the transaction might involve other goods, but cows were the most commonly used commodity.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-48.



research, it was another kind of patron-client system, *umuheto*, that involved whole lineages. Unlike *ubuhake*, the two *umuheto* parties usually respected one another and used the system to their mutual benefit. The client bred the patron's cows for him, then gifted calves to the patron once every year or two. The patron then provided protection of the client's own herd. This resembles Vansina's description of *ubuhake*. The difference, according to Newbury, is that *ubuhake* was more demanding; the patron could require several heads of cattle from the client and at more frequent intervals than just once a year. Also, because it involved a contract between individuals, *ubuhake* was more prone to creating social cleavages because individual members of a kin group might serve as clients to different, competing patrons. Newbury states that *umuheto* preceded *ubuhake*.<sup>28</sup> (Vansina, meanwhile, makes no mention of *umuheto*, while Newbury makes no mention of *ubugabire*. Most scholars mention neither and focus only on *ubuhake*, describing it in still more contradictory ways. For example, Johan Pottier claims that *ubuhake* did not emerge until the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, two hundred years after Ndori<sup>29</sup>).

### **The Expansion and Complexity of the Monarchy**

It is not necessary here to recount the succession of all the Abanyiginya kings and their schemes, exploits, and other events related to them, but rather to point out a few important developments that will impact one's reading of Bikindi's lyrics. The first is that, following a civil war that lasted from 1796-1801, the Abanyiginya kings gradually developed a political and economic system that was highly structured and quite sophisticated.<sup>30</sup> By the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, various administrative divisions had been established to oversee the military, the divine rituals, and most importantly, the distribution and management of land. The latter tended to result in resentment and jealousy. Kings and their top officials granted large tracts of land to favored cattle breeders, military officials, and other political supporters in order to reward them and ensure their loyalty, an arrangement that was called *igikindi*.<sup>31</sup> Anyone who had been previously using these lands either had to submit themselves as clients to the new tenants or find somewhere else to go. More and more land was doled out in this manner, especially throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and so less and less was available to the rest of the population. As a result,

---

<sup>28</sup> C. Newbury 1988, pp. 74-82.

<sup>29</sup> Johan Pottier, *Re-imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press: 2002), p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> Vansina 2004, pp.126-39.

<sup>31</sup> C. Newbury 1988, pp. 79, 119.

ordinary cattle breeders, who were by then also called Tutsi (discussed below) found their herds diminishing and with that their socioeconomic status. Many Tutsi thus turned to farming to survive. The song, “Intabaza,” focuses on the oppression of and infighting between farmers, a group that included both Hutu and many Tutsi. Nevertheless, Bikindi’s critics argue that he is only speaking of Hutu when he references farmers.

New administrative chiefdoms were created to exact taxes, settle local disputes, oversee the military, and manage land and determine whether it be used for grazing or farming. The chiefdom structure resembled a quasi-pyramid scheme with the lesser “hill chiefs” subservient to provincial chiefs who were then subservient to one of the king’s appointees, though the authority of chiefs crosscut one another in complex ways. Almost all chiefs acted as patrons to at least a few clients, but many were also clients of more powerful chiefs or of the king. Two types of provincial chiefs were “chiefs of the long grass” (*abanyankenke*), who taxed and managed cattle breeders, and “chiefs of the land” (*abanyabutaka*), who oversaw agricultural work. There was often much grist between these two chiefs and their representatives. Since cattle were so valued and grazing land becoming scarcer due to a multiplying population and the practice of *igikindi*, the chiefs of the long grass usually got their way.

Paralleling the increasing complexity of the monarchical administration, the patron-client system became even more diversified. There were patron-client arrangements that had to do with land usage as opposed to borrowing cattle. The main type of these was *ubukonde*, where owners of large tracts of land would rent out some of their land to farmers in return for a percentage of the harvest, similar in ways to the sharecropping system that developed in the American South.<sup>32</sup> Disputing the scholarly consensus that was prevalent up to around the 1970s, both Vansina and C. Newbury argue that when the patron-client system first developed, only a small fraction of the population submitted to it, and of those who did, most were lesser Tutsi who submitted to more powerful Tutsi. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though, most Rwandans found themselves entangled in some sort of patron-client contract. In Bikindi’s songs, the patron-client system is mentioned or alluded to several times and always in a negative way.

---

<sup>32</sup> C. Newbury, pp. 79-81; Vansina 2004, pp. 40, 132, 134.

## Hutu and Tutsi as Occupational and Socioeconomic Identities

The most critical development concerns the evolution and application of the terms “Tutsi” and “Hutu.” Vansina claims that “Hutu” was a term of derision used by Tutsi elites to refer to those they viewed as inferior, alluding to “rural boorishness and loutish behavior.”<sup>33</sup> It was applied not just to poor farmers but to anyone who made a living doing menial labor, servants, and even to people who lived outside the kingdom (in this latter sense, it carried similar connotations as the term “barbarian”). It was also used to refer to those who served in the military but were not allowed to engage in combat.<sup>34</sup> With its potential for spoils and glory, combat was an honor reserved only for those of higher status, and since ownership of cattle was the prime marker of status, those who were allowed to engage in warfare were usually Tutsi while those who were barred from warfare were often non-elite farmers. As the Abanyiginya kingdom expanded, its military system and associated terminology spread so that the term “Hutu” eventually came to refer to all farmers and “Tutsi” to all cattle breeders, whether they served in the military or not and whether they were of high status or not. Chiefs of the land, for instance, were usually regarded as Hutu, because they were affiliated with farming. Many Tutsi, on the other hand, possessed only a small herd of cattle and had to farm in order to survive (under colonial rule, these lesser Tutsi were called “*petit* Tutsi”). Indeed, not all patrons were Tutsi and not all clients were Hutu. For example, a chief of the land, who very well may have been Hutu, could have had several Tutsi clients. To summarize Vansina’s theory, before the institutionalization of this terminology in the military, “Hutu” was employed by Tutsi elites in a rather snobbish fashion. Following their institutionalization in the military, the terms became widely used and associated with occupational affiliation while denoting only to a limited extent and only in certain cases economic and political status.

The conceptual application of the term “Hutu” and “Tutsi” was not uniform but was adopted slowly and variably by region. For example, in Burundi as late as 1960, “Tutsi” still applied only to elites who descended from the more powerful kinship lineages of cattle breeders.<sup>35</sup> C. Newbury identified during field research in the early 1970s that inhabitants of Ijwi Island (located in Lake Kivu along the Rwandan-Congolese border) still did not use the

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

terms “Hutu” and “Tutsi”; Rwandans were instead distinguished by their *ubwoko*, *umuryango*, or *inzu*.<sup>36</sup>

Where the terms were in use in Rwanda, a person’s identity as a Hutu or Tutsi was patrilineally inherited. Still, identities were not fixed at first. Over time a person or family might switch identities due to intermarriage, the acquisition or loss of cattle, and/or by ascending or descending the sociopolitical ladder. These factors explain why, in *most* cases, Hutu and Tutsi cannot be distinguished by appearances alone.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Social and Political Inferiorizing of Hutu**

The political relationship between Hutu and Tutsi was dramatically altered and polarized under the penultimate Abanyiginya king, Rwabugiri (Kigeri IV),<sup>38</sup> who ruled from 1853-1895. Rwabugiri’s reputation is that of a tyrant, and his reign was marked by near constant warfare, terror, and internal conflict within his court. Through the use of brute force, he centralized authority under his rule, stripping the autonomy of more distant chiefdoms and bringing them under his control. He amassed an enormous and technologically advanced army (many of his soldiers were armed with rifles). He then dispatched his armies to reinforce and expand the borders of the Abanyiginya kingdom so that by the end of his reign, it encompassed most of present-day Rwanda.

Rwabugiri devised a new patron-client system called *uburetwa*.<sup>39</sup> Unlike pre-existing patron-client arrangements, *uburetwa* required most Hutu and *only* Hutu to submit to it; Tutsi, no matter how meager their status, were exempt. Thus contravening the pro-RPF narrative, there was indeed hierarchical division between Hutu and Tutsi before the arrival of colonialism. The terms of the new system were severe, and the only reciprocity on the part of the patrons, who in this case were the king and various local chiefs, was that Hutu were allowed access to their farmlands. Hutu families were required to build and maintain roads and embark on long marches to Rwabugiri’s palace or to the courts of his chiefs, bearing foodstuffs and luxury goods such as tobacco, honey, and beer. It also required Hutu to serve as night watchmen and to perform other

---

<sup>36</sup> C. Newbury 1988, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Because Twa have historically sequestered themselves in isolated communities and have rarely intermarried, they still appear quite distinct from most other Rwandans.

<sup>38</sup> Rwandan kings were identified by both their given birth name and their royal lineage name, the latter indicated in parentheses. The birth name seems to be more commonly used in Rwandan historiography.

<sup>39</sup> Vansina 2004, pp. 134-39.

tasks such as collecting and drying firewood, again labor that often had to be performed during the night so that Hutu could tend to their farms during the day.<sup>40</sup> Any failure to meet a certain labor quota was met with whippings, the forfeiture of land, or worse. Beginning in 1885, the injustice of the system provoked a series of uprisings, but they were quickly squelched.<sup>41</sup> Under *uburetwa*, the identities of Hutu and Tutsi were further hierarchically institutionalized and rigidified; it was all but impossible now for Hutu to become Tutsi. *Uburetwa* was the most hated policy among Hutu, and Bikindi specifically denounces it in his songs.

### **The End of the Dynasty**

For all his cruel swagger, Rwabugiri's power was hardly secure. The queen-mother, Kanjogera, whose power was nearly equal to that of the king, was a member of the Abega clan, long a rival of the Abanyiginya. She and Rwabugiri were married in part to maintain peaceful cooperation (the queen-mothers had for some time arose from the Abega for this purpose), but Rwabugiri infuriated her and the Abega when he went against the established royal code and selected Rutarindwa, the son of one of his lesser, non-Abega wives, to succeed him. When Rwabugiri died suddenly in 1895, the kingdom entered a period of near anarchy. Adding to the political instability, Rwanda was in the midst of a severe famine, a locust invasion, a smallpox outbreak, an epidemic of rinderpest that had wiped out much of the cattle, and an infestation of jiggers—small flea-like insects that bore into the toes and fingers, causing great discomfort. Rutarindwa inherited his father's throne as Mibambwe IV, but a year later was deposed in a coup orchestrated by Kanjogera. He subsequently committed suicide. Kanjogera's own son, Musinga (Yuhi V), was then installed as king. He was affiliated with the Abega, and so with his ascension, the great Abanyiginya dynasty came to an end.

### **Colonial-Monarchial Era**

Few Rwandans have kind things to say about the colonial occupation of their land by Germany and Belgium, but there are still sharp differences between the pro-RPF and anti-RPF views of this era. The disagreement has mainly to do with the level of responsibility colonialism bears for creating conflict between Hutu and Tutsi. The pro-RPF side argues that colonialism

---

<sup>40</sup> Newbury 1988, pp. 140-44.

<sup>41</sup> Vansina 2004, pp. 136-37.

was solely responsible for inflaming anti-Tutsi resentment by instilling the idea that Tutsi were a superior race and then favoring them politically over Hutu and Twa. This view persists in the belief that there was little tension, discrimination, or conflict between the groups before colonialism, removing any culpability on the part of the Tutsi-dominated monarchy. The anti-RPF side argues that there were already problems between Hutu and Tutsi elites and that colonialism only exacerbated them; indeed, Tutsi elites took advantage of colonial support to tighten their grip on power and further plunge Hutu into submission and poverty.

### **The Hamitic Myth and the Racialization of Hutu and Tutsi**

The Germans first encountered the Abanyiginya court in the early 1890s, just shortly before Rwabugiri's death. They were struck by its elaborate political and economic systemization and the dominance of a Tutsi minority. Sure, they noted that here and there Hutu had also attained a few chiefdoms and that many Tutsi were not so wealthy or influential. But by and large, those who were in positions of power were Tutsi, and though they were vastly outnumbered by Hutu, they had still somehow managed to subjugate them. The Germans also noticed the three physiognomies that broadly distinguished Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. They combined these observations with the racial theories that were prevalent in Europe at the time to conclude that Tutsi had originated from somewhere closer to Europe. According to their thinking, "true Africans" were not intelligent nor civilized enough to have devised such an intricate political and economic scheme. *Ubwoko* came to refer not to clan affiliation but to a person's identity as either a Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa, understood now as a hierarchically distinguished race, with Tutsi at the top and Hutu and Twa at the bottom.

The Hamitic hypothesis or Hamitic myth was among the most influential of these racial ideas.<sup>42</sup> It was named after the Biblical character Ham, the youngest of Noah's three sons. The relevant passage is found in the ninth chapter of Genesis. Following the establishment of the covenant between Noah and Yahweh, Noah consumes a copious amount of wine and falls asleep naked in a drunken stupor, a sight that causes Ham to erupt in laughter. When Noah awakes and learns of his son's mockery, he curses Ham and decrees that his descendants will serve as slaves for the descendants of his brothers. Rabbinic treatises in the Middle Ages embellished the story to say that Ham was then cursed with darkened skin, larger lips, and short, tightly curled hair—

---

<sup>42</sup> See Taylor 1999 and Mamdani 2001.

traits generally associated with African heredity. The Curse of Ham was used to self-righteously affirm the view among Europeans that Africans were their inferiors and that their enslavement was justified. Employing tautological reasoning, they believed that Africans, because they were seen as fit for slavery, must be the descendants of the cursed Ham, and in turn, because they were the descendants of the cursed Ham, they were fit for slavery. This view was altered in some cases, as it was in Ruanda-Urundi. In such cases, the colonialists did not believe that *all* Africans were the descendants of Ham, but only those who exemplified a more “civilized” way of life and were able to establish political dominance. These Hamites were believed to have originated somewhere in the Near East, perhaps present-day Turkey, and eventually migrated to present-day Egypt, Ethiopia and Somalia. Because they originated closer to Europe, they had inherited some of the supposedly superior traits of Europeans. As for the reason the Hamites took on African physical features, this was simply due to inbreeding.

For a time, Tutsi elites were happy to confirm this belief as it only further validated their superiority in relation to the rest of the population. If they had indeed migrated from the north and were then able to subjugate the native Hutu and Twa, then it was a sign of their intelligence, resourcefulness, and thus their fitness to rule. By the end of the colonial-monarchial era, Hutu revolutionaries would turn the Hamitic myth on its head. The notion of Tutsi as foreign subjugators *vis-à-vis* Hutu indigeneity delegitimized the political domination of Tutsi and rallied Hutu to overthrow the monarchy.

### **The Colonial-Monarchial Alliance**

Musinga was enthroned in 1896, shortly after the Germans encountered the Abanyiginya kingdom. Musinga may have ushered in a new dynasty, but he continued much of the practices of his forebears, including *ubuhake* and *uburetwa*. Given that he had ascended via a violent coup and that he was only in his teens, his claim to the throne was tenuous. Musinga realized that the Germans presented an opportunity to secure his power. The Germans were happy to oblige, because they, in turn, observed in the monarchical system the sort of civilizing effort that they had come to enact. They also supported the various patron-client policies because it supplied them with cheap labor and a clearly delineated system of labor and production. Operating indirectly through the monarchy and the patron-client policies it instituted, the Germans used Hutu clients to clear forests, build roads, cultivate coffee, and deliver supplies. The terms of

clientship were thus expanded in ways that were even more demanding and arduous for Hutu. To ensure the strength of the monarchy and the continuation of its policies, they provided Musinga with military support. With German assistance, outlying kingdoms and chiefdoms in the north and west that had so far managed to remain autonomous were eventually forced to submit to Musinga's rule. Germany also sent several Catholic priests, known as White Fathers, who established mission schools where they taught literacy and trained students to serve as colonial clerks. At first, only Tutsi were permitted to matriculate, though the schools did eventually open their doors to Hutu.<sup>43</sup>

### **Belgian Colonialism and the Further Racialization of Hutu and Tutsi**

As important as the colonial foray was in propping up Musinga's reign, the German presence in Rwanda was actually quite small. This changed when Belgium took over. Besides scores of officials, soldiers, and priests, a number of French scholars (many of whom were also priests) arrived. They scrounged for more intellectual credibility to their racial theories by examining the oral literature of the monarchy. Influential ethnographies in this regard stemmed from Louis de Lacger (1930), Pere Page (1933), and Jacques Macquet (1954).<sup>44</sup> Post-colonial historians argue that the oral history of the court on which these colonial scholars based their research was likely fabricated—an “invented tradition,” to use Hobsbawm's and Ranger's terminology<sup>45</sup>—that legitimized the Tutsi monarchy.<sup>46</sup> According to these arguments, Europeans presented their racial theories to the royal court, and the court historians, realizing the advantages these conferred upon the monarchy, concocted stories about the origins of Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa and of the monarchy that confirmed their theories.

The most respected and famous Rwandan scholar of the late colonial-monarchical era was the Tutsi priest, Alexis Kagame. From 1943-47, under the directive of the king, he composed a monolithic chronicle of Rwandan history titled *Inganji Kalinga* (The Victory of *Kalinga*,

---

<sup>43</sup> For more on how the church's complicity in ethnic and political division, see Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Louis de Lacger, *Ruanda I. Le Ruanda ancien*, (Kabgayi, Rwanda, 1930); Pere Pages, *Un royaume hamite au centre de l'Afrique* (Brussels: Institut Royal du Congo Belge, 1933); Jacques Macquet, *Les système des relations sociaux dans le Ruanda ancien* (Tervuren, Belgium: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 1954); all cited by Taylor 1999, pp. 71-75.

<sup>45</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

<sup>46</sup> Taylor 1999, pp. 75-77. For exhaustive transcriptions of this body of oral literature, see Pierre Smith, *Le récit populaire au Rwanda* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1975).



referring to the dynastic drum of the Abanyiginya kingdom). Kagame provided the most convincing affirmation yet of the theory of separate racial origins. Moreover, he ascribed the ascension of the monarchy to its military might and large-scale conquests of Hutu chiefdoms by Tutsi kings. As he recounted these conquests, he detailed them in all their bloody glory, including numerous episodes of torture. Kagame's work is still well-known if criticized by Rwandan students. Several of the stories he tells appear throughout Bikindi's songs.

Like the Germans, the Belgians also recognized Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa as biologically distinct races. Throughout the 1920s the administration enacted a census, one of the purposes of which was to determine the "racial" demographics of the colony. Priests traveled throughout the realm taking all measure of phenotypical traits, especially height and cranial dimensions. Based on these metrics, they determined each person's identity. In cases where it could not be determined, they inquired as to the number of cattle a person's family owned. Ten or more, the person was regarded as Tutsi; less than ten, a Hutu. Upon completing its census in 1931, the colonial administration then issued mandatory identity cards that indicated people's racial identity. Over sixty years later, these identity cards would be the mark of death for many Tutsi.

In the same year the Belgian administration issued the racial identity cards, it forced Musinga into exile and replaced him with his son, Rudahigwa (Mutara III). The Belgians distrusted Musinga because of his alliance with their German predecessors. Musinga also refused to acculturate himself to European norms. He declined Christianity, preferred to wear his customary robes, and continued to practice polygamy. The Belgians also wanted more control over the patron-client system so that they could streamline it and select the chiefs that would oversee it. Musinga resisted this.<sup>47</sup> His son, though, was more compliant. Rudahigwa converted to Catholicism, dressed in European-style suits, and traveled about by automobile. Following his lead, thousands of Rwandans also converted, and Catholicism soon became the dominant religion in Rwanda. Hutu were allowed to enroll in Catholic seminaries. Still, the sociopolitical and socioeconomic gap between Hutu and Tutsi grew even more unassailable. Again, most Tutsi were not wealthy and powerful, but of those Rwandans who were wealthy and powerful, almost all were Tutsi.

---

<sup>47</sup> Alison Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News: Rwanda under Musinga, 1896-19* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).

## The Democratic Revolution of 1959-1961

By the early 1950s, in ways and for reasons that are too varied and complex to delve into here, colonial subjects throughout Africa began to organize and clamor for independence. Most European occupiers, their coffers depleted by World War II, recognized the unsustainability of the colonial enterprise and began preparing the transition towards self-government. Rudahigwa initially worked with the Belgians to their mutual benefit, but he eventually grew embittered with the manner in which they manipulated and meddled in the political and economic affairs of his kingdom. He and other Tutsi elites became enamored with the Congolese independence leader, Patrice Lumumba, and his Marxist ideals. Inspired by Lumumba, Rudahigwa began to seek the support of communist-bloc nations.

Around the same time, a small cadre of seminary-educated Hutu, led by Grégoire Kayibanda, Jean Habyarimana Gitera, and others, began to radicalize the Hutu population. Demonstrations routinely broke out, demanding better treatment of Hutu and more Hutu representation in the government.<sup>48</sup> Gitera specifically requested that the great drum, *Kalinga*, be removed as it was an affront to Hutu. Rudahigwa refused to comply with any of this.

Ostracized from state politics, these Hutu counter-elites used their connections within the local Catholic hierarchy to acquire status and influence. Many of them, in fact, were ordained clergy. Further aiding their cause, a new influx of Flemish priests and nuns was gradually replacing the elder clergy. Unlike their predecessors who mostly hailed from the levels of French aristocracy, this new clerical body hailed from more modest backgrounds and as such tended to sympathize with the plight of Hutu. The Belgian government was also wary of the monarchy's new ties to Lumumba and communist Europe, and so it too began to shift its favor towards the pro-democracy Hutu cohort. In 1959, Rudahigwa died suddenly of a brain hemorrhage.<sup>49</sup> To this day, many still suspect he was killed by the Belgians. Rudahigwa left no heir, and so the choice of who would rule fell to the *abiru*. Without consulting the colonial administration, they chose his younger brother, Ndahindurwa (Kigeri V).<sup>50</sup> He would be the last king of Rwanda.

In 1957, Gitera founded APROSOMA (*Association Pour la Promotion Sociale de la Masse*), and Kayibanda founded MSM (*Mouvement Social Muhutu*). The purpose of these

---

<sup>48</sup> C. Newbury 1988, pp. 180-94.

<sup>49</sup> His wife, Rosalie Gicanda, remained in Rwanda but was murdered during the genocide.

<sup>50</sup> Rudahigwa never bore any sons.

organizations was to galvanize Hutu as a political bloc, attain greater political representation, and eventually banish the monarchy once and for all. At first these were activist organizations, but by 1959 they had evolved into political parties at which time the more popular MSM was renamed PARMEHutu (*Parti du mouvement de l'émancipation Hutu*). Whereas Gitera was a firebrand, authoring anti-monarchial screeds and fomenting violent demonstrations, Kayibanda was a quiet tactician who gradually built up support and a rich logistical network. Gitera simply desired to abolish the monarchy and liberate all Rwandans—Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa alike. Kayibanda, however, promoted the ideology of Hutu Power. He desired to replace the monarchy with an exclusively Hutu government. Tensions between Gitera and Kayibanda reflected not just their divergent aims but a longstanding conflict between their respective regions. Gitera was more influential in the northwest and Kayibanda in the south. It was the northwestern kingdoms that were the last to fall to the central monarchy, and its inhabitants would remain resistant to central authority throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even if that authority was in the hands of fellow Hutu. Overcoming this regional conflict is a salient theme throughout Bikindi's songs.

Fearing these newly emergent Hutu-dominated parties and the loss of power in coming election, the monarchy formed its own party, UNAR (*Union Nationale Rwandaise*). UNAR leaders and their supporters employed violence, terror, and coercion as a means of preventing people from supporting PARMEHutu or APROSOMA. On November 1, 1959, a group of young UNAR supporters attacked Dominique Mbonyumutwa, a local chief and Hutu who was a prominent supporter of the anti-monarchial revolt.<sup>51</sup> Mbonyumutwa survived, but the attack set off a two-week wave of anti-Tutsi reprisal violence across Rwanda. Few were actually killed; the protesters mainly destroyed property and burned down houses, but it was enough to send a clear message. Ndahindurwa ordered his army to suppress the uprising and to arrest or kill its leaders. Gitera found protection with the Belgians, Kayibanda went into hiding, but other Hutu leaders were captured and tortured, and some were killed. By mid-November, an uneasy calm was restored when the Belgian administration sent in more troops to take control of the situation. Still, much of the population refused to obey their Tutsi overseers. In response, the Belgians supplanted about half of the chiefs with Hutu who were supportive of either APROSOMA or PARMEHutu. Tutsi had ruled Rwanda for nearly three hundred years, but almost overnight, the Belgians irrevocably reversed the polarities of power in a way that now favored Hutu. From

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 194-206.

June 26 to July 30, 1960, the colonial authority mandated and supervised local communal elections. PARMEHutu representatives easily won the majority of seats. This was followed by legislative elections on September 25, 1961. Again, it was a landslide with PARMEHutu winning thirty-five out of forty-four seats. A referendum was then held to abolish the monarchy. Ndahindurwa was forced into exile (he now lives in Washington, D.C.). On July 1, 1962, Belgium formally declared Rwanda an independent republic and transferred all authority to the new government, led now by Kayibanda and PARMEHutu.

### **The Independent Republic Era**

There is little dispute that the first decade of independence, referred to now as the First Republic, was a tumultuous period, a time when stringent anti-Tutsi laws were passed. Anti-Tutsi discrimination was punctuated by a number of massacres of Tutsi that resulted in mass exoduses and retaliatory attacks by Tutsi exiles. Disagreement arises between the pro-RPF and anti-RPF sides mainly over two broad issues: the treatment of Tutsi during the Second Republic and the motivations and actions of the RPF. The anti-RPF side views the founder of the Second Republic, General Juvénal Habyarimana, as an autocratic but peaceful ruler who provided far more protection and freedom to Tutsi than his predecessor. They believe that the RPF invasions were unprovoked and unjustifiable and that RPF soldiers intentionally slaughtered thousands of innocents. This, they claim, is what ultimately incited genocide, perhaps even that the genocide was intentionally and subversively provoked by the RPF as a way to justify their takeover. The pro-RPF side believes that little changed under Habyarimana and that the oppression of Tutsi continued unabated. Not only that, but it was Habyarimana's cronies in the government and military who conspired to incite genocide as a way of negating political opposition and consolidating public support. They also believe that if Habyarimana would have permitted Tutsi exiles to peacefully return and reintegrate and allowed RPF representation in the government, then the RPF would not have needed to invade. As for the deaths of innocents, the pro-RPF side diminishes the body count and regards it as unintended collateral damage.

### ***Rubanda Nyamwinshi and the Persecution of Tutsi under PARMEHutu***

A wave of anti-Tutsi discrimination and violence followed the abolition of the monarchy. Between 1959 and 1964, fearing for their lives, over a hundred thousand Tutsi fled the country.

Most settled in Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and Congo. Several small militant groups emerged from this massive group of exiles. They staged a few border skirmishes in the futile hope of recapturing the country.<sup>52</sup> These militants were nicknamed “cockroaches” (*inyenzi*), a derisive trope that would come to refer to all Tutsi exiles and, by the 1990s, to all domestic Tutsi as well. The attacks failed miserably and only led to an uptick in anti-Tutsi resentment and violence. Over a two-month period, between December 1963 and January 1964, over 10,000 Tutsi were massacred—a mere preview of the atrocities that would be carried out thirty years later. In Rwanda’s former sister colony, Burundi, this lesser genocide instigated the retaliatory murders of scores of Hutu politicians and intellectuals, including the Prime Minister. Reprisal massacres between Hutu and Tutsi continued in Burundi, culminating in the 1972 genocide in which up to 300,000 Hutu were killed and another 300,000 fled, mostly to Tanzania. Afterward, Tutsi retained control of most of the Burundian government.

Alarmed by anti-Hutu violence in Burundi, the Hutu leadership in Rwanda worked to ensure that the same fate would not befall them. They passed a series of ethnic quota laws that served to marginalize Tutsi and prevent them from attaining significant political influence. Because Tutsi only comprised 9% of the population according to a government census, they should only be allowed to comprise 9% of government positions, student bodies, and all sectors of employment. The dominant political ideology that framed these policies was known as *rubanda nyamwinshi*—“majority rule”—understood along ethnic lines. In reality, though, the suppression of Tutsi was less severe than that. This would change in 1972. Reacting to the Burundian genocide of Hutu, Kayibanda organized a number of “vigilante committees” to scour the nation’s schools, businesses, and local public administration departments in order to make sure that the ethnic quota laws were being enforced.<sup>53</sup> The purging of Tutsi led to another mass exodus, this time mostly to Uganda. Altogether, according to Prunier, between around 500,000 to 700,000 Tutsi had now fled Rwanda due to political persecution since PARMEHutu took power.<sup>54</sup> In addition to their official purpose of restoring ethnic proportionality within the public domain, the vigilante committee members also recognized the opportunity to enrich themselves and their friends. Ousting Tutsi from various sectors of employment and education provided openings that could be easily exploited. This only led to more internal political turmoil,

---

<sup>52</sup> Prunier 1995, pp. 56-57

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

especially between northern-western and southern-central politicians as they argued over how these new openings should be reapportioned and used the vigilante committees to settle scores.

### **Habyarimana and the Second Republic**

Though a gifted organizer, Kayibanda was a feckless leader who was unable to quell the political infighting between representatives of the northwest and south-central regions. Just as important, he failed to generate any level of prosperity throughout society. Rather than invest in infrastructure and economic development, his administration focused on punishing Tutsi and preaching Hutu Power. Throughout his leadership, Rwanda ranked as one of the three or four poorest nations in the world.

Kayibanda was from Gitarama, which made him a Munyanduga, a term that refers to southern-central Rwandans. His top military commander, Juvénal Habyarimana, hailed from the northwestern town of Gisenyi, making him a Mukiga. He was loved by his soldiers and enjoyed a loyal following in the northwest. On July 5, 1973, he leveraged his popularity to remove Kayibanda from power and install himself as President, establishing the Second Republic. The following year, he organized a new political party, MRND (*Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement*), and outlawed PARMEHutu and all other parties. He then decreed that all Rwandans were to become members of MRND.<sup>55</sup>

The policies of *rubanda nyamwinshi* remained loosely in effect under Habyarimana. There were almost no Tutsi in his government, but he relaxed the enforcement of the ethnic quota laws, allowing more Tutsi back into schools, public service jobs, and other sectors of employment. Quite a few Tutsi thrived as entrepreneurs. Habyarimana also ensured the protection and safety of Tutsi. His main message to them seemed to be that as long as they did not interfere in politics, they would be left alone.<sup>56</sup>

Like Kayibanda, Habyarimana was deeply morally conservative, and this quality came to characterize Rwandan society under his administration.<sup>57</sup> He banned any sort of lewd media. In his speeches, he preached virtue and strongly discouraged adultery and divorce. Church and school attendance continued to bloom under his leadership. Moreover, his administration cultivated an ethos of hard work and closely monitored labor and production. Rwanda's GNP

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 75-76.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-82.

and per capita income steadily increased, the Rwandan franc became central Africa's most stable currency, and Western aid came pouring in.

### **Economic Collapse and Multipartyism**

Habyarimana's reign was at first relatively peaceful and prosperous if still discriminatory towards Tutsi. Things began to unravel in 1987 when the global price of coffee, Rwanda's most important export, went from a steady decline into a rapid freefall and would continue to plummet for the next two years. For years prior, Habyarimana had run deficits because of the stability of Rwanda's currency, but the coffee crisis exploded the national debt. This resulted in food shortages, made all the worse by drought conditions during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Meanwhile, in 1988, upwards of 25,000 Hutu were murdered in Burundi in another wave of reprisal killings. Fearing for their lives, 60,000 Burundian Hutu fled to Rwanda, which by this time was already the most densely populated nation in Africa.

Habyarimana was unable to address the abysmal economy, overpopulation crisis, or the famine. In 1989, he slashed the budget by 40%, mainly by cutting social services. He then raised taxes and required more participation in communal labor projects (*umuganda*—still carried out once a month under the RPF). These measures entailed a significant loss of his support.<sup>58</sup> Beyond his inability to address Rwanda's economic woes, he was beholden to his Bakiga<sup>59</sup> constituency, favoring the area when it came to infrastructure investments and choosing whom to promote and serve in his administration. As it had for three centuries, Rwanda continued to be sociopolitically divided along a fault line between the northern-western and southern-central regions. Tired of Habyarimana's ineffectiveness, new political factions organized, especially among the southern-central Banyanduga. On July 5, 1990, Habyarimana formally opened up the political landscape to oppositional parties, and over the next two years, ten different parties would form.<sup>60</sup> Habyarimana's toleration of multipartyism, though, was mainly symbolic, a way for him to save face, especially with the French government on whose military support in the forms of arms and equipment he had come to rely. Elections did not immediately materialize, much in part because the RPF invaded just three months later. Rather than engender a peaceful democratic process, the farce of multipartyism would beget widespread

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>59</sup> Bakiga and Banyanduga are the plural forms respectively of Mukiga and Munyanduga.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

violence as party loyalists, notably the youth wings, took to the streets in order to brutalize their opponents into submission. Kidnappings, beatings, murders, grenade attacks, bomb explosions, the burning of forests, and the destruction of homes and other property became commonplace.

### **War with the RPF and the Arusha Accords**

By 1990, the RPF was fully armed, mobilized, and ready to strike. The weakening of Habyarimana's authority, the fracturing of the polity, and the frail economy presented the RPF with an opportunity that was too good to pass up. If successful, the conditions would allow the RPF to insert itself into the inevitable political reforms as the dominant power broker. RPF leaders first demanded repatriation and political representation. Habyarimana refused, citing overpopulation and economic woes. The RPF then decided to take matters into its own hands and force their demands through the use of combat, invading on October 1.

The initial attack failed. The RPF was decimated and its head commander, Fred Rwigema, was killed, perhaps by his second-in-command, Major Banyingana, who fiercely disagreed with Rwigema's cautious tactics.<sup>61</sup> Soldiers and their commanders retreated to Uganda to regroup and recruit. Over the next two years, the RPF grew from a couple thousand soldiers to over 12,000. The FAR, meanwhile, grew from 5,000 soldiers to somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000<sup>62</sup> as throngs of destitute men signed up in the hopes of a decent meal and a place to sleep.<sup>63</sup> Though France supplied the FAR with weaponry, the Rwandan government was unable to pay all these new soldiers, and by mid-1992, mutinies were breaking out.

The situation was far different for the RPF. Well-funded, well-organized, well-supplied, and full of Zionist-like zeal under the new leadership of Paul Kagame, it made its encampment high in the Virunga volcanic chain that lies along the Rwandan-Congolese-Ugandan border. Some of the peaks rise to heights of over 15,000 feet, and it would get so cold that a few RPF soldiers froze to death during the nights. Still, morale never wavered, and subsequent invasions were increasingly successful if not exactly honorable. Innocent civilians were killed, and the clashes resulted in the largest refugee crisis yet as nearly a million northern Rwandans fled south.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>62</sup> Mamdani puts the number at 30,000, while Prunier puts it at 50,000.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-20, 174-80.



In July 1992, Habyarimana and other MRND delegates began meeting with representatives of rival parties and with RPF officials in Arusha, Tanzania, in order to negotiate a peace settlement and power-sharing agreement. Other African heads of state and UN dignitaries were present to help nudge the process along, but the negotiations were a mess. Habyarimana half-heartedly agreed to allow elections, the repatriation of Tutsi exiles, and RPF representation in the government. Meanwhile, hardliners in the MRND and a few other parties viewed Habyarimana's capitulations to the RPF as a form of surrender. They broke off and formed a new party, CDR (*Coalition pour la Défense de la République*), their members unified in their hatred of the RPF and an insistence on maintaining Hutu Power. To bolster support, CDR's leaders attempted to focus and redirect people's inchoate angst not just towards the RPF, but towards what Prunier describes as an enemy that "was both facelessly abstract and embodied in the most ordinary person living next door": the Tutsi.<sup>65</sup> Younger, impoverished men were recruited to join the MRND and CDR youth brigades, *Interahamwe* for the MRND and *Impuzamugambi* for the CDR, and trained to fight in order to defend the nation from the RPF. In essence, the youth brigades were a cheaply organized extension of the FAR. Many of the recruits were refugees who had either fled from the massacres of Hutu in Burundi or from the RPF invasions in the north.

On January 9, 1993, the various delegates in Arusha signed the Protocols of Agreement on Power-Sharing, one of several agreements that would become known as the Arusha Accords. Hardline loyalists of CDR and MRND responded with a week-long rampage of death and destruction throughout Kigali and Bugesera, killing an estimated 300 citizens, mostly Tutsi, who were suspected of supporting the power-sharing agreement.<sup>66</sup> Cowed by the more extremist elements in his administration, Habyarimana was hesitant to implement the power-sharing agreement. The RPF, fearing the rapid ascent of the CDR and the threat it represented to Tutsi, became disgusted with Habyarimana's dissembling. On February 8, just a month after the protocols had been signed, the RPF broke the cease-fire agreement contained therein.<sup>67</sup> With Rwanda's military in tatters, the RPF easily captured large chunks of the north, including the major town of Ruhengeri, and came within twenty miles of the capital city of Kigali. As it advanced, RPF soldiers killed more innocent civilians. For many Rwandans, this confirmed that

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

the RPF truly was their enemy, and it cast more suspicion on their Tutsi neighbors. Further stoking their smoldering animosities towards Tutsi, on October 21, 1993, Melchior Ndadaye, the first Hutu and first democratically elected president of Burundi was stabbed to death by Tutsi soldiers after only three months in office.

## The Genocide

Throughout 1993 and early 1994, anti-Tutsi rhetoric intensified on the newly formed radio station, RTLM, in extremist news journals such as *Kangura*, and in political meetings, speeches, and rallies. Rwandans refer to the time between the RPF's February invasion and the genocide a little over a year later as *Igihirahiro*—"the time of hesitation/uncertainty."<sup>68</sup> Participants in this dissertation describe it as a time of chaos, a time when they had no idea what would happen to their government, their country, or their own lives. "Akabyutso" and "Intabaza," composed a month after the RPF's onslaught, were in many ways the anthems of *Igihirahiro*.

On August 4, 1993, the RPF and the Rwandan government signed the last of the Arusha Accords, bringing (another) end to the war. Eight months later, on April 6, 1994, Habyarimana and the new Burundian President, Cyprien Ntaryamira, were returning from yet another round of talks in Arusha. Around 8:30 p.m., their single-engine Dassault Falcon 50 jet was approaching the airport in Kigali when two surface-to-air missiles were fired from a nearby hillside. The first hit the jet's wing, the second hit its tail, and the jet went down in flames, killing everyone aboard. Pieces of the plane landed in the lawn of the presidential mansion.

Panic immediately ensued. Many Rwandans first heard the news on RTLM. The broadcasters claimed that the jet had been shot down by the RPF. The RPF blamed Rwandan forces who viewed the signing of the Arusha Accords as a betrayal on Habyarimana's part. To this day, the assassination of Habyarimana officially remains an unsolved case.

Hours after the crash, the Presidential Guard began scouring Kigali and killing moderate politicians who had supported the Accords. One of the first to be killed was the Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana. Within days, it was not just politicians who were targeted but the entire Tutsi population and anyone who sympathized with them. As RTLM's broadcasters,

---

<sup>68</sup> Prunier 1995, p. 210.

government officials, and local agents urged on the massacres, it was not just soldiers who killed but the youth brigades as well and soon thereafter thousands of ordinary civilians.

The Arusha Accords mandated that the RPF could station a battalion of six hundred troops in Kigali. These troops engaged the Presidential Guard and the remnants of the FAR. The rest of the RPF swept down from its strongholds in the north, first towards Kigali, then fanning out to the south and west. In general, genocidal killing was most intense in those areas where the RPF vanguard was threatening to advance. It began in Kigali and first moved northward and westward. Butare, where I conducted most of my research, was one of the last areas to be engulfed in violence. The town is located in the far south of the country, and boasting the nation's most prestigious university, is considered the intellectual center of Rwanda. As such, it was a bastion of more moderate thinking and home to the PSD party (*Parti Sociale Démocrate*), which embraced the Arusha Accords and found support among many Tutsi. Because of its location and more liberal atmosphere, most residents did not believe they would be affected by the violence raging throughout the rest of their nation. Many Tutsi, therefore, never thought to flee. When the militias and youth brigades eventually showed up, it was a bloodbath. Local residents told me that at least 75% of the Tutsi population was annihilated.

There was no single motive for participation in the genocide. While many killed out of pure ethnic hatred, many others believed they were acting out of self-defense, which is not quite the same. They had been led to believe that most Tutsi were indeed allies of the RPF and therefore needed to be killed in order to defeat the RPF. They did not really hate Tutsi; they just saw them as political adversaries. From this perspective, the genocide was an extension of war, the assassination of President Habyarimana having escalated things to the point that it inspired the active involvement of ordinary civilians. Many killed because they were coerced into doing so, threatened with punishment or death if they refused to participate. Some killed in order to loot property or claim larger homes and more land, others because they did not want to appear weak before their peers. Some killed because their minds were so addled with drugs<sup>69</sup> that they were easily seduced into killing, and some killed because they had already killed and, in a strange way, killing again was a way to bury their guilt. Most killed due to a combination of these reasons. The vast majority of Hutu, though, did not kill or act as accomplices. Most were

---

<sup>69</sup> Drug and alcohol abuse was widespread among the youth brigades.

afraid for their own lives and tried to hide.<sup>70</sup> The genocide should thus never be used to indict the entire Hutu population. It is the generalization of blame, after all, that has been the most destructive and tragic legacy of Rwanda's history.

### Concluding Remarks

In interpreting Bikindi's lyrics and, more importantly, in interpreting Rwandan interpretations of Bikindi's lyrics the question of how to define ethnicity in Rwanda inevitably surfaces. For example, Bikindi speaks of the oppression of and infighting between *bene Sebahinzi*—"the children of the Father of Farmers." Many interpret this as a reference to Hutu, but in fact, most Tutsi also farmed for their livelihoods. The preceding overview of Rwandan history showed that the identities of Hutu and Tutsi (and to a lesser extent, Twa) have been defined according to fluctuating combination of heredity, kinship ties, morphology, occupation, political and socioeconomic status, and a certain mythologization of the past. The identities of Hutu and Tutsi then are not really even "ethnic," as that term has been variably conceptualized throughout Western scholarly discourse. However they are defined, what matters is what it means to be Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa in relation to one another and to the centers of political and economic power, how these relations have been transformed throughout Rwandan history *as a result of* that history, and how Rwandans conceptualize and experience ethnicity. If the answers are not so clear to foreign scholars, it is perhaps because the answers are not uniform among Rwandans either. This is an area still in need of further research. As Francis sadly expressed at the conclusion of four summers of field research together:

And you know, still now, there is ambiguity in our history between Hutu and Tutsi. We have two ideologies that come in. One, they say that there is Hutu and Tutsi by nature, by physical features, by everything, and the other ideology says there is no Hutu and Tutsi; the difference between them had to do only with wealth. And so, even still, there is ambiguity in our history—we have not grasped which one is which.

---

<sup>70</sup> See Scott Straus, "How many perpetrators were there in the Rwandan genocide? An estimate," in *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 6, no. 1 (March 2004), pp. 85-98.

Following his summation of the “problem” of ethnicity in Rwanda, Francis went on to criticize Bikindi’s songs for exploiting and manipulating this supposed ambiguity during a time when Rwandan society was fracturing along ethnic lines. In line with the pro-RPF narrative, his main criticisms were that Bikindi overstated the cruelty of the monarchy, purposefully led his audience to associate the monarchy with all Tutsi, and ignored the persecution and discrimination of Tutsi at the hands of Hutu following the 1959 Revolution. If Bikindi had softened his denouncement of the monarchy and also mentioned ways in which Tutsi had also been harmed, then there would have been less of a problem. Francis concluded, “And so out of this, in the middle of our conflict in our history, Bikindi picks just a little bit from this history and puts it in the song.” He believed that Bikindi did this strategically in collusion with pro-genocide government and media officials as a way of promoting Hutu Power at the expense of Tutsi.

However difficult it is to define ethnicity in Rwanda, its existence is a fact of life. In an e-mail, I shared my thoughts about this with Jeanette. Responding with the following three points, she effectively summarized what I have tried to outline throughout this discussion. Her bristling tone is due to her anger concerning the RPF’s attempts to do away with ethnic identity, a move she believes is not only ahistorical but is a cynical tactic employed by the RPF to deflect accusations that it too has indulged in ethnic favoritism:

1. I do believe that all Rwandans understand well what it is to be Hutu or Tutsi. We became Hutu or Tutsi depending on the ethnicity of our fathers because Rwandan society is patriarchal. For example, I’m recognized as Hutu even though mom is Tutsi. No one will contest this. This element is fundamental for me.
2. The likely confusion for Rwandans jumps in when talking about governance and benefits. Throughout history, some Hutu became Tutsi in order to gain favors from Tutsi authorities. On the other hand, Tutsi wished to become Hutu when Hutu took power. But I strongly believe they were still Hutu and Tutsi in their heart! At this level, those who have political interests will call Hutu and Tutsi economic groups! Political groups! I acknowledge that Hutu and Tutsi do not match with the sociological definition of ethnicity. However, members of each group recognize themselves as Hutu or Tutsi. Moreover, we know there are Hutu and Tutsi in Burundi

and Republic of Congo who recognize themselves as Hutu and Tutsi. Are they also economic groups? Political groups?

3. Rwandan history changes too, depending on who is using it and why! Some facts will be omitted by Tutsi because the facts compromise them; Hutu will do the same! Western scholars are trapped in this game, but as I said, Rwandans don't have any confusion about being Hutu or Tutsi!

## CHAPTER 3:

### THE TRIAL

On November 8, 1994, the United Nations Security Council agreed to establish the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) at the request of RPF leaders struggling in the nascent stages to form a new government and rebuild the nation.<sup>1</sup> The tribunal's purpose was to prosecute those deemed most responsible for the genocide in accordance with the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the Genocide Convention).<sup>2</sup> In Article 4, the Genocide Convention states as follows: "Persons committing genocide or any of the other acts enumerated in Article 3 shall be punished, whether they are constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals." The UN chose the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha as a safe, convenient, and politically neutral locale for the court.<sup>3</sup> Arusha is a fairly quiet town, known mainly as a tourist depot for safaris to the Serengeti, Maasai Mara, and Ngorongoro Crater. It was also once the site of the headquarters for the East African Community (EAC), an intergovernmental organization that was formed in order to negotiate economic and trade policies. The organization dissolved in 1977 (revived in 2000) but left behind a sprawling complex, perfect for the UN to rent as facilities for the ICTR.<sup>4</sup> On July 5, 1995, the various rules that would govern the court's proceedings were implemented. Three trial chambers and an appeals chamber, each comprised of an international consortium of judges, were assembled. Lawyers hailing from throughout the world were likewise called to serve on prosecution and defense teams, and investigators were enlisted to gather evidence that would be used to determine who ought to stand trial. In October 1995, the court indicted and arrested its first suspect, a schoolteacher and mayor named Jean-Paul Akayesu who stood accused of inciting, ordering, and overseeing a number of genocidal massacres. On October 2, 1998, Akayesu was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment, making him the first person in history to have been prosecuted under the Articles of the Genocide Convention. As of this

---

<sup>1</sup> UN Doc. S/RES/955 (1994), 8 November 1994.

<sup>2</sup> The ICTR also extended the jurisprudential range of criminal acts as enumerated in Article 3 of the Genocide Convention by including sexual violence as a crime for which suspects could be prosecuted.

<sup>3</sup> UN Doc. S/RES/977 (1995), 22 February 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

writing, the court has completed seventy-two cases and convicted sixty-two people,<sup>5</sup> with three cases still in progress and one defendant awaiting trial. One of those convicts was Simon Bikindi.

Bikindi was indicted on July 5, 2001 and arrested on July 12 in Leiden, Netherlands, where he had been briefly living in exile. Pursuant to Articles 3 and 6 of the ICTR's Statute, Bikindi was charged on six counts: conspiracy to commit genocide (count 1); genocide (count 2) or, in the alternative, complicity in genocide (count 3); direct and public incitement to commit genocide (count 4); murder as a crime against humanity (count 5); and persecution as a crime against humanity (count 6). On March 27, 2002, after spending nearly nine months in a detention facility, he was extradited to Arusha, and on September 18, 2006, following another four-and-a-half years of investigation and pre-trial, his trial began.<sup>6</sup> The Prosecution alleged that Bikindi knowingly and purposefully aroused anger, fear, and hatred against Tutsi through his songs and public speeches, exploiting the influence he possessed as a celebrity musician. He was accused of collaborating with government and military leaders and RTLM personnel to organize and incite the genocide. He was further charged with recruiting members of *Interahamwe*, overseeing their training, and personally ordering them to kill. Most chilling, he was accused of acts of sexual violence as well as personally murdering several people. For these charges, the Prosecution sought the maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

### **Purposes in Studying Bikindi's Trial**

My aim at first in studying Bikindi's trial was to reconstruct some of the details of Bikindi's biography that would help to assess the intentions behind his songs. I approached witnesses' testimonies as a body of oral history from which to extract such relevant details. If it was proven that Bikindi knowingly, willfully, and directly participated in acts of genocide, then this would reasonably provide cause to assume that he intended for his music to incite such acts. I believe the information gleaned from the trial is valuable in this regard, but as will be shown, caution must be exercised when utilizing trial evidence for the purposes of biography, historiography, and ethnography. Following the chronology of the proceedings, I began reading through the testimonies of witnesses called by the Prosecution, and the further I went, the more

---

<sup>5</sup> As of this writing, ten defendants were acquitted and another seventeen are currently appealing the court's decision.

<sup>6</sup> The ICTR has been criticized by many legal scholars for the inordinate amount of time cases have taken.



convinced I became that Bikindi was a cold-blooded murderer who despised Tutsi and desired their extermination. But like any good court drama, my convictions faltered as I began reading through the arguments and testimonies delivered on the part of the Defense. When I then read the Final Judgment and Bikindi's appeal, any certainty I had was completely eroded. In spite of this—in fact, *because* of it—there is significant value in closely examining Bikindi's trial, provided that testimony and trial evidence is not mistaken for fact. For one, the trial is a matter of historical record. Though it is difficult to establish from the trial all the facts of Bikindi's life and the ideological positions his biography would seem to reflect, a biography of Bikindi would be remiss if it did not include a historiography of the trial itself. Second, many people are certain of Bikindi's criminality. Pointing out how the Prosecution's case was often dismantled by the Defense and the Chamber serves to destabilize such hardened perceptions of Bikindi. Third, on the other side Bikindi has his share of defenders, sure that he has been wrongfully accused and maligned. A close examination of Bikindi's trial ought to provide cause for reevaluating these perspectives as well. Fourth, whether they are true or not, the allegations and testimonies illuminate the level of fame and influence that Bikindi enjoyed throughout Rwanda in the early 1990s. This in turn leads to a fuller appreciation of the impact his songs had. Fifth, his trial highlights broader problems inherent in seeking justice in the aftermath of the genocide. Given the steep political, material, and psychological interests involved, there are ample motives for false accusations and corruption. These motives impinge upon the credibility of witnesses and the efforts to determine the facts of a given case. Because the trial was conducted over a dozen years after the genocide, memories have also faded or become distorted, making the establishment of facts difficult. Issues of translation and hermeneutics become especially complicated and problematic when seeking justice within the contours of international law and under the authority of an international body of judges. Defendants and witnesses do not speak the same language nor share the same culturalized understandings as lawyers and judges. How is it that judges who have barely set foot in Rwanda are considered eligible to determine the meaning and intentions behind Bikindi's songs? The official languages of the ICTR are English and French, whereas most of the witnesses did not understand either language and spoke only Kinyarwanda. Trial participants sat before microphones and donned headphones, connected via closed circuit. As questions were administered by the judges and legal counsel, interpreters simultaneously translated them into Kinyarwanda for the witnesses; likewise, their replies were

then translated back into English and French. Occasionally, the judges and legal counsels would even request witnesses to remove their headphones so that they could speak “privately” among themselves. Unfortunately, Kinyarwanda transcriptions of the testimonies are unavailable, and so ICTR scholars are forced to rely on the acumen of court transcribers and translators as to what witnesses actually shared. Great care should thus be taken when relying upon testimonies, court documents, and other trial evidence for the purposes of historiography and ethnography.

### **Chronology and Composition of the Chamber and Counsels**

Fifty-seven witnesses, twenty for the Prosecution and thirty-seven for the Defense, were called to testify over the course of sixty-one trial days. The trial was divided into three sessions. The first session was held from September 18 to October 20, 2006, during which the Prosecution called sixteen witnesses. The second lasted from February 12 to 20, 2007, during the Prosecution called another four witnesses, including two expert witnesses. The third was held from September 24 to November 7, 2007, during which witnesses testified for the Defense. The Chamber was comprised of Presiding Judge Inés Mónica Weinberg de Roca (Argentina), Florence Rita Arrey (Cameroon), and Robert Fremr (Czech Republic). The Prosecution was led by William Egbe, with co-counsels Veronic Wright, Patrick Gabaake, Peter Tafah, Iain Morley, Sulaiman Khan, Amina Ibrahim, and Disengyi Mugeyo.

The Defense was initially led by Wilfred Nderitu, assisted by co-counsel Jean de Dieu Momo, but midway through the trial, in an awkward and dramatic turn of events, Bikindi requested that Nderitu be replaced. On Friday, February 9, 2007, just before the second session was to set to begin, the Prosecution filed a confidential motion that Momo be excluded from further proceedings, alleging that he had secretly met with one of the Prosecution’s witnesses in an attempt to sway his or her testimony. For some time, the Prosecution had suspected Momo of meddling and had been conducting a clandestine investigation. It resisted filing a motion, though, until it received a letter earlier that morning from Nderitu in which he substantiated the charges against his partner. All of this was done without the knowledge of Bikindi or Momo. Both were taken aback when, as the second session opened the following Monday morning, Lead Prosecutor Egbe stated before the court:

We are asking that Mr. Jean de Dieu Momo be excluded from current proceedings for a

grave breach not only of the Code of Professional Conduct, but for interfering with a very important Prosecution witness in a matter that is absolutely prohibited by the rules of this Tribunal. The witness in question is Witness BUY.<sup>7</sup> Witness BUY is a witness who is expected to arrive this week and to testify next week on a very important fact in the indictment. The identity of Witness BUY was made known to the Defense in October of last year, and in November and December Defense co-counsel took it upon himself not only to meet this witness in violation of the rules, but to attempt—I want to be very clear here that I am basing my submission on allegations—but to attempt to influence the witness to change his testimony. Now, we decided to bring this motion on Friday not because we didn't know that such an event had occurred; but out of prudence and for better judgment, we decided to investigate this matter fully. The government of Rwanda is investigating this matter. In fact, the Minister of Interior had written about this event. The Minister of Justice had written about this incident. Of course, all of this was predicated upon a report obtained—a report made by the Director of Prison, who is directly concerned with the report of this incident. But then on Friday, while we were investigating, we received credible information from the Defense team itself that, indeed, what was an allegation was almost confirmed. What has become clear from the letter of the Defense is that there is indeed a witness statement obtained from Witness BUY by Defense co-counsel. That is a grave, grave, grave offence indeed. What we are saying at this moment, Your Honor, is that the integrity of these entire proceedings has been put to question. The integrity of the person at the centre of this allegation is also an issue. We are requesting, in the interest of fairness and in the interest of international justice, that Mr. Momo be excluded from current proceedings. We are not saying that Mr. Momo has already been found guilty. No. While investigations into these serious allegations are going on, we would be protecting the integrity of these proceedings by asking Mr. Momo to step aside. We do not care if Mr. Momo remains within the premises, within the courtroom, but Mr. Momo should have no further role to play in these proceedings until this matter is completely and finally investigated.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> As a matter of security, almost all ICTR witnesses are identified by a three- or four-letter code (occasionally also containing a numerical digit). The fact that this witness was identified as BUY is simply an ironic coincidence.

<sup>8</sup> William Egbe, *ICTR vs. Simon Bikindi*, Case No. ICTR-01-72-T, 12 February 2007, pp. 3-4

When the Chamber asked him to respond, a stunned Momo replied:

I was just made aware of these serious accusations against me, and it is at this very instance that I just received the Prosecutor's motion dated 9th of February. I have not read it. I have not perused it. I just got it now. When looking at it, I realized that the Prosecutor's motion is based on a letter from my lead counsel, denouncing facts for purposes which I am not aware of...Let me, however, note that I am very dumbfounded by such an accusation, because nothing transpired. I know nothing.<sup>9</sup>

Bikindi, rather than being upset with Momo, became furious with the perceived duplicity of Nderitu and demanded that he be reassigned a new lead counsel. The Chamber refused to relent to his request, advising him that a new counsel would require an inordinate amount of time to familiarize him or herself with the trial and that such a drastic and sudden transition would ultimately hamper his case. Nevertheless, from this point on, Bikindi refused to meet with Nderitu. Throughout the second session, Bikindi even conducted a significant portion of the cross-examination himself (most of this cross-examination consisted of two expert witnesses testifying on the meaning of his song lyrics, and so it was not as if Bikindi was entirely out of his element). Eventually, the Chamber determined that there was no firm evidence behind the charges against Momo and that he would be allowed to remain as co-counsel. After the second session concluded, the Chamber acquiesced to Bikindi's request to replace Nderitu with a new lead counsel, and on May 9, 2007—just six days before the opening of the Defense's case<sup>10</sup>—South African lawyer Andreas O'Shea was assigned to take over the role of lead counsel.

## **Explanation of the Charges**

### **Genocide**

In accordance with the Genocide Convention, genocide is defined in Article 2 of the Statute of the ICTR as follows:

Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

---

<sup>9</sup> Jean de Dieu Momo, Transcript from The Prosecution vs. Simon Bikindi, 12 February 2007, pp. 4-5

<sup>10</sup> Though the Defense case opened on May 15, 2007, Defense witnesses did not begin testifying until September 24.

- a) Killing members of the group;
- b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

If the Prosecution was able to prove that Bikindi had, with specific intent, committed any of these acts, then he would be convicted of genocide. Bikindi's guilt could still be established even if he did not directly commit such acts. Articles 6(1) and 6(3) of the Statute of the ICTR establish modes of liability by which a defendant could still be found guilty of genocide:

1. A person who planned, instigated, ordered, committed or otherwise aided and abetted in the planning, preparation or execution of a crime referred to in Articles 2 to 4<sup>11</sup> of the present Statute, shall be individually responsible for the crime.

3. The fact that any of the acts referred to in Articles 2 to 4 of the present Statute was committed by a subordinate does not relieve his or her superior of criminal responsibility if he or she knew or had reason to know that the subordinate was about to commit such acts or had done so and the superior failed to take the necessary and reasonable measures to prevent such acts or to punish the perpetrators thereof.

According to these stipulations, if the Prosecution could prove that Bikindi possessed a high enough level of influence and authority, that he ordered those under his influence and authority to commit acts of genocide, and that his orders were followed, he too would be found guilty of genocide even if he was not the one to pull the trigger, so to speak. This also allowed the Prosecution to charge Bikindi with two or more crimes for the commission of one act. For example, by ordering killings, he could be charged with murder and complicity in genocide.

Noteworthy is that in previous cases at the ICTR and ICTY<sup>12</sup> it was established that the accused need not occupy an official political or military position.<sup>13</sup> If it could be proven that any

---

<sup>11</sup> Article 3 regards crimes against humanity, a separate category from genocide. Article 4 concerns crimes enumerated in the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 for the Protection of War Victims (further amended on June 8, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., *Halilović*, Judgment, para. 59; *Gacumbitsi*, Judgment, paras. 760, 761, 763, 768, 807.

sort of superior-subordinate relationship, formal or otherwise, existed between the accused and one or more others who carried out crimes, then the accused may be implicated of those same crimes and would face similar punitive measures as those who followed his orders.

### **Conspiracy to Commit Genocide**

Conspiracy to commit genocide is defined by the ICTR as “an agreement between two or more persons to commit the crime of genocide.” This need not be a formal agreement. Furthermore, conspiracy is considered an inchoate crime, defined by *Black’s Law Dictionary* as “a step towards the commission of another crime, the step in itself being serious enough to merit punishment.”<sup>14</sup> An inchoate crime is a crime defined *vis-à-vis* a potentially resulting crime, even if this second crime is never carried out. In the case of conspiracy to commit genocide, genocide does not necessarily have to have resulted from the agreement for the individuals in question to be punished. It only needs to be proven that they intended to commit genocide and coordinated a plan of attack. The ICTR Statute states that conspiracy “can be proved by evidence of meetings to plan genocide, but it can also be inferred from other evidence, such as the conduct of the conspirators or their concerted or coordinated action.” The Statute does emphasize that merely associating with those who were responsible for genocide does not constitute conspiracy; what matters is the nature and extent of the relationships and the content of any communications between the suspected parties. This obviously involves a highly subjective assessment of the evidence on the part of the Chamber.

### **Complicity in Genocide**

This charge encompasses actions that aid and abet those who directly commit genocide. Specifically, the Prosecution charged Bikindi with complicity *in the alternative* to the charge of genocide itself. What this means is that the Prosecution determined that if it was unable to win a conviction on the charge of genocide, it was still likely to win a conviction of the lesser charge of complicity by proving, for example, that Bikindi drove killers to massacre sites, trained them, or gave them orders to kill.

---

<sup>14</sup> B.A. Garner, ed., *Black’s Law Dictionary*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., (St. Paul, MN: West Group, 1999), p.765.

## **Direct and Public Incitement to Commit Genocide**

Direct and public incitement concerns allegations that Bikindi intentionally employed his music as a means to foment anti-Tutsi violence. He was also accused of delivering speeches at political rallies in which he likewise incited anti-Tutsi violence. Finally, the Prosecution alleged that while traveling along the road between the communes of Kivumu and Kayove sometime in June 1994, Bikindi used a public address system fitted to the car in which he was riding to encourage passers-by to carry on with the genocide.

Prosecuting direct and public incitement to commit genocide has been one of the most complicated undertakings of the ICTR due to the dangers a ruling potentially poses to rights of free expression. In 2003, the ICTR handed down a conviction in its ruling on the famous “Media Trial,” which involved two RTLM broadcasters, Ferdinand Nahimana and Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, and the editor of *Kangura*, Hassan Ngeze. The ruling was highly controversial. The Appeals Chamber would later excoriate the Trial Chamber for neglecting to clarify the guidelines by which it established that radio broadcasts and written editorials had incited genocide and for failing to distinguish between incitement and hate speech. In this, the Appeals Chamber established important new guidelines for prosecuting incitement. It determined, for instance, that if more than one interpretation could legitimately be inferred from a statement, then it could not be proven beyond a reasonable doubt that such statements qualified as incitement. Consequently, the three men at the center of the “Media Trial” each had their sentences reduced by the Appeals Court.<sup>15</sup>

When it came to Bikindi’s case, the Chamber emphasized in the Final Judgment the importance of protecting the right to freedom of expression, invoking provisions to this effect set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR). The Chamber emphasized, however, that none of these charters make the right to free expression absolute. All

---

<sup>15</sup> Nahimana and Ngeze’s sentences were reduced from life imprisonment to thirty years while Barayagwiza’s already reduced sentence was further reduced to thirty-two years. For more on the trial, see Dina Temple-Raston, *Justice on the Grass: Three Rwandan Journalists, Their Trial for War Crimes and a Nation’s Quest for Redemption* (New York: Free Press, 2005).

contain stipulations that limit this right. For example, Article 7 of the UDHR, adopted by the UN in 1948, states that, “All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against *any incitement* to such discrimination.” Drafted in 1950, Article 10 of the ECHR also allows for a number of circumstances in which freedom of expression may be curtailed, in some cases severely so. It states:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.
2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or the rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

Article 20 of the ICCPR, adopted by the UN in 1966 and entered into force<sup>16</sup> in 1976, prohibits war propaganda and “incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence” on the basis of national, racial, or religious grounds. CERD, adopted by the UN in 1965 and entered into force in 1969, specifically outlaws and criminalizes discriminatory speech, stating in Article 4, that its signatory parties:

- (a) Shall declare an offence punishable by law all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, as well as all acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race or group of persons of another colour or ethnic origin, and also the provision of any assistance to racist activities, including the financing thereof;
- (b) Shall declare illegal and prohibit organizations, and also organized and all other propaganda activities, which promote and incite racial discrimination, and shall recognize participation in such organizations or activities as an offence punishable by law;

---

<sup>16</sup> The phrase, “entered into force,” refers to the date when a treaty, regulation, or other type of legislation is legally in effect or enforced.



(c) Shall not permit public authorities or public institutions, national or local, to promote or incite racial discrimination.

The ACHR, drafted in 1969 and entered into force in 1978, states that expressive acts that harm the reputations of others and violates their rights are subject to liability. It also seeks a punishable ban on war propaganda and the advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that incites violence along these lines. The ACHPR, drafted in 1979, asserts that, “The rights and freedoms of each individual [including the right to free expression] shall be exercised with due regard to the rights of others, collective security, morality and common interest.”

There are problems with all of these charters. For one, there is little that can be done to enforce their provisions on the level of individual states, and as such, there are numerous examples of signatory states whose governments have later ignored them. The ICTR, as a UN institution, is legally bound to incorporate these provisions, but the provisions are so vague, broad, and, in some cases, self-contradictory that there is much room for interpretation and thus inconsistency and abuse when applying them to individual criminal cases. Note for example that several of the above clauses would ban certain expressive acts if it was determined that they ran counter to the prevalent morals of a society. Is not one of the principal purposes of protecting free expression to allow people to challenge moral norms? Note also those clauses that would ban expressive acts that harm a person’s reputation. If enforced, this would make most political journalism illegal.

Perhaps the most problematic issue is a lack of definition and distinction as to what constitutes hate speech or discriminatory speech versus what constitutes incitement to genocide or other instances of mass violence. This is of critical importance in matters of international jurisprudence, because confusing the two may potentially lead to flimsy and unjust convictions. Furthermore, because the ICTR is responsible for establishing precedent on this issue, if it convicts people of incitement while at the same time failing to define what incitement is and distinguishing it from other forms of speech, such rulings may provide justification for governments to suppress people’s rights to express themselves. People may, for instance, openly criticize their government, a right that must be protected as it is fundamental to maintaining a healthy balance of power between governments and the citizenry. If, however, a government were to decide that such speech could potentially ignite violence along national, ethnic, racial, or

religious lines—even if such violence were only a remote possibility—it could choose to suppress such speech and indict the speaker, using international law as cover. This could lead to alarming abuses on the part of governments seeking to destroy opposition and cement its power under the guise of instilling social harmony and peace (some would claim that this is exactly what is happening in Rwanda today).

A person may engage in hateful rhetoric, but hate speech in and of itself is not a crime, even when it is intended to cultivate antagonistic attitudes towards some category of people. Incitement, however, is a crime. Moreover, it should to be prosecuted as such, because doing so may act as a deterrent against genocide. Susan Benesch and other international legal scholars argue that incitement is a necessary step towards genocide.<sup>17</sup> As it currently stands, however, there are flaws in how incitement has been defined or, rather, undefined in international law. In the 1948 Genocide Convention, there is no definition whatsoever for incitement, and therefore the ICTR has had to rely on international treaty law for establishing the parameters by which it prosecutes incitement. Under current law, to commit incitement means that:

1. One must have specific intent to cause genocide, and
2. The incitement must be direct and public.

Like conspiracy, incitement is considered an inchoate crime. It does not need to be proven that incitement directly resulted in genocide or that genocide was even a realistic possibility. It only needs to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt that genocide was the specific intent of the speaker (or, in this case, musician). Benesch elaborates on the problems with this definition. She describes a hypothetical scenario in which some degenerate sociopath could stand on a corner in Times Square, shouting racial or anti-Semitic epithets and calling for the destruction of these groups with the hopes of inciting mass violence against them. Under current law, this person could thus be found guilty of direct and public incitement to genocide, even though the chances of genocide occurring would be next to nil. More likely, he would be ignored, shouted down, and possibly beat up. Benesch thus proposes a six-pronged test to determine whether someone is guilty of incitement, one that takes into account not just the content of the statements or the speaker's intent, but also the greater political and psychosocial

---

<sup>17</sup> Susan Benesch, "Vile Crime or Inalienable Right: Defining Incitement to Genocide," in *Virginia Journal of International Law*, vol. 52, no. 4 (June 2012), pp. 485-528.

context in which the statements are delivered. Benesch's inquiry would consist of the following questions:

1. Was the speech understood by the audience as a call to genocide? Did it use language, explicit or coded, to justify and promote violence?
2. Did the speaker have authority or influence over the audience and did the audience have the capacity to commit genocide?
3. Had the victims-to-be already suffered an outbreak of recent violence?
4. Were contrasting views still available at the time of the speech? Was it still safe to express them publicly?
5. Did the speaker describe the victims-to-be as subhuman, or accuse them of plotting genocide? Had the audience been conditioned by the use of these techniques in other, previous speech?
6. Had the audience received similar messages before the speech?

Under Benesch's recommendations, incitement need not even be regarded as hate speech; instead, it needs to be shown that the statements had a direct and causal link to genocidal violence.

### **Murder and Persecution as Crimes against Humanity**

Crimes against humanity, addressed in Article 3 of the ICTR's Statute, were first defined in the 1907 Hague Convention which sought to codify the customary law of armed conflict. Crimes against humanity were considered acts of mass atrocity that fell outside this customary law, the most prominent examples involving the intentional targeting of civilians. It was first officially invoked in 1915 in a statement by the Russian, French, and British allied forces to condemn the Armenian Genocide carried out by the Ottoman government (at which time, the term "genocide" had not yet been coined). Since then, the definition of crimes against humanity has broadened and moved beyond the context of official, state-sanctioned war.<sup>18</sup> In the wake of the genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia, the UN realized the need to clarify and distinguish genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. In 1998, the UN General Assembly

---

<sup>18</sup> M. Cherif Bassiouni, *Crimes Against Humanity in International Criminal Law*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Alphen aan den Rijn, The Netherlands: Kluwer Law International, 1999).

convened in Rome in order to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).<sup>19</sup> Under the new agreement, a permanent international tribunal was established in The Hague, though the ICTR was retained in Arusha until it could conclude its trials. While the ICC may only prosecute crimes committed after July 1, 2002, the year the Rome Statute went into effect, the UN nevertheless incorporated much of the new language into revisions of the ICTR's Statute. For the purposes of prosecuting defendants accused of committing crimes during the Rwandan genocide, Article 3 of the ICTR Statute clarifies the definition of crimes against humanity as follows:

The International Tribunal for Rwanda shall have the power to prosecute persons responsible for the following crimes when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population on national, political, ethnic, racial or religious grounds:

- (a) Murder
- (b) Extermination
- (c) Enslavement
- (d) Deportation;
- (e) Imprisonment;
- (f) Torture;
- (g) Rape;
- (h) Persecutions on political, racial, and religious grounds;
- (i) Other inhumane acts

The Rome Statute Explanatory Memorandum went on to emphasize that such acts, in order to constitute crimes against humanity, must be carried out as part of a widespread and systematic attack against *non-combatant* civilians. There is much overlap between crimes against humanity and genocide. The main distinction is that crimes against humanity do not necessarily but may still target a political, ethnic, racial or religious group; in other words, crimes against humanity encompass genocide but not vice versa. By separately enumerating the two

---

<sup>19</sup> The treaty was ratified by a vote of 120 to 7. The seven nations that voted against it were Iraq, Libya, Qatar, Yemen, China, Israel, and the United States.

categories of crimes, it also allows the Prosecution to “throw the book” at defendants; that is, to come up with a longer list of charges.

Bikindi was thus charged not only with genocide, but with murder and persecution as crimes against humanity under Article 3(a) and (h). For murder, the ICTR employs a three-pronged test of proof: “(1) the death of a victim; (2) that the death was the result of an act or an omission of the perpetrator; and (3) that the perpetrator, at time of the act or omission, intended to kill the victim or, in the absence of such specific intent, knew that the death was a probable consequence of the act of omission.”<sup>20</sup> Persecution is defined as:

An act or omission which discriminates in fact and which denies or infringes upon a fundamental right laid down in international customary or treaty law, and was carried out deliberately with the intention to discriminate on one of the listed grounds, specifically race, religion, or politics.<sup>21</sup>

Bikindi was charged with persecution on the basis that he intentionally composed songs that provoked anti-Tutsi discrimination. It was an odd accusation, for the Prosecution had to prove that a musical work or recording in and of itself could somehow constitute an act of discrimination rather than a mere call for discrimination. The Chamber noted in its ruling that the Indictment was “unclear as to the exact nature of the underlying act of persecution alleged.” With this lack of clarification, the Chamber stated that its understanding of the allegation was that the Prosecution argued that Bikindi purposefully aided and abetted the persecution of Tutsi by broadcasting his songs via RTLM. The Chamber, however, ruled that even though Bikindi composed the songs with the specific intent of encouraging ethnic hatred, he did not control what RTLM aired. With that, the charge of persecution was summarily dismissed.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Judgment, *The Prosecution vs. Simon Bikindi*, Case No. ICTR-2001-72-T, 2 December 2008, p. 105.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

## Specific Charges and Judges' Decisions

Specifically, the Prosecution charged Bikindi with the following crimes:<sup>23</sup>

- Ordering massacres of Tutsi prisoners at Gisenyi Prison
- Murder of Stanislas Garasira, a worker at the National Printing Press
- Murders of a watch repairman named Karasira and his family
- Preparing and leading massacres in Nyamyumba commune
- Murders of a nurse named Ancilla and her daughter
- Ordering massacres of Tutsi at a roadblock in Gisenyi
- Massacres of Tutsi at Camp Scout
- Driving captured Tutsi women to the *commune rouge*, a large killing field near Gisenyi
- Murders of three women at the *commune rouge*
- Encouraging sexual violence against Tutsi women among his subordinates
- Conspiring with political and military leaders and RTLM personnel to train *Interahamwe* and organize and coordinate the genocide
- Inciting genocide through public speeches at several political rallies
- Inciting genocide through statements made from a car as he traveled between Kivumu and Kayove
- Composing three songs that incited genocide

### Massacre of Tutsi Prisoners at the Gisenyi Prison

On the first day of the trial, the Prosecution called to testify ALP, a Hutu man who was incarcerated for theft at Gisenyi prison from 1989 to 1994. According to his testimony, at some point between June 8 and 18, 1994, Bikindi visited the prison along with the prison director Gasirabo, Major Kabera of the FAR, and the notorious journalist, Hassan Ngeze. The four men were accompanied by approximately ten soldiers serving as their bodyguards. Upon their arrival, chief warden Rukara read aloud a list containing the names of twelve prisoners, including ALP, summoning the men to congregate in the prison yard. Rukara then either handed over the

---

<sup>23</sup> Amended Indictment Pursuant to Decisions of 11 May 2005 and 10 June 2005 Annex. ICTR vs. Simon Bikindi, Case No. ICTR-2001-72-I.

list to Bikindi or had it snatched from him by the musician (such minute details often matter a great deal in trial). Perusing the list, Bikindi asked if there were any Tutsi among the dozen prisoners gathered there and, if so, to raise their hands. Ten of them did so. I turn now to ALP's testimony<sup>24</sup> to show how detailed and convincing these testimonies can be. In the following, "W" refers to the witness and "P" to the Prosecution:

W: I told you that when Rukara brought the list, Bikindi took it from him, and Bikindi himself asked the Tutsis to raise their hand. Ngeze repeated the same question and Major Kabera was nearby. But if one were to look at this matter closely, it would seem that all these people who were present had come to an agreement about this incident with the assistance of their bodyguards.

P: Was there any conversation between Bikindi and the director of the prison, Gasirabo, when Bikindi saw ten Tutsis identifying themselves?

W: Thank you. Regarding their conversation, Gasirabo, the prison director, had to answer questions from Major Kabera as to whether there were other Tutsis in the prison. The—Bikindi answered by saying that "How come these Tutsis are still here, whereas Tutsis have been killed everywhere else?" Gasirabo said that there were people who had been brought in from Kigali, but that they were unable to make a distinction between Hutus and the Tutsis. In fact, Bikindi and Major Kabera discussed with Gasirabo, the director, when they asked him to explain how it came about these Tutsis had not been killed and whether there were any others inside the prison. Gasirabo, the director, indicated that there were still other Tutsis. So, this is all I could make out from what was being said by the director, Gasirabo, and these other people.

P: So that there's no misunderstanding: who was it; in your long answer just then, who asked, "How come there were Tutsis in the prison when all the Tutsis had been killed elsewhere?"

W: Thank you. I want to explain to you clearly the following. When Major Kabera was saying something, Ngeze would follow suit and so would Bikindi. So, among these people, everyone was wondering why Tutsis were still alive, Tutsis who had not been killed in this particular place. And this is why I'm saying that these people must have come to an agreement in order to come and say that, because everyone was saying,

---

<sup>24</sup> Space does not allow for a complete re-printing of all the relevant testimony, as a typical day of testimony comprises about forty to eighty pages of text. See [www.jasonmccoy.org/bikindi](http://www.jasonmccoy.org/bikindi) for complete transcripts.

“Why were there still Tutsis who had not been killed in this particular place?”

P: You've told us that Rukara had the list when you all went outside the prison. Who ended up with the list?

W: I would like to clearly explain. Rukara mentioned the names when we were still inside the prison, when we were close to the bodyguard, and Bikindi snatched the list from him, and once we were outside, we were made to sit down and the Tutsis were asked to raise their hand. The first Tutsi to be called was Matabaro and he was the one who was killed, so it wasn't Rukara who mentioned the names of the people outside. He did so while we were still inside the prison.

P: Thank you. Now, listen carefully to the questions, please. Who called the names from the list? Who called Matabaro forward?

W: It was Simon Bikindi.

P: What happened to Matabaro when he was called forward?

W: As soon as he got in front of Bikindi, there was a soldier who was to the left of Bikindi who struck him down with his small axe, and Matabaro fell to the ground. Bikindi, once again, called Kayibanda who was met with the same fate. It was the bodyguards of these people who were killing others. It would seem—it would seem to us that these people were controlling and giving orders to their bodyguards.

P: You described Matabaro being called forward by Bikindi and then struck by a soldier on Bikindi's left. And what happened to Matabaro as a result of being struck? You said he fell down. What happened to him?

W: Thank you. I'm telling you the truth. You are a human being. If you are struck down with a small axe, a blow to your head, and your brain is targeted, what would happen? Well, obviously, you would die. So, it's clear that he died in that very instant.

P: Thank you. After Matabaro was struck and killed with a small axe to his head, what's the next thing that Bikindi did?

W: Thank you. After Matabaro's death, Bikindi called out Kayibanda. He was also struck down by another soldier. He fell to the ground, and he died. Thank you.

P: How far from the killing of Matabaro and then the killing of Kayibanda was Bikindi?

W: It was a distance of less than five meters. It's practically the distance equal to the one between me and these officers of the registry. It was about three meters, and when the person came in front of that group, the person would be killed.

P: And after the second killing, what happened to the remaining eight Tutsis who



identified themselves?

W: I thank you, Your Honors. When Bikindi called out the third person, that person came forward and Major Kabera said that they needed to act quickly and then go to Ruhengeri, and Bikindi said, “Yes, indeed, we need to act quickly so we can go to Ruhengeri.” After that, the soldiers who were present used their bayonets, and they killed the remainder of those Tutsis. Prisoners were called upon, and we picked up the bodies of those who had been killed. We removed the lids of the septic tanks which were in the area and we threw those bodies in there. At that time, Major Kabera, Bikindi, Ngeze left and went to Ruhengeri and we took the bodies—the remaining bodies to Ruriba. That is what happened in that location, according to what I saw.<sup>25</sup>

ALP’s testimony seems convincing that Bikindi oversaw the murder of ten Tutsi inmates. On February 19, 2007, the second-to-last day of the Prosecution’s case, witness BUY, a former *Interahamwe* member serving a life sentence for genocide, was called to take the stand in order to corroborate ALP’s testimony. Here, the Prosecution’s case began to unravel as a number of discrepancies cropped up between the testimonies of the two witnesses. BUY testified that Bikindi arrived in a vehicular convoy accompanied not by soldiers, but by *Interahamwe*. BUY did mention that Major Kabera and Hassan Ngeze were with him as well, but not mentioned by ALP, BUY further testified that Charles Zilimwabagabo, the *préfet* of Gisenyi prefecture, had joined the group. Whereas ALP testified that the prisoners had been transferred from Kigali and were already at the prison when Bikindi’s party arrived, BUY stated that they were transferred from Ruhengeri and had been brought in the same convoy as Bikindi.

There were other contradictions in the two witnesses’s testimonies. BUY said that Major Kabera handed the list to Bikindi who then handed it on to Gasirabo, contradicting ALP’s testimony that Bikindi was the one who read the list after either snatching it from Rukara or having it handed to him by the chief warden. Whereas ALP stated that it was Bikindi who read out the names, BUY asserted that it was Gasirabo. The two men also differed on how the prisoners were killed, with ALP testifying that they were killed with axes and bayonets and BUY asserting that they were shot and then finished off with knives and bayonets. They also contradicted each other as to where the bodies were disposed. ALP stated that some were

---

<sup>25</sup> Witness ALP, T. 18 September 2006, pp. 47-49

dumped into a septic pit and the rest were taken to Ruriba, a small commune in Gisenyi prefecture. BUY said that the other bodies were taken to the *commune rouge* (“the red commune”), a cemetery just outside Gisenyi town, given its moniker because it was a place where numerous victims were either slaughtered onsite or were brought after being killed elsewhere. ALP also mentioned a gate at the prison entrance, which BUY denied any existence of, stating that there was simply a cord that stretched across the entrance. Where there was some corroboration between the two testimonies, BUY confirmed that as the prisoners were systematically killed, Bikindi indeed asked, “What are you waiting for to kill these *inyenzi*? Normally, they should already have been killed”—a similar statement as that found in ALP’s testimony.

One might surmise that the inconsistencies between the two testimonies were due simply to faltering memory. After all, they were testifying over a dozen years after the alleged incident. Nevertheless, the fact still remains that ten Tutsi prisoners were massacred under Bikindi’s command. What difference does it make as to who exactly accompanied him, or whether the victims had come from Ruhengeri or Kigali, or whether he was accompanied by soldiers or *Interahamwe*, or whether there was a cord or an actual gate at the prison’s entrance, or where the bodies were taken?

These seemingly minor discrepancies, however, are critical in establishing the credibility of witnesses and the veracity of their testimonies. In the Final Judgment, the Chamber raised a number of significant concerns regarding this. In explaining the reasons for his incarceration, ALP confessed to illegally taking a motorcycle across the border to Zaïre, but soon after stating this, he denied ever entering Zaïre. ALP also asserted that Bikindi worked for RTLM in 1991, yet the station was not created until 1993, and even then, Bikindi was never an employee and had only spoke twice on air in order to promote upcoming performances. ALP first stated that he and another inmate had disposed of all the victims’ bodies in a nearby septic pit, but then later said that only five bodies had been disposed of in such manner and that the other five bodies were taken to Ruriba. He also first testified that Rukara handed over the list to Bikindi, but later in his testimony asserted that Bikindi snatched the list from Rukara. The judges’ suspicions were further raised by ALP’s constant and overt insistence that he was telling the truth<sup>26</sup> and his

---

<sup>26</sup> Judgment, p. 72.

indignation when probed by the Defense to provide more details as to why he himself had been imprisoned.<sup>27</sup>

The Chamber was likewise none too convinced of BUY's testimony, noting a number of internal inconsistencies and possible motives for testifying against Bikindi. In a signed statement he provided to ICTR investigators in 2001, he stated that in early 1994, he was a member of the Rwandan army,<sup>28</sup> but in a later statement, given to investigators in 2006, he said that he worked as a driver for the prison at this time.<sup>29</sup> During his testimony, he then denied ever being part of the army, instead saying that he was *Interahamwe*. He testified that he was receiving military training at the time and was based at a military camp in Gisenyi and never left the camp. When asked during the trial how he could be based fulltime at this camp while working as a driver's aide for the prison, he then testified that, in fact, he was only at the camp a few hours each day, allowing him to carry out his duties for the prison. The Defense pointed out that in his deposition to the Rwandan Ministry of Justice, BUY stated that he worked as a watchman at Warrant Officer Bizimana's compound during the genocide.<sup>30</sup> To explain how he could do this *and* also work as a driver for the prison *and* remain stationed at the military camp, BUY tried to explain that Bizimana had let him stay at his home during the genocide and he therefore watched over it—that is, he was a “watchman.” The Chamber found these explanations unconvincing. There were several other inconsistencies in BUY's testimony. In a 2006 statement he provided to the Prosecution, BUY said that when he arrived on the scene where the Tutsi prisoners were massacred, they were already gathered in the prison courtyard, but in his testimony, he said that he actually saw the prisoners being pulled from the vehicular convoy after having been transferred from Ruhengeri. The judges were also concerned about any motives BUY may have had in testifying against Bikindi. Serving a life sentence for genocide, they questioned whether BUY hoped to receive a reduced sentence by appearing to cooperate in the case against Bikindi.<sup>31</sup> The Defense pointed out that BUY failed to mention the prison slayings in another

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 71. See also p. 8: “When evaluating *viva voce* evidence, the Chamber considered various factors, including witnesses' demeanor in court, the plausibility and clarity of their testimony, and whether there were contradictions or inconsistencies within their testimony or between their testimony and their prior statements relied upon the court or admitted as exhibits.”

<sup>28</sup> Exhibit D37, Witness BUY's written statement dated June 6, 8, and 9, 2001. See Judgment, p. 40.

<sup>29</sup> Exhibit D39, Witness BUY's written statement dated October 24, 2006. See Judgment, p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> Exhibit D38, Witness BUY's Deposition to the Ministry of Justice, Rwanda, dated February 4, 2000. See Judgment, p. 40.

<sup>31</sup> Judgment, p. 40.

earlier signed statement that he provided to ICTR investigators in 2000 and, in fact, did not bring up the prison incident until his 2006 statement.

Particularly damning to the Prosecution's case were the testimonies of two witnesses called by the Defense. On October 5 and 8, 2007, a man identified by the court as ASQ1 was called to testify. The witness was an inmate at the Gisenyi prison at the time of the alleged massacre. He confirmed that, indeed, there was a massacre of Tutsi prisoners who had been transferred there from Kigali, but that it was actually thirty who were killed, not ten, and that it occurred not in June, but on April 29, 1994, at which time Bikindi was in Europe. According to ASQ1's testimony, rumors spread from inmates who had been allowed to work outside the prison that Tutsi were killing Hutu nearby, and out of vengeance, it was the Hutu inmates themselves who decided that night to rise up against their fellow Tutsi prisoners, killing them to a man by smashing them over their heads with fallen tree trunks. ASQ1 stated that he had been assigned by the prison director as a sort of liaison between the prisoners and the prison staff and that it was his duty to report the massacre to the prison warden the following morning. This is why he was certain of the date of the incident. He further stated that he was incarcerated during the entire duration of the genocide and that at no time did any sort of dignitary, including Bikindi, ever visit the prison—that, in fact, it was dangerous for them to do so as the surrounding region was engulfed in war. The Defense informed ASQ1 that certain witnesses had accused Bikindi of coming to the prison and ordering the killings, to which he replied:

As far as I'm concerned, when I hear that there are certain people who have been saying that Bikindi came to the prison, I was, honestly, quite saddened because even the army commander could not dare come to the prison. I heard it from certain people who were fellow inmates; that was in the year 2000 when those inmates, out of hunger, decided to unfairly denounce certain people. They started mentioning names of people, including Bikindi, and when they mentioned Bikindi's name, we put the following question to them: "If you are saying the truth, you were all sentenced to death or to a life sentence and now you are talking about that person. Who saw him here?" And they said: "Well, it's a way for us to get out of our current situation." So, it was, you know, a group of inmates who seemed to have mastered the art of fabricating false testimony, which they used for personal and materialistic purposes.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Witness ASQ1, T. 5 October 2007, p. 40.

Finally, on October 22, 2007, the Defense called to the stand Charles Zilimwabagabo, one of the officials whom BUY had accused of being party to the murders at the prison. Zilimwabagabo denied ever knowing of any such massacre, of ever visiting the prison, of ever seeing Bikindi during his time as *préfet*, and of ever seeing Major Kabera anywhere in Gisenyi. As expected, when Bikindi was called to testify, he too denied any involvement or knowledge of the event. In light of all this, the Chamber determined that the Prosecution had not proven beyond a reasonable doubt that Bikindi had anything to do with the massacre at Gisenyi prison or that the incident had even occurred at all.<sup>33</sup>

### **Murder of Stanislas Gasasira**

On October 19 and 20, 2006, the Prosecution summoned witness AHP, a former butcher and *Interahamwe* member currently serving a life sentence at the Gisenyi prison for genocide. According to his testimony, sometime in June 1994, Stanislas Gasasira, a Tutsi employee of the National Printing Press of Rwanda, was seized from his car upon arriving at a roadblock in Gisenyi. He was then forced into a minibus (a small van used as a taxi), and taken to the *commune rouge* where Bikindi stood waiting. According to AHP:

They took that person to the *commune rouge* where Tutsis were being killed. They took him out of the vehicle, searched him, pulled out a wallet from his clothing and I saw a badge. But as I attempted to read what was written on that badge, someone snatched it from me, one Nshogozabahizi snatched that badge from me, but I was able to remember the name of that person. That man came from Kigali, and his name was Stanislas Gasasira. He was a worker with the National Printing Press of Rwanda. It was Bikindi who ordered that he be killed. There was quarrelling, and then Bikindi shot at him with his pistol. This person did not die, and Asiel Rusagara finished off that person. I witnessed this event, and the body was abandoned at that location. I am telling you what I saw with my own eyes regarding Bikindi, and I can tell you these things because they were first-hand experience.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Judgment, pp. 70-74

<sup>34</sup> Witness AHP, T. 19 October 2006, pp. 3-4.

No other witnesses, however, corroborated AHP's story, and the Defense pointed out a number of inconsistencies in his testimony. The witness said in earlier written statements that he did not know what Bikindi was doing in Gisenyi in June and July 1994.<sup>35</sup> In a later written statement, he said that the victim, rather than being abducted at the roadblock, was already in the minibus as it passed through the roadblock, pinned to the floor by his assailants.<sup>36</sup> In this same written statement, he made no mention of Bikindi shooting Gasasira, instead stating that Bikindi drove away from the scene as soon as Gasasira was pulled from the minibus. He then provided a third version of the event when cross-examined, testifying that Bikindi was actually the one driving the minibus. When the Defense pointed out these discrepancies between AHP's earlier written statements and his testimony, he accused the investigators of not copying down his statements correctly, though he acknowledged that he willingly signed these statements.

On September 26, 2007, Defense witness WQK, who was eight years old at the time of the alleged incident, testified that Gasasira was killed by a man named Kivenge, a resident of the witness' home (more specific information regarding the relationship between Kivenge and the witness's family has been redacted from the transcript in order to protect the identity of the witness). WQK told the court that during the genocide Kivenge often returned to the house at the end of the day with his shirt stained with the blood of people he had slaughtered and his pockets and arms full of items he had looted. According to the witness, one evening in June 1994, Kivenge arrived home carrying Gasasira's identity card, boasting that he had killed him along with several women. Contradicting this, however, on October 25, 2007, Defense witness RH testified that Gasasira was actually killed before the genocide.<sup>37</sup> Due to these discrepancies, the Chamber ruled that the Prosecution failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Bikindi was guilty of Gasasira's murder.<sup>38</sup>

### **Murders of Karasira and Family**

Bikindi was accused of murdering a Tutsi watch repairman from Gisenyi named Karasira along with seven members of his household. The accusations were supported by witnesses AHP and BKW, testifying from October 16 to 19, 2006. Like AHP, BKW was another former

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 34, with reference to Exhibit D29/1, Witness AHP's written statement dated February 7 and March 31, 2001. See Judgment, p. 75.

<sup>36</sup> Exhibit D29/2, Witness AHP's written statement dated June 18 and 19, 2002. See Judgment, p. 75.

<sup>37</sup> Witness RH, T. October 25, 2007, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Judgment, pp. 74-76.

*Interahamwe* member who is currently serving a life sentence for his participation in the genocide. In addition to his activities as a member of *Interahamwe*, BKW also worked as a motorcycle taxi driver. According to his testimony, sometime in mid-June 1994, around the noon hour, he was repairing his motorcycle beside the road when he spotted Bikindi, Hassan Ngeze, and three CDR officials, including *conseiller* Sibomana, driving to Karasira's house. As the men exited the vehicle, BKW noticed that Bikindi was wearing a military cap and uniform and was armed with a pistol and an AK-47. The witness went on to explain that the men marched up to the door, and when they knocked, several women ran out screaming. Bikindi and one of the other officials then called over to BKW to bring a vehicle to the house in order to round up the household and take them to the *commune rouge*. BKW carjacked a car at gunpoint belonging to the nearby milling factory (the word "*maïserie*" was painted on its side) and forced the driver to drive to the house. Karasira and all seven members of his family were forced into the car. They were then taken to the *commune rouge* where Bikindi and his cohorts, including BKW, shot them at point blank.

AHP corroborated much of the story, testifying that though he himself did not participate in the incident, out of curiosity he followed the car (his description matching that of BKW's) from Karasira's house to the *commune rouge*. According to AHP, after Bikindi fired his pistol, he told the others that he never wanted to hear any mention of Tutsi again. But AHP's testimony differed from BKW's on a key detail. He said that Bikindi never approached the house, instead remaining behind in his vehicle while the others rounded up Karasira's family. He also contradicted an earlier written statements in which he indicated that he did not actually go all the way to the *commune rouge* and did not personally witness the murders, stating, "I concluded that the Tutsis who were crying inside [the car] had been taken to *commune rouge* and that they were going there to be killed because once any Tutsi was taken by *conseiller* Sibomana, everybody knew that [those] people were going there to be killed and could never be seen again."

Despite these discrepancies, it would seem that the two stories closely matched, enough at least to ascertain that Bikindi was directly involved in the murders. Once again, however, the Chamber noted several problems with the witnesses and their testimonies. During cross-examination, BKW told the Defense that the victims included Karasira's 12- or 13-year-old son Nazinda, his 18-year-old daughter, and that the rest were older women. Earlier in his testimony, the witness also noted the presence of a "small girl," which may have referred to Karasira's

daughter (in Kinyarwanda, “small” can also be interpreted as “young”). But in a written statement he provided to investigators in 2005 he made no mention of Karasira’s daughter, explaining instead that the victims included Karasira, his son Nazinda, his wife, and five “old women.” BKW had also testified in another trial that he followed Bikindi and the victims on his motorcycle, whereas in this case he asserted that he was with them in the same vehicle. While under the Prosecution’s examination-in-chief, he testified that after the murders, Bikindi and the other officials each went off in their own direction, but during the Defense’s cross-examination, he claimed that they all returned immediately to Karasira’s house. In addition to these inconsistencies, the Chamber had serious doubts about the motives behind both witnesses’ accounts. Both men are currently serving life sentences at Gisenyi prison, the same prison where Defense witness ASQ1, himself an inmate, testified that several prisoners were conspiring against Bikindi and others in the hopes of receiving better treatment and/or a reduced sentence. The charge against Bikindi for the murder of Karasira and his family was thus dismissed.<sup>39</sup>

### **Massacres at Nyamyumba and Incident at Rugerero Roadblock**

The Prosecution alleged that in mid to late June 1994, Bikindi was in charge of a group of around twenty *Interahamwe* manning a roadblock in Rugerero, a village within Gisenyi prefecture. Another *Interahamwe* group later arrived from the nearby village of Nyamyumba. They told Bikindi and the others that they had been trying to finish off the Tutsi but were facing heavy resistance. In response, Bikindi, accompanied by Colonel Buregeya and a local *Interahamwe* leader name Noël, led the group in a vehicle convoy to Nyamyumba where they provided reinforcements. They eventually killed off the remaining Tutsi as well as Father Thaddée Gatore, a Hutu priest who providing sanctuary to Tutsi at his parish. Bikindi also ordered the death of another Hutu man named Ildephonse Kabayiza for trying to protect Tutsi. When they returned to the roadblock in Rugerero, Bikindi began waving Father Gatore’s identity card about, telling those within earshot that “this should be an example, that any Hutu who will be taken unawares while hiding a Tutsi was going to be faced with the same fate as were Gatore and Kabayiza.” Bikindi and his underlings in the *Interahamwe* had also looted the area, including several heads of cattle. Back at the roadblock, a fight broke out between two of the *Interahamwe* members over the loot, and both were killed along with a possible third member.

---

<sup>39</sup> Judgment, pp. 76-79



Bikindi then chastised the other men. According to one witness, he told them “to control themselves and not to—to allow themselves to act in that way...that it was not good in the eyes of the people. It was shameful.” Another witness quoted Bikindi as saying, “You are killing yourselves, whereas there are Tutsis to kill. Why don't you go and kill the Tutsis with whom we have a problem? Why are you killing yourselves?”

The accusations regarding this incident were made by three witnesses: AJZ, who testified from September 25 to 26, 2006, AJY, who testified from September 26 to 27, 2006, and BKW. Recall that the credibility of BKW had been undermined due to inconsistencies in other testimony and by the fact that he is serving a life sentence and may have had motive to make false accusations in the hopes of less severe punishment. Neither AJZ nor AJY have been accused of any crimes related to the genocide (though AJY had been imprisoned for other crimes) and so would not seem to share the same ulterior motives as suspected of BKW. Nevertheless, none of the witnesses actually went to Nyamyumba and had only learned of the killings and lootings through hearsay. There were also, once again, numerous inconsistencies within and between the three testimonies. They did not agree on the time of day when Bikindi allegedly led the assault on Nyamyumba, with AJY saying it was around 9:00 or 10:00 a.m., BKW saying it was around 11:00 a.m., and AJZ saying it was around 5:00 p.m. They could not agree on the model of vehicle in which Bikindi rode to Nyamyumba, with BKW saying it was a Volkswagen and AJY insisting it was a Peugeot. They also could not agree on who killed whom during the quarrel over the loot. AJY and BKW asserted that the men who were killed were named Nokori and Paulin. AJY claimed that Nokori killed Paulin who was then in turn shot to death by another *Interahamwe* member, but AJZ testified that three men were killed. One was Paulin, and the other two were named Serumveri and Kizito, but the Defense was able to establish that Kizito was still alive and well. Finally, a UNAMIR report concerning the killings of priests in the area determined that Father Gatore was killed in April 1994, while Bikindi was in Europe. Due to discrepancies in the witnesses' testimonies related to this and other allegations, the credibility of their testimonies was thrown into question, and the Chamber once again ruled that the Prosecution was unable to prove Bikindi's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Judgment, pp. 79-84

## Rape and Killing of Ancilla and Her Daughter

The Prosecution contended that Bikindi ordered the rape and murder of Ancilla, a nurse in Gisenyi, and the murder of her four-year-old daughter. The alleged crime began with a rally held at Umuganda Stadium in Gisenyi in late June 1994, soon after the alleged massacres in Nyamyumba. Witness AJZ, already mentioned in connection with the Nyamyumba incident, testified that at this rally Bikindi urged a crowd of about three hundred to continue killing off all Tutsi, telling them that the Tutsi “should be looked for and eliminated because they were the enemies of Rwanda; in fact, they were the *inyenzi* who were attacking Rwanda.” AJZ went on to explain that after this rally, there was a renewed effort on the part of the *Interahamwe* and others to search for Tutsi and kill them. At some point, an *Interahamwe* member named Kabulimbo reported to Bikindi and two *Interahamwe* leaders named Noël and Pascal. He informed them that he had discovered a Tutsi woman hiding in the ceiling of her house. Bikindi ordered the *Interahamwe* to go to the house. There they encountered Ancilla’s husband who claimed that his wife had fled to Zaïre. After brutally beating the husband, they forced Ancilla from the ceiling and raped her. They then brought her and her daughter out to the road where Bikindi was waiting. Bikindi said, “There is no other solution, you must go and kill her.” Bikindi and Noël took Ancilla and her daughter to the middle of a sweet potato farm belonging to a farmer named Mirasano. There, the two females were slaughtered. When the Prosecution asked AJZ how it happened, he replied:

She was beaten up with clubs, and with some sharp objects. In fact, it was an atrocious death...The child was also clubbed to death. These clubs were known at the time as *ntambongano y’umwanzi*.<sup>41</sup> These were clubs to which nails had been affixed.<sup>42</sup>

AJZ insisted that he was an eyewitness to the entire episode. AJY, who also claimed to have witnessed the event, added the detail that Ancilla was raped before being murdered. If true, this would be a most heinous crime, but once again, as with every violent incident to which Bikindi was allegedly connected, there were a number of problems in the witnesses’ testimonies and issues regarding their backgrounds that damaged their credibility to the extent that the

---

<sup>41</sup> The term translates literally as “Don’t accept a bribe/offer from the enemy.” These clubs were also known as *ubuhiri*.

<sup>42</sup> Witness AJZ, T. 26 September 2006, p. 13

Prosecution was unable to successfully convict Bikindi. In this case, AJZ kept mixing up the date of the incident, at different points testifying that it had occurred in late June, then early July, then late July, even though it was shown that he had gone into exile to Zaïre on July 10 and so could not have witnessed it in late July. Rather perplexing is the following statement in which, regarding the time of her murder, he seems to contradict himself nearly within the same breath:

I was standing by the road, and many of us were present and we could see she was being killed in a farm or a field. The next day, in the morning, an *Interahamwe* known as Kazaroho, came down the road and saw Ancilla, and then screamed, saying that the time had come for nurses to go harvest sweet potatoes. That is the time at which she was taken away and killed in Mirasano's farm, under Mirasano's supervision.<sup>43</sup>

It almost seems in this excerpt as if Ancilla had been killed twice: first one day, and then again the next morning. It may be that the witness was referring to the general time period of the murder, but whatever the case, the Chamber found it confusing. At the time of the trial, local Rwandan authorities were still investigating the death of Ancilla, and so the Chamber also wondered why AJZ had not offered to provide any evidence to them. The Chamber also emphasized several significant discrepancies between the testimonies of AJZ and AJY. Unlike AJY, AJZ never mentioned rape, even though he was supposedly eyewitness to the entire event. AJZ also said that Bikindi was waiting by the road, whereas AJY said that he had entered Ancilla's house. Finally, AJZ suggested the murder had occurred in the morning, whereas AJY said it was the evening. Therefore, the Prosecution again failed to substantiate Bikindi's involvement in these murders, and the charges were dismissed.<sup>44</sup>

### **Massacres at Camp Scout**

Prosecution witness BHI, a former *Interahamwe* member currently serving a life sentence, testified on October 12 and 13, 2006 that Bikindi ordered *Interahamwe* to set up a roadblock at an area known as Camp Scout. Few details of this location were disclosed in the trial. All that was revealed was that it was near a Pentecostal church in Gisenyi. According to the witness, Bikindi was in charge of a roadblock there and oversaw the deaths of several Tutsi

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Judgment, pp. 84-87.

who were apprehended while trying to pass through. BHI, however, was the sole witness to this. His testimony was often contradictory and vague on certain details, for example claiming at first that the roadblock was guarded twenty-four hours a day and then later claiming that it was only manned at night. Furthermore, Defense witnesses HZTX, RH, and FLV, all of whom hailed from the same area, insisted that no roadblock had ever been established at this location. FLV attended *gacaca* hearings regarding the matter and testified that at these hearings Bikindi was never mentioned. In fact, he said the massacre occurred in April while Bikindi was in Europe. BHI's testimony regarding this incident was thus thrown out, and the charges were dismissed.<sup>45</sup>

### **Murders of Three Women at *Commune Rouge***

BHI also testified that Bikindi ordered *Interahamwe* members to abduct three women in a compound in Gacuba *cellule*<sup>46</sup> in Gisenyi. According to BHI, Bikindi then drove the women to the *commune rouge* where they were killed. The witness, though, never actually saw the women driven to the *commune rouge*. He merely testified that he saw Bikindi driving a car in the direction of the *commune rouge*, but swore that crammed in the car with Bikindi were three women and several *Interahamwe*. BHI attested that the women were being beaten, but with no further detail and no corroboration, the Chamber ruled that his testimony was insufficient.<sup>47</sup>

### **Allegations of Sexual Violence**

The Prosecution accused Bikindi in its Indictment of raping and overseeing the rapes of several women, but the only instance in which the accusation of sexual violence came up during the trial was in relation to the murder of the nurse, Ancilla. She was allegedly raped by *Interahamwe* members acting under Bikindi's orders. Bikindi, though, was acquitted of this crime, and so charges of sexual violence were dismissed.<sup>48</sup>

### **Conspiring with Political and Military Leaders and RTLM personnel**

The Prosecution accused Bikindi of collaborating with the leadership of the MRND and CDR parties, including President Habyarimana, as well as *Interahamwe* leaders, top military

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 87-89.

<sup>46</sup> A *cellule* refers to a small division of a village, town, or city.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-90.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

brass, and RTLM personnel. Together, they conspired to commit genocide by creating and disseminating anti-Tutsi propaganda, recruiting people into the MRND and *Interahamwe* militias, and training them to kill. On all charges, the Chamber ruled that the Prosecution failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Bikindi was guilty, and the charges were dismissed. The Prosecution alleged that certain members of *Irindiro* belonged to *Interahamwe* and later committed genocide, but whether true or not, the Chamber ruled that this would not prove that Bikindi was responsible for their actions. The Prosecution also failed to adduce any evidence proving that Bikindi closely associated with Rwanda's political and military leadership to the extent that he would have personally worked with them to plan and carry out the genocide. As to his association with RTLM, the evidence showed that Bikindi was only one of numerous shareholders. In his defense, Bikindi testified that he only bought one share, at a price of 5,000 Rwandan francs (less than ten dollars), and his reason for doing so was so that he could secure advertising. This gave him no control over programming. Bikindi was only interviewed twice, on December 31, 1993 and again on January 3 or 4, 1994. During these interviews, Bikindi commented on the political situation at the time, voicing his support for President Habyarimana and criticizing the Arusha Accords. He never made any statements against Tutsi or in favor of genocide.<sup>49</sup>

Prosecution witness BGH was an economics journalist for ORINFOR (*Office Rwandais d'Information*) who attended and reported on several MRND demonstrations. She testified that at these demonstrations, she often witnessed Bikindi talking with leaders such as Mathieu Nzirorera (Executive Secretary of the MRND), Jean Habyarimana (an MRND official based in Kigali), Mathieu Ngirumpatse (National President of MRND), Édouard Karemera (first Vice-President of the MRND), Ferdinand Nahimana (co-founder of RTLM), and various ministers. In her testimony, BGH asserted that it was obvious to her that Bikindi knew these people well, but she also confessed that she was never able to overhear anything being said.

In conjunction with BGH's testimony, other evidence submitted by the Prosecution demonstrated that, as a musician, Bikindi was a favorite of Rwanda's top leadership. On January 16, 1994, Vice-President Karemera was heard on RTLM telling listeners:

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-20.

Bikindi, whom you know—ha! Even the *Inkotanyi*<sup>50</sup> know him, even all the soldiers know him. Hmm...Bikindi is well known...All the MRND militants like him...Dear militants, the *Irindiro* troupe has just reminded me of Bikindi's talent. It has enabled me to remember this song which praises the heroic deeds of the Rwandan Armed Forces...Dear militants, brothers and sisters, I would request you to help Simon Bikindi for the significant contribution he has made to Rwandans but especially in a particular way to the members of the MRND through the numerous and rational advice which he has been giving. Assist me therefore in thanking him [\*applause\*].<sup>51</sup>

Based on BGH's testimony, this radio transcript, and other evidence showing that Bikindi and his troupe performed at MRND rallies, the Chamber determined that "Bikindi was perceived as an important and influential member of the MRND and was familiar with MRND leaders,"<sup>52</sup> and that "Bikindi was held in very high esteem by the *Interahamwe* and considered to be an important figure and a man of authority in the movement."<sup>53</sup> The Chamber noted that this last point was exemplified by an incident in which Bikindi persuaded *Interahamwe* near his home in Gisenyi to return items that they had stolen from his Tutsi neighbor. Furthermore, the Chamber was "convinced that Bikindi approved of the dissemination of anti-Tutsi propaganda by the MRND and its leaders,"<sup>54</sup> and that through his music, "Bikindi himself participated in the anti-Tutsi propaganda campaign,"<sup>55</sup> but these were not enough to warrant a conviction of Conspiracy to Commit Genocide.<sup>56</sup>

### Statements Delivered at Political Rallies

As an employee of the Ministry of Youth and Culture and Rwanda's most popular musician, Bikindi, as was expected of him, performed and spoke at numerous government functions, including rallies intended to bolster support for the MRND. At some of these rallies anti-Tutsi statements were made, but Bikindi's participation does not in mean that he agreed with these statements, nor does it constitute incitement on his part. What matters is the specific

---

<sup>50</sup> *Inkotanyi* was a common nickname for the RPF. It can be translated in a number of ways, such as "activists," "fanatics," or "great warriors."

<sup>51</sup> Exhibit P47, Transcript of RTL M Broadcast of 16 January 1994, pp. 5-6. See Judgment, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Judgment, p. 17

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

content of any speech (spoken or sung) that he delivered at these rallies. The rallies in question consist of those held at Ruhengeri and Gisenyi in 1992; Rubavu, Gisenyi, Kivumu, and Kigali in 1993; and Gisenyi and Kigali in 1994.<sup>57</sup> Rather than delve into the details of every one of these rallies and the allegations related to them, most of which are redundant, I focus on a few which will serve to provide a clear idea of the issues involved.

Witness AKE, a professional football player, testified that in “early 1994” Bikindi attended a CDR meeting at the MRND *Palais* in Kigali (a government mansion and compound that housed the president and his family). Football players were allowed to use the facilities at the *Palais* to dress before games. AKE claimed that as he was getting ready for a game he witnessed the meeting and overheard Bikindi say that the “[CDR members] should be careful because the enemy had infiltrated among them.”<sup>58</sup> When asked later to repeat Bikindi’s statements, AKE revised his testimony, testifying that Bikindi said that “the Hutu should take revenge and kill the Tutsis.”<sup>59</sup> Due to this discrepancy as well as other puzzling details in his testimony, the Chamber determined that it could not rely on AKE’s testimony.<sup>60</sup>

The Prosecution alleged that Bikindi participated in a rally held in “mid to late June 1994” at Umuganda Stadium in Gisenyi. There, he told the gathering, “Hutus should know who the enemy is, and that the enemy is the Tutsi” and that “Hutus should hunt and search for the Tutsis and kill them.” The rally incited a number of massacres of Tutsi in the surrounding area. AJZ was the only witness to testify to this meeting. The Chamber found reason to question AJZ’s credibility due to numerous inconsistencies and contradictions throughout his testimony related to this and other allegations (see above). His testimony on this matter could also not be corroborated, and so the charge was dismissed.<sup>61</sup>

Most alarming is the testimony of witness BHB, a female Tutsi who sought refuge with approximately two hundred<sup>62</sup> others at a cultural center in Ngororero, Gisenyi. According to her, on April 10, 1994, Bikindi sang and spoke at a rally held in front of the sub-prefectural office,

---

<sup>57</sup> Though Bikindi’s participation at rallies held before 1994 would fall outside the temporal jurisdiction of the court, testimony regarding these rallies was allowed to be admitted as evidence of Bikindi’s ideology and intentions during 1994. See Judgment, pp. 30-44.

<sup>58</sup> Witness AKE, T. 5 October 2006, pp. 36-37.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Judgment, p. 33.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-33.

<sup>62</sup> There is some confusion in the transcripts over whether it was two hundred or two thousand displaced persons at the cultural center.

located about 100 to 150 meters away from the cultural center. Testifying on September 20, 2006, she stated:

W: You see, the purpose of the rallies at the time was to incite people to kill others...Several persons spoke at the rally and then Bikindi spoke, saying, “Why look for the enemy far away, whereas he is not far from us?” And he pointed at us. He pointed at the location at which we were.

P: At that point in time—what did you perceive him to mean by “the enemy”?

W: From the time we took refuge at that location, Hutus were referring to Tutsis as the enemy. And so it is us who were being referred to as the enemy, given that we were Tutsi.

P: Now, during this time as the singing and the statements and utterances were made, can you describe to this Honorable Court the demeanor, the mood of the *Interahamwe* and those who were involved in the singing and chanting of these songs; and when the statements were made, their mood and their demeanor, describe them.

W: Whenever they came to the rallies they were wearing their uniforms, and those uniforms were different from their ordinary attire. They had special uniforms that were specific to the *Interahamwe*, and you would see that they were happy as they danced, and, clearly, there was something on their mind which made them happy. And as you looked at them, you would think that they were happy.

P: Do you know what happened to those refugees whom Simon Bikindi pointed at—or, towards their direction and stated that they were the enemy? Do you know what eventually happened to them?

W: All those who were in that building were killed in 1994, later on, in that very building. That is the building where they were at the time those songs were being chanted.

P: How do you know they were killed?

W: I know because I was in that group.<sup>63</sup>

As convincing as BHB’s testimony may sound, the charges against Bikindi were again dismissed. The rally was never mentioned in the Indictment nor the Pre-Trial Brief nor the

---

<sup>63</sup> Witness BHB, T. 20 September 2006, pp. 26-27.



Prosecution's Opening Statement, and thus the Chamber ruled that the Defense did not have sufficient notice to properly prepare its case in regards to the matter. More conclusive was that Bikindi was not even in the country in April 1994. BHB's testimony was thrown out.<sup>64</sup>

In all the allegations against Bikindi regarding his participation at these rallies, the Chamber determined that in only one instance was the Prosecution able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Bikindi made anti-Tutsi statements. This was at a rally held in mid-May 1993 in Kivumu, a commune in Gisenyi prefecture. Witness AKJ, a Hutu farmer and groundnut trader, testified that Bikindi addressed the gathering with the following words: "You know this well: you must exterminate or get rid of these serpents which are among you." He then clarified who the "serpents" were by telling the crowd, "Your enemies are the Tutsis; your enemies are the Tutsis."<sup>65</sup> Following these statements, AKJ stated that Bikindi's songs were played from a sound system fitted to a car, and everyone danced for about fifteen minutes before departing. AKJ then attested that while no one was killed immediately afterward, there were *Interahamwe* members present who later committed genocide. Because Bikindi's statements at this rally took place outside of the temporal jurisdiction of the court, he was not convicted, though the court considered the event as evidence that shed light on Bikindi's attitudes towards Tutsi.<sup>66</sup>

### **Statements Delivered on the Road between Kivumu and Kayove**

The Prosecution alleged that during an afternoon in late June 1994, Bikindi led a convoy of vehicles from Kivumu to Kayove and back, participating in rallies held at both communes. The convoy consisted of a car, with Bikindi sitting in the passenger seat, followed by two buses, each packed with *Interahamwe* members who were shouting, blowing whistles, and waving guns and clubs out the window. As the caravan slowly made its way, Bikindi's songs blared from a loudspeaker fitted to the car. Now and then, Bikindi interrupted his songs to urge passersby to carry on with the genocide. To make its case, the Prosecution relied on the testimonies of witnesses AKJ (the farmer mentioned above) and AKK, an unemployed Hutu and former student who was living with his parents in Kivumu at the time. AKJ's testimony began on September 20, 2006. He stated that he witnessed the convoy arriving in Kivumu from Kayove, describing the scene as follows:

---

<sup>64</sup> Judgment, p. 116.

<sup>65</sup> Witness AKJ, T. 20 September 2006, p. 48; T. 21 September 2006, p. 23. See Judgment, p. 33-35.

<sup>66</sup> Judgment, p. 35.

P: You said there was a convoy. [Besides the car], what other vehicles were in that convoy?

W: There were two buses belonging to ONATRACOM,<sup>67</sup> and those vehicles carried people clad in MRND uniforms. Some of them even wore grass around their head.<sup>68</sup>

P: Do you know who these people were, these people with grass on their head?

W: Most of those who were in those vehicles were *Interahamwe*—were members of the *Interahamwe*.

P: Can you tell us what you observed when that convoy passed you—went past you?

W: Bikindi stopped at a center in Kivumu. The car in which he was drove very slowly, and then he said, “Have you killed the Tutsis here?”, and as the vehicle went by, I was able to hear him ask that question, asking whether they had killed the “snakes.”<sup>69</sup>

AKK witnessed the convoy on its way to the Kayove rally. He testified on September 22, 2006:

P: Could you tell the Honourable Court what intermittent statements you heard being uttered by Simon Bikindi?

W: This is what Simon Bikindi said, “You sons of Sebahinzi, who are the majority, I am speaking to you, you know that the Tutsi are minority. Rise up and look everywhere possible and do not spare anybody.”

P: What did you understand the statement to mean?

W: Well, you may want to know that it is not always easy to understand what the Kinyarwanda language means. But what he meant was that some Tutsis had already been killed, but some were hiding here and there. So, he was, indeed, calling on people to do all that which was necessary to eliminate all the Tutsi. So, they used dogs to discover the areas where Tutsis were hidden—hiding in order to kill them.

P: Do you know what happened to—do you have any knowledge of what happened to Tutsi who were within that area subsequent to the statements that were uttered by Simon Bikindi?

---

<sup>67</sup> ONATRACOM stands for “Office National de Transport en Commune”.

<sup>68</sup> It was common for *Interahamwe* members to distinguish themselves by tying grass around their head or banana leaves around their torso.

<sup>69</sup> Witness AKJ, T. 20 September 2006, p. 50.

W: As they were going to Kayove he made some statements, but on the way back he stopped at a roadblock and met the leadership of the local *Interahamwe*, and he had a discussion with the leader of the local *Interahamwe*. And he insisted on the following point: “You see, when you hide a snake in your house, you can expect to face the consequences.” Now, when he left that location then members of the population went about trying to find any other survivors, and in that effort they found a prisoner by [the name of] Gatore,<sup>70</sup> whom they killed on the spot. And other people were also discovered as this search proceeded and those people, too, were killed. Now, when he came, the calm that obtained in our area was rather precarious because some people had successfully hidden themselves, but after his statement the *Interahamwe* intensified their searches for the Tutsis so they went into homes in order to flush out Tutsis who may have been hiding in any location.

P: That will be all with this witness, Your Honours. Thank you.

[At this point, Judge Fremr asked the witness to further clarify Bikindi’s statements]:

W: Thank you, Your Honour. He went on to explain what he meant when he said that these people should be sent back to their home. I don't know how far the Nyabarongo River goes, but you know that if somebody is thrown in a river, that person drowns and dies and then the river would carry the body up to a certain destination, and upon verification it was noticed that people had actually been thrown into the river, people had been dropped into pits, people were thrown in Lake Kivu. So he used certain allusions referring to the descendants of Sebahinzi. But in Kinyarwanda the message can be understood.<sup>71</sup>

The Chamber found no reason to doubt the credibility of the two witnesses. The Defense raised some questions about AKK’s statement that Father Gatore was killed subsequent to Bikindi’s speech at the roadblock. The UNAMIR report determined that the priest had been killed in April, but the Chamber argued that the confusion over the matter did not “discredit Witness AKK’s first-hand and articulate evidence on Bikindi’s exhortation to kill Tutsi on his way to Kayove.”<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> This is the same Father Gatore referred to previously, the Hutu Catholic priest who was killed in April for using his parish to provide sanctuary to Tutsi.

<sup>71</sup> Witness AKK, T. 22 September 2006, pp. 5-6.

<sup>72</sup> Judgment, p. 66.

In making its case against this particular allegation (as well as other allegations), The Defense relied on the testimonies of nine witnesses, including Bikindi's two wives, Apolline Uwimana and Angeline Mukabanana, and Bikindi himself. Witnesses DVR, QUTI, KMS, and Uwimana testified that when Bikindi returned to Rwanda in mid-June 1994, he and his family stayed at a friend's home in Nyundo, Gisenyi. Witness KMS asserted that Bikindi never left this home. Others said that Bikindi only left to exercise, visit with members of *Irindiro*, or take his injured daughter to the hospital. One witness claimed that when Bikindi did leave the home, he never went far and always returned by 5:00 p.m., and another witness said that Bikindi was worried about his safety and that of his family and therefore did not go out in public anymore than necessary. Mukabanana also testified that Bikindi's car did not have a public address system fitted to it. Bikindi, of course, denied the whole incident.

The Chamber noted that each of the Defense witnesses had a close relationship with Bikindi and so had motive to testify in his favor. Also, none of them would have been able to account for Bikindi's every move. As to the issue of Bikindi's car not having a public address system, the Chamber emphasized that it was never clarified whose car it was that led the convoy. As to Bikindi's denial of the incident, the Chamber all but called him a liar, having found the testimonies of AKK and AKJ convincing. In conclusion, the Chamber ruled that the Prosecution had proven beyond a reasonable doubt that while traveling on the road between Kivumu and Kayove, Bikindi accompanied a caravan of *Interahamwe*, and while doing so he broadcast his songs and exhorted onlookers to go and find any remaining Tutsi and kill them.<sup>73</sup>

### **Composing Songs with the Intent to Incite Genocide**

Perhaps the most far-reaching relevance of Bikindi's trial concerns the Chamber's need to balance the right to musical expression with the need to prosecute the composition, performance, and recording of songs that incited genocide. This was the first time in the history of international law that music itself had been put on trial, and therefore, any ruling on the matter would set a precedent for the legal treatment of other musicians and artists whose output might be similarly linked to mass atrocity. The temporal jurisdiction of the ICTR, however, only covers activities occurring during 1994, and so once it was established that Bikindi composed and recorded his songs before this time, the charges specifically related to them were dismissed.

---

<sup>73</sup> Judgment, pp. 64-69.

It would seem then that the Chamber was able to sidestep the issue. A report for PRI's *The World* claimed that the ruling further enshrined the right to musical expression, stating that "the court's decision does cement the freedom for other musicians elsewhere who may be writing hate music."<sup>74</sup> Ole Reitov, Program Manager for Freemuse, a leading organization committed to combating musical censorship and protecting the rights of musicians, was quoted in the report as follows: "It says that we cannot prove the link [between music and violence] which means that it leaves scope for freedom of expression of composing songs." He went on to say that "more significantly, the verdict sends a warning—especially to African despots—who would like to censor music and gag musicians."<sup>75</sup>

In fact, the Chamber's ruling does nothing to protect musicians. The Chamber was constrained by its temporal jurisdiction and really had no clear choice but to rule the way it did, thus begging the question: what if Bikindi's songs were composed *after* January 1, 1994? On this, the ruling does not lay down any legal precedent one way or the other, but in the Final Judgment, the Chamber determined that:

The Prosecution proved beyond reasonable doubt that Bikindi's songs "Nanga Abahutu" and "Bene Sebahinzi" [properly titled "Akabyutso" and "Intabaza"] extolled Hutu solidarity against a common foe, characterized Tutsi as Hutu enslavers, enemies or enemy accomplices, and were composed with the specific intention to disseminate pro-Hutu ideology and anti-Tutsi propaganda, and to encourage ethnic hatred. [The Chamber] has also found that "Twasazareye," "Nanga Abahutu" and "Bene Sebahinzi" were deployed in 1994 in Rwanda in a propaganda campaign to promote contempt for and hatred of the Tutsi population and to incite the listening public to target and commit acts of violence against Tutsi.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, the Chamber ruled that the songs did indeed incite genocide. Bikindi escaped a more severe sentence only because his songs were composed and recorded before 1994, and the judges determined that there was no evidence that he performed and disseminated them during 1994. Nevertheless, the ruling does potentially establish a legal precedent that music and violence can be causally linked.

---

<sup>74</sup> PRI's *The World*, December 3, 2008. See <http://www.pri.org/theworld/?q=node/22972>.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Judgment, p. 106; see also pp. 62-64.

## **Aggravating and Mitigating Circumstances**

In a criminal trial, the Prosecution may bring to the Chamber's attention a number of aggravating circumstances. These are not direct evidence of crimes but are factors that the Prosecution believes ought to play a role in determining the context, nature, and motive behind the defendant's criminal activity and thus influence the Chamber's decision regarding the verdict and proper level of punishment. In this case, the Prosecution urged the court to make note of Bikindi's fame, his close affiliation with powerful figures who were behind the genocide, the premeditated nature of his crimes, his direct participation, the violent and humiliating nature of his acts, the vulnerability of his victims, and the duration of his victims' suffering. The Chamber agreed that Bikindi's stature as a famous and beloved musician imbued him with the ability to influence people's thinking and behavior. In its final ruling, the Chamber believed that Bikindi abused this influence to incite genocide. As for the other aggravating circumstances, the Chamber ruled that the Prosecution had not proven them beyond a reasonable doubt.<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, the Defense argued for a number of mitigating circumstances. Like aggravating circumstances, these do not consist of evidentiary information that clearly disproves a crime but rather shed light on a person's character, attitudes, and ideology—information that might dissuade a guilty verdict. The Defense emphasized that Bikindi came from a family of modest means and simple existence, that he was exceptionally talented and had made significant contributions to Rwandan music, that through international touring he had helped Rwanda's economy by bringing commercial "dynamic publicity" to the country, and that his position as the director of the national junior ballet at the Ministry of Youth and Sports was not of a political nature. The Chamber found all this irrelevant and, in fact, stated that it only highlighted the degree to which Bikindi would have been able to influence people. The Defense also tried to impress upon the judges Bikindi's humane character by pointing out that some of his songs call for peace and social harmony, that he created the junior national ballet partly as a means to help street children and orphans, that he had helped Tutsi during the genocide, and of course, that his second wife was Tutsi. Again, the Chamber dismissed all this as irrelevant. As to helping Tutsi, the Chamber noted that Bikindi only helped those with whom he had some personal relationship such as family or members of *Irindiro*.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Judgment, p. 110.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110-11.

## Verdict and Sentencing

The Chamber rendered its verdict on December 2, 2008. On the basis of testimony delivered by only two witnesses, AKJ and AKK, Bikindi was found guilty of direct and public incitement to commit genocide. He was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment, retroactive from the date of his arrest on June 12, 2001.<sup>79</sup>

## The Appeal

On March 16, 2009, Bikindi and O'Shea filed an appeal,<sup>80</sup> arguing that there were serious problems in the testimonies of AKJ and AKK that were not properly assessed by the Chamber. AKK insisted that Father Gatore was killed in late June, one day after Bikindi allegedly delivered the damning statements on the drive between Kivumu and Kayove. But the priest was killed in April.<sup>81</sup> AKK also attested that a person named Kalisa was killed alongside Gatore, but other testimony regarding Gatore's murder never mentioned this name. In an earlier written statement, the witness stated that the Kivumu-Kayove road incident occurred in early June, not late June. Bikindi and O'Shea thus argued that these discrepancies should have discredited AKK's testimony.

The Appeals Chamber dismissed their arguments. Regarding the date of Gatore's death, the Chamber clarified that AKK never testified that he witnessed the priest's death, only that he learned of it from Gatore's killers whom he heard boasting about it the day after Bikindi's alleged statements. Therefore, AKK may have been led to believe that the priest had been killed in June rather than April. This did not undermine his testimony. As for the discrepancy between his written statement and his testimony, the Trial Chamber ruled that this was likely a mistranslation (remember that none of the lawyers or judges speak Kinyarwanda, and therefore all written statements and testimonies must be translated into English and French). AKK's testimony was firm, clear, and consistent enough to be considered reliable and credible.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>80</sup> The Prosecution also filed an appeal, challenging the Chamber's verdict and asserting that Bikindi's sentence was too lenient. The Prosecution continued to demand a life sentence. See Appeal Judgment, Case No. ICTR-01-72-A, 18 March 2010, pp. 1-3.

<sup>81</sup> Defense witness Shadrack Bizimana provided direct, eye-witness evidence in testifying that he actually reburied Father Gatore's body.

<sup>82</sup> Appeal Judgment, pp. 17-23.

Bikindi and O'Shea challenged AKJ's testimony on the grounds that he too contradicted himself. During the Prosecution's examination-in-chief, he was asked to provide dates when he witnessed Bikindi:

P: Can you tell the Chamber when—the first time you saw him, when was that? Can you recall the date?

W: I remember the year, but I do not remember the exact date or day.

P: Can you tell us what year that was?

W: The very first time I saw him was in 1993...

P: ...Thank you. Now, can we come to the next time you saw Mr. Bikindi in 1994?

W: Yes, indeed. In 1994, at about 1:30 or 2 p.m., we were on the road and we saw vehicles passing from a rally that had taken place at Kayove. So, there was a convoy of vehicles and the vehicle in which he was, was in front, and others came after him. Now, those in the vehicle included Mr. Bikindi, whom I was able to recognise in his MRND uniform. I also saw Boniface and Appollinaire, but I was not able to identify the fourth person in that vehicle.

P: Now, when exactly—or, about when in 1994 did this happen?

W: It was the month of June, towards the end of the month of June.<sup>83</sup>

AKJ was clear in this excerpt as to the month and year when he observed Bikindi along the Kivumu-Kayove road. The following day, Defense co-counsel Momo conducted his cross-examination, and as he did so, he attempted a tactic whereby he would suddenly switch his line of questioning between the two events in which AKJ claimed to have witnessed Bikindi: the 1993 rally at a football field in Kivumu and the 1994 Kivumu-Kayove road incident. Momo attempted to confuse AKJ, destabilize his recollection of the events, and cause him to contradict himself, thus belying the reliability and credibility of his testimony. Momo would also slyly insert descriptive elements of one episode into the other and ask AKJ to comment in the hopes that the witness would not pick up on the sleight-of-hand. The strategy, however, backfired. It had the effect of not only confusing AKJ, but the entire court as well, resulting in the Chamber chastising Momo. Rather than highlight any falsity in AKJ's testimony, Momo succeeded only

---

<sup>83</sup> Witness AKJ, T. 20 September 2006, p. 47, 50.



in annoying the judges, likely doing more harm than good to Bikindi's case. In the Judgment, the Chamber concluded that:

[D]uring the cross-examination much confusion was created regarding the date of the rally. However, the Chamber attributes this solely to the method of questioning used by the Defence Counsel, and accordingly does not consider that this witness's credibility was harmed by this. The Chamber found no reason to doubt the reliability of this eye witness or his credibility, which was consistent throughout his testimony.<sup>84</sup>

The Appeals Chamber dismissed Bikindi's and O'Shea's appeal that witness AKJ had contradicted himself.<sup>85</sup> Bikindi and O'Shea then sought an appeal on the grounds that Momo had bungled the questioning. They also pointed out the hostile working relationship that developed between Momo and Bikindi's initial lead counsel, Wilfred Nderitu, after Nderitu accused Momo of secretly contacting Prosecution witness BUY. The Appeals Chamber dismissed all of this, ruling that such matters should have been brought up during the trial. Bikindi and O'Shea then argued that when O'Shea was assigned to replace Nderitu, he did not have enough time to properly prepare for the trial. The Appeals Chamber regarded this as irrelevant.<sup>86</sup>

Perhaps more challenging to the court's verdict was Bikindi's and O'Shea's charge that, in fact, witnesses AKK and AKJ did not corroborate one another's testimony.<sup>87</sup> AKK witnessed Bikindi traveling from Kivumu to Kayove, and AKJ witnessed him on his way back to Kivumu. They did not witness the same event from two vantage points but rather witnessed two separate events and heard two separate sets of statements. In a ruling on an earlier appeals case, the Appeals Chamber established the ground rules for corroboration, stating that:

Two testimonies corroborate one another when one *prima facie* credible testimony is compatible with the other *prima facie* credible testimony regarding the same fact or a sequence of linked facts. It is not necessary that both testimonies be identical in all aspects or describe the same fact in the same way. Every witness presents what he has

---

<sup>84</sup> Judgment, p. 34.

<sup>85</sup> Appeal Judgment, p. 26.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-15.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-28.

seen from his own point of view at the time of the events, or according to how he understood the events recounted by others. It follows that corroboration may exist even when some details differ between testimonies, provided that no credible testimony describes the facts in question in a way which is not compatible with the description given in another testimony.<sup>88</sup>

Under these guidelines, the Appeals Chamber dismissed Bikindi's and O'Shea's appeal that the two testimonies did not corroborate each other, ruling instead that the two witnesses "described a sequence of linked events and that the testimonies were compatible."<sup>89</sup> Whether this constitutes corroboration or not is arguable, for it remains that the Prosecution failed to identify two witnesses who observed the same specific event and heard the same specific statements. Also, if Bikindi was using a P.A. system to exhort people to carry on with the genocide, it would stand to reason that there were many people walking along the road. Why, then, was the Prosecution only able to locate two witnesses, and not even two witnesses who saw and heard the same thing?

Bikindi and O'Shea also argued that Operation Turquoise was in effect at the time of the alleged incident. Operation Turquoise was a French-led mission mandated by the UN on June 18, 1994. Its purpose was to establish a safe zone in southwestern Rwanda in order to protect and assist the massive numbers of refugees fleeing Rwanda during the war and genocide. The operation was based across the border in Zaïre, but UN troops were entering through Gisenyi and occupying a large swath of southwestern Rwanda. Soldiers frequently used the road between Kayove and Kivumu for its maneuvers. Because of this, Bikindi and O'Shea argued that it would have been imprudent for a convoy of *Interahamwe* to travel on this road and for Bikindi to make statements exhorting people to carry on with the genocide. The Appeals Chamber responded that troop movements on this road were sporadic so that the convoy could still have utilized the same route.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, Bikindi and O'Shea argued that the Trial Chamber did not give enough weight to the evidence presented by Defense witnesses in general.<sup>91</sup> They argued that it was especially

---

<sup>88</sup> *Nahimana et al.* Appeal Judgment, para. 428. See also *Karera* Appeal Judgment, para. 173. Cited by *Bikindi*, Appeal Judgment, p. 27, para. 81.

<sup>89</sup> Appeal Judgment, p. 27.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-33.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-42.

unfair to dismiss the testimony of witnesses just because they had a close relationship with Bikindi. In particular, they were upset that the judges ignored the testimony of Charles Zilimwabagabo in which he informed the court that Bikindi actually spoke out against the genocide.<sup>92</sup> The Appeals Chamber did not consider this relevant.

I would raise one other problem concerning the verdict. The alleged crime for which Bikindi was convicted is reprehensible, but it is not nearly on the scale as accusations against other ICTR defendants. At issue here are a couple of sentences that Bikindi allegedly shouted from a car. Among the crimes outlined in Bikindi's indictment, it is among the least egregious. Normally, such accusations would be prosecuted by the local Rwandan *gacaca* court, the judicial system established by the RPF to bring to justice the thousands of lesser genocide suspects. The *gacaca* system was set up before the ICTR Prosecution team decided to indict Bikindi, and yet Bikindi's name never came up as a suspect in *gacaca* investigations. It would seem odd then that Bikindi would not have been investigated by local RPF authorities before the ICTR chose to prosecute him.

### **Bikindi's Final Statement to the Court**

On September 30, 2009, Bikindi and O'Shea stood before the Appeals Chamber to present their final statements. Bikindi arrived in the traditional garb of musicians—a white robe draped across his right shoulder, a symbol that he had yet to relinquish his role as bearer of Rwandan history and culture.<sup>93</sup> After a few brief statements from the Prosecution and Defense, Chief Judge of Appeals Patrick Robinson turned to Bikindi and said, "I have to inform Mr. Bikindi—Mr. Bikindi, that you have an opportunity now to make a statement. If you wish to, you may make a statement."

What followed was perhaps the most bizarre yet poignant moment to have occurred in a trial that was full of such moments. Bikindi stood. Smiling demurely, he replied to the judges, in French, "Thank you, Mr. President, your honors; my declaration is simple." Then, in a soft, plaintive cadence, he began to sing:

The awful events that occurred in Rwanda constitute an unspeakable tragedy,

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-42.

<sup>93</sup> My description of the event is based on a video I received from an intern working at the ICTR. Bikindi sang in Kinyarwanda. The English translation presented here was provided by ICTR personnel.

tragic events that will leave you stunned, a real tragedy.

Let us pray that never again will they happen, that never again will they occur.

Oh, my people, never again. Never, ever, ever, ever again.

Were I again to have the opportunity to sing, to sing for Rwandans,

I would go the country of a thousand hills, so that all Rwandans could hear me.

I would climb right up to the highest peak, and once at the pinnacle, I would launch my appeal.

[\*Bikindi cups his hands around his mouth as if calling out over a great distance\*]

I would invite the Rwandans: Hutu, Twa, and Tutsi alike.

I would remind them that the tragic events that occurred in Rwanda have injured the hearts of all of us.

I would invite them to sing in unison:

The awful events that occurred in Rwanda constitute an unspeakable tragedy,  
tragic events that will leave you stunned, a real tragedy.

Let us pray that never again will they happen, that never again will they occur.

Oh, my people, never again. Never, ever, ever, ever again.

Then will come the political leaders and the ordinary citizens.

Sages, experienced and honest men, will also be invited there.

Coming also will be experts in Rwandan history so that they can do a thorough analysis.

Present also at the appointed hour will be experts in the social and economic fields.

They will come together to identify the real causes of our misfortunes and make proposals for a final solution to the endemic tragedies among Rwandans.

All this with a single objective for everyone: the reconstruction of Rwanda, so that she becomes a nation spared of wars, killings, and tears.

A nation in which Tutsi, Twa, and Hutu will together live in peace like brothers, without tearing each other apart.

I will seize the opportunity to remind Rwandans that Rwanda is the home of three ethnic groups—Hutu, Twa, and Tutsi—and no one chooses to be born Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa.

No one pays to be born Rwandan.

A Mutwa is a Rwandan Mutwa.

A Muhutu is a Rwandan Muhutu.

A Mututsi is a Rwandan Mututsi.

No one can change that.

We must all understand and always bear in mind that no one should be a victim of his ethnicity or have to live as an outcast because of it.

Above all, the most important thing is the acceptance of the other person and the respect of his or her individual integrity, respect for their rights and freedoms throughout the national territory.

Dear fellow citizens, be careful. Division is only of benefit to others.

It is forbidden, dear fellow citizens. It is against our culture to remind someone of painful events.

To the contrary, Rwandan culture teaches us that victims of the same misfortune try to support and console one another.

Faced with the same misfortune, they provisionally set aside their quarrels.

They close ranks without bitterness so that they can better understand the truth and allow it to see the light of day.

The innocent are proved innocent. Pardon is at last given. And the guilty are punished.

Thus, these exchanges, based on truth, mutual respect, and understanding, firmly cement reconciliation.

Thus, Rwandans, I invite you to observe a brief moment of silence so that altogether, we can honor the memory of all those innocent victims so savagely killed.

And we shall close by singing in unison:

The awful events that occurred in Rwanda constitute an unspeakable tragedy, tragic events that will leave you stunned, a real tragedy.

Let us pray that never again will they happen, that never again will they occur.

Oh, my people, never again. Never, ever, ever, ever again.

Throughout his performance, Bikindi gradually took on the stature of a wizened elder gently lecturing a group of youngsters. At certain moments, he leaned back and gazed across the court through half-closed eyes. At others, he lifted his hands towards the sky or waved his index finger back and forth in a manner bespeaking authority. At the conclusion of the song, Bikindi

placed his hands over his heart, bowed, and thanked the judges. It was the final statement he would make before the court. Afterwards, Justice Robinson thanked him in return and stated simply, “That ends the hearing. We are adjourned.” A few months later, the judges ruled to deny Bikindi’s appeal, forcing him to serve out his full sentence.

Bikindi’s song, which sounds far more elegant in Kinyarwanda, certainly does not seem to reflect the heart of a genocidal murderer. How does it comport with all the testimony and evidence presented throughout these last two chapters? Did he sincerely believe what he sang, or was it all a ruse to curry favor with the Chamber and the wider public? What is to be made of this man and his music?

### **Concluding Remarks**

I set out to study Bikindi’s trial in the hopes of learning more about his life, his political views, his attitudes regarding Hutu and Tutsi, whether or not his songs played a causal role in inciting the genocide, and, in all this, whether or not he intended for his songs to incite genocide. I approached the testimonies as I would a body of oral history from which I hoped to glean information relevant to this endeavor. In some ways, the lawyers were in a better position to conduct interviews for such purposes than most ethnographers. Because of their professional roles, they enjoyed a high degree of access. Within the context of a court of law, they were able to confront witnesses in a direct, forthright, even combative manner. If an ethnographer were to take a similar approach it could very likely offend or alienate informants and dissuade them from engaging any further in an interview. The testimonies delivered by the witnesses—which transcribed constitute well over 3,000 pages worth of data—thus provide a vast and rich reservoir of contestable information on Bikindi and his music.

The job of the Prosecution and Defense, though, is not to discover the truth, but to do everything they can within the law to win their case. To do so, both sides will seek out witnesses and guide their testimonies in a way that will bear out or conceal certain “facts.” Considering that some witnesses had a vested interest in their cooperation and in the outcome of the trial, there was often a motive for them to fabricate testimony—a problematic issue that raised its head at various points throughout the trial. Reflecting on this, I wonder what would happen if I, as an ethnomusicologist with no personal interest vested in Bikindi’s trial, had an opportunity to converse with these witnesses. Would their testimonies be any more or less honest and

forthcoming? I have my doubts. As an American who is writing a publicly available document related to Bikindi and the issues that surround him and his music, they may have viewed me as someone of influence, however small that influence may be. They also may not have trusted me, and as such, I am not sure I would have been any more capable of verifying their testimonies than that of the ICTR investigators, lawyers, and judges.

I find myself as uncertain at the end of Bikindi's trial as I was at the beginning. Every murder-related charge, whether legally categorized as genocide, complicity in genocide, murder as a crime against humanity, or some overlapping combination of the three, was dismissed. According to the judges' ruling, the evidence was not substantial enough, the Prosecution's arguments were not conclusive enough, or there was reason to doubt the reliability and credibility of witnesses. It was the same with all charges related to persecution as a crime against humanity, conspiracy to commit genocide, and direct and public incitement to commit genocide, with the one exception of the Kivumu-Kayove road incident. Considering all the testimony and evidence related to these charges, it may be hard to believe that Bikindi was innocent of all of them. Save for the witnesses who had been in prison together, most of the other Prosecution witnesses did not know one another, and so it is unlikely that they coordinated a fabricated attack on Bikindi. Is it possible that they were all willfully lying? Perhaps a combination of grief, anger, and a desire for vengeance, festering over the years and stoked on by their peers and their government, had warped their memories to the extent that their recollection of events was false. Maybe they had simply forgotten, because the events happened so long ago.

Bikindi's single conviction of incitement was based on the testimonies of only two witnesses, one who supposedly saw him on the way to Kayove, and the other who supposedly saw him arriving back in Kivumu. Can this one allegation be isolated from all the others? If he really made those statements, would it not be likely that he would be guilty of other crimes? And if he was not guilty of other crimes, does it not seem strange that he is guilty of only this one? Finally, if he did make statements urging Hutu to continue killing Tutsi, is it right to assume that Bikindi despised Tutsi and that he intended to use his music and his influence to incite their annihilation?

Jolanta T. Pakacz, in an incisive article<sup>94</sup> concerning issues that musical biographers should confront, asserts that the manner in which a musician's biography is constructed is contingent upon a host of cultural assumptions, political agendas, social pressures, and other motives on the part of the biographer, many of which the biographer is often unaware and therefore go unacknowledged. Rather than lining out a chronology of facts, constructing biography is an interpretive process, one that says much about the biographer's perspective as it does the subject of the biography. In a way, the Prosecution, Defense, and their witnesses have all constructed their own biographies of Bikindi within their own minds, and it is critically important to account for factors that determine what they remember and believe about him.

Even if it could be ascertained that Bikindi made statements extolling Hutu to kill Tutsi or even that he directly participated in massacres, this does not conclusively prove that he intended for his songs to incite anti-Tutsi violence. As Pakacz points out, a composer's life and music do not form an inseparable unity. She writes:

... methodologically, traditional biography has been grounded on a number of assumptions about the subject's personality: that there is a coherent, essentially unchanging and unitary self; that there is a unity and coherence to personality; that "the child is father of the man." Further, traditional biography has assumed that motives of the subject are readable and, when the "real" personality is understood, motives can be discerned. The biographer is expected to open the mind of the subject to us and to "make sense of it" by connecting things and identifying (or creating) patterns of his or her life by recognizing both linear and horizontal relationships. One purpose of traditional biography has been to tell a coherent story about an identifiably unified individual. One of the consequences of such an approach was to present the portrait of a hero whose unified persona has been purged of contradictory or confusing material.<sup>95</sup>

Arguing against this notion of a coherent, unchanging, unitary self which is often assumed in so-called "traditional biography," Pakacz supports a conception of identity in which

---

<sup>94</sup> Jolanta T. Pakacz. "Memory, History and Meaning: Musical Biography and Its Discontents." *Journal of Musicological Research* 23 (2004), pp. 39-80.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.



she says “identities are viewed as mobile, contested, multiple constructions of the self that depend as much on context as on any defining traits of character.”<sup>96</sup>

To take a more grounded view of things, Bikindi composed and recorded one of the songs in 1986 and the other two in early 1993, during which the situation was very different than in 1994. In 1993, he was composing in a context of partisan war, political upheaval, and social unrest, but there was not yet genocide, at least not nearly on the scale as would occur in 1994.<sup>97</sup> He would not have known that genocide was going to occur. RTLM would not come into existence for another few months. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to think that there could have been a transformation in his ideology, attitudes, and motives over the course of this time period. If Bikindi was guilty of some of the allegations listed in his indictment, it could be because upon returning to Rwanda in mid-June 1994, during the apex of genocidal violence, he was so confused and frightened for himself and his family that he chose to make moral and ethical compromises to show his allegiance to the pro-genocide government. Considering the level of coercion from authority figures and peers that was commonly used to force people to participate in the genocide, he would certainly not be the only person to have done so. In negotiating their own survival, it was not uncommon for Rwandans to provide help to some Tutsi while also murdering or aiding and abetting in the murder of others. In the end, only those who observed Bikindi first-hand during the genocide know for sure what he did or did not do. As for what he truly believed, only Bikindi knows.

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>97</sup> Throughout the early 1990s, there were sporadic outbreaks of violence specifically targeting both Tutsi and Hutu, as well as members of oppositional political parties.

## CHAPTER 4:

### THE SONGS

MCCOY: So, let me ask this other question, why have some interpreted your songs as a call for genocide, and how would you respond to those people?

BIKINDI: Let's divide this into two parts. The RPF took over and has put into the heads of the people, inciting the people to think that my songs incited genocide. This was not correct.

Let me begin with "Twasazareye." I composed this song in '86, and it was selected for a competition in '87, and that [competition] was meant to prepare for the celebration of independence that was to take place in July. I composed this song, and it was awarded first prize. And among the people who comprised the judges was Mbonimana<sup>1</sup>...And those guys, including Gamaliel Mbonimana, who was the president of the jury—they decided that this song should be sung on Independence Day, and so we performed this song on the first of July. One of the accusations against me in the indictment is that I performed the song in protest of the formation of the Arusha Accords. [Switches to English]: Think!?! The song...

MCCOY: ...was composed in 1986, and they said it was against the Arusha Accords, which were many years later...

BIKINDI: Do you know when the Arusha Accords were signed?

MCCOY: It was in 1993, wasn't it?

BIKINDI: August 4. August 4. I invite you to calculate...

MCCOY: Yeah, the logic is...??

---

<sup>1</sup> Gamaliel Mbonimana was one of two expert witnesses for the Prosecution. His testimony against Bikindi was key to judges' conclusion that Bikindi intended to use his music to provoke anti-Tutsi hostilities.

BIKINDI: I invite you to calculate, and look—'87—'93—me, I'm 'here' [as in 'here' in 1987]. [Switches back to Kinyarwanda]: Am I a prophet or a fortuneteller to compose a song that would be against the Arusha Accords, which would be seven years later?!

About “Akabyutso” and “Intabaza”—they were composed in '93. It was a crucial time for all Rwandans. This was a major moment, when the RPF was attacking. But this cannot be the only reason why I would compose these songs. We had also the creation of multipartyism. This period caused tribulation. It caused people to die. This multipartyism was the cause of people dying like rats! So, you would hear that a taxi had exploded, and while people were still dealing with that, there would be a bus—the post office in Kigali—the whole bus park would be down. And when you went to Kibuye, for example—if you went to Kibuye, you would find that the forest had been burnt down and that the hills were bare. So you would come back to Kigali.

I want to tell you something that touched me. There was a journalist in Gitarama. He had a son whom I loved so much. I will remember [the journalist's] name—Semusambi, Semusambi! His son went down to Gakingjero, which is a small market down in the town. Some others had gone [to the market] to fight for their party, to fight for people to join their party. [Switches to English]: It is called *kubohoza*, *kubohoza*—“to grab someone else.”<sup>2</sup> Yeah, like you are in Republican party and I took you for the Democratic party. And I took you to say, “You! Now! Since you are in Democratic party, if you refuse to be in Democratic party, we kill you!” That is *kubohoza*. [Switches back to Kinyarwanda]: Semusambi was not in the MRND; he was just a good writer. An *Interahamwe* member's house had been destroyed, so he and some of his young friends took revenge.<sup>3</sup> There were also two boys from MDR<sup>4</sup> whose parents had been killed. So these two

---

<sup>2</sup> “*Kubohoza*” translates more literally as “to free” or “to liberate.” In this context, it referred to a widespread practice during early-1990s multipartyism in which party loyalists would use threats and physical violence to force others to support their party, that is, “to be liberated” people from a rival party. In the months leading up to and during the genocide, it also referred to theft and, most disturbingly, rape. See Binaifer Nowrojee, Dorothy Q. Thomas, and Janet Fleischman, *Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence during the Rwandan Genocide and its Aftermath* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996), p. 39, fn. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Recall that *Interahamwe* was affiliated with MRND.

<sup>4</sup> MDR was one of MRND's fiercest rivals.

groups, these youth belonging to different parties, they met in the market. First, the ones from MDR had come “to grab” the youth from MRND. They destroyed houses and put down everything. Then, the *Interahamwe* came, and they came for revenge, because there were some who had lost their parents.

And I was a witness to this, because the son of Semusambi’s eyes had been ripped out. They brought him to the hospital without eyes. So, I can’t forget the shock of the situation with the son of Semusambi. [In English]: It was a great shock for me! A great shock! [Switches back to Kinyarwanda]: When I asked, “Why did they remove his eyes?” I was told that the guy who did it—his mother had been hung on a steel bar, and he said, “Whoever I meet first, I will take his eyes.”

Another incident...My [office] window was next to the taxi park. It was like ten o’clock at night, and something exploded—BOWWW! And I saw the dead bodies falling down. [\*Sighs heavily\*]. I left my office and took my car and went straight to the taxi park to see who I could help...So, this is another example that haunts me.

MCCOY: And this was the inspiration for these songs?

BIKINDI: And then all the other opposition parties came together. When these things happened, all these other parties came together, including the RPF, and they said, “No one else killed these people except Habyarimana.” [He mentions the names of several well-known politicians who were killed]. And this one died, and so-and-so died. This touched my heart.

It’s not only that. I went to the meetings. The tongue was very dangerous. We went to meetings—these were party meetings, not regular meetings. So I went there, but on the way I saw that there were members of other parties. They would beat you. So when you were going to party meetings, you would find members of other parties who would beat you up.

What I can’t forget is the accusation against me for organizing an attack at Musha. Musha is outside Kigali near Gikongoro.

MCCOY: Someone was accusing you?

BIKINDI: Someone accused me of being a leader of the attack at Musha! To my surprise, they accused me of this, but I was not even there at the time! I was at a wedding. At this same wedding, a prosecutor was there. So who put this rumor on the radio?! Fortunately, he and another prosecutor were invited on the radio to deny what was said about me. Otherwise, I would have died for nothing. I would have died for nothing!

So, you asked me what was pushing me towards composing these songs. If you were to ask me after these explanations, you would have to be an insensitive person. Who would not be able to compose songs like these? For me, the situation in my country was bad. [Switches to English]: *Really, really, really bad...* [Back to Kinyarwanda]: Me, as a witness to these troubles, I composed these songs so that I could call for justice, so that I could stop people from doing what they were doing.

The preceding analysis of Bikindi's trial examined evidence and testimonies, the main purpose of which was to learn more about his beliefs and the intentions behind the three songs for which he was indicted. The conclusion of this analysis was that the evidence and testimonies were insufficient to determine this. It was difficult to know who was a credible witness and who was not and who was lying (or remembering incorrectly) and who was being honest. It is therefore difficult to discern what Bikindi believed or to ascertain what actions he took in the time leading up to and during the genocide.

Turning now to the songs themselves, the next chapter will present the song lyrics with English translations. This will then be followed by a chapter presenting commentary on the songs drawn from personal conversations and trial testimony. If trial testimony was inconclusive, perhaps more can be learned from examining the song lyrics and compiling interpretations and arguments on the part of Rwandan listeners as to their intended usage and meaning. If there is consensus among a diverse range of listeners that the lyrics clearly express an anti-Tutsi attitude and a pro-genocide agenda, then this would be suggestive of Bikindi's ideology and intentions. What will instead be shown is that there is no consensus. The best that can be achieved, then, is to identify where along social and political fault lines this debate

occurs, and what this informs as to broader social and political conflict in Rwanda's past and present.

### **Claims from the Prosecution, Defense, and Chamber**

The Prosecution claimed in its Indictment that:

Simon Bikindi addressed public gatherings, composed, performed, recorded, or disseminated musical compositions extolling Hutu solidarity and characterizing Tutsi as the enslavers of the Hutu. These compositions were subsequently deployed in a propaganda campaign to target Tutsi as the *enemy*, or as *enemy accomplices*, and to instigate, incite, and encourage the Hutu population to separate themselves from the Tutsi, to commit acts of violence against them and to kill them. Simon Bikindi composed, wrote, performed, recorded, and disseminated musical compositions and addressed public gatherings as set out above with the specific intention of instigating persecution of all Tutsis, and of Hutus opposed to ethnic division. The basis of responsibility for the deployment of his compositions is Article 6(1) of the Statute [of the ICTR] for aiding and abetting the persecution of Tutsis, through songs that assimilated all Tutsis as the enemy, by blaming the enemy for the problems of Rwanda, by continuously making references to the 1959 revolution and its gains by the *rubanda ngamwinshi*<sup>5</sup> [sic], and by finally supporting the Hutu ten commandments.<sup>6</sup> [emphasis theirs]

Gamaliel Mbonimana, Professor Emeritus at the National University of Rwanda, is well-known throughout Rwanda for his work as a cultural historian and musicologist. His colleague, Jean de Dieu Karangwa, is a linguist at *L'Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales* in Paris. The two served as expert witnesses for the Prosecution, testifying against Bikindi and authoring the Prosecution's Expert Report on which the indictment of Bikindi's compositional activities was based. Their report opens by stating:

---

<sup>5</sup> Recall that *rubanda nyamwinshi* means "majority people" and became the main rallying cry for granting nearly all political power to Hutu.

<sup>6</sup> The 'Hutu Ten Commandments' was a deplorable editorial authored by Hassan Ngeze and published in his anti-Tutsi newspaper, *Kangura*. The contents of this editorial will be discussed more in Chapter 6. To summarize, the editorial called for complete segregation between Hutu and Tutsi in all domains of society, including marriage and business dealings. It also demanded that Hutu be taught about the "evils" of Tutsi and to always be suspicious of them.

These songs suggest that the real history of Rwanda in general and of the Hutu in particular started in 1959 when the Tutsi-led monarchy was abolished following a social revolution, with the independence secured in Rwanda giving birth to a Rwandan Republic dominated by the Hutu long marginalized by the previous regime. This Hutu/Tutsi dichotomy reflects Bikindi's worldview which is just as simple: with the Revolution the Hutu freed themselves from the multi-secular yoke and excesses of the Tutsi feudal monarchy. Independence and the Republic of Rwanda are a Hutu affair with the Hutu being the sole credible guarantors and the sole custodians thereof.

Bikindi's songs help keep the 1959 flame burning. His inspiration flows from this almost obsessive idea: a call for vigilance and Hutu mobilization in order to preserve the Republic and the gains of the revolution threatened by danger that shall remain unnamed. It takes decoding such a description to discover that it refers to the Tutsi who act of their own accord or through the Hutu, whom they manipulate. As a diversionary tactic, the Hutu is invariably sharply criticized by the composer while the Tutsi is only alluded to or not mentioned.

To this politically committed artiste, Hutu prosperity and perpetuity may be attained only by excluding the Tutsi. Hence, Hutu priority is to prevent Tutsi—**by all means possible**—from regaining any fraction of power, however small. The three songs, which somehow complement each other, reflect how the composer's commitment evolved developments in Rwanda from propaganda/mobilization (“Twasazareye”: “We bade farewell”) to open incitement to hatred (“Nanga Abahutu” or “Akabyutso”: “I hate Hutu” or “The Awakening” and “Bene Sebahinzi” or “Intabaza”: “The descendents of Sebahinzi” or “The Alert”). [emphasis theirs]<sup>7</sup>

Mbonimana and Karangwa go on to write that the songs have a “very appealing rhythm with Bikindi bringing to bear all his talent as a skillful lyricist and his knowledge of Rwandan culture, language, and traditions in hammering out **formidable weapons for mass persuasion** designed to persuade the Hutu, whoever they may be, to detest the Tutsi and, possibly, to

---

<sup>7</sup> Mbonimana Gamaliel (UNR-Butare) and Jean de Dieu Karangwa (INALCO-Paris), “Topical Analysis of the songs ‘Twasazareye’ (‘We bade farewell’), ‘Nanga abahutu’ (‘I hate Hutu’) and ‘Bene sebahinzi’ (‘The descendants of Sebahinzi’).” Expert Report prepared for the ICTR for The Prosecution vs. Simon Bikindi. Case no. ICTR-2001-72-I. (2006), p.3.

eliminate them” [emphasis theirs].<sup>8</sup> In their conclusion, they reiterate that the “songs became a **true weapon of mass persuasion in the service of mass destruction!**” [emphasis theirs].<sup>9</sup>

Based on the testimony of the two expert witnesses and their report, and with an appreciation of the fact that two of the songs, “Intabaza” and “Akabyutso” were composed during a time when political and ethnic relations were indeed violently rupturing, the judges agreed that Bikindi intended to stoke further ethnic resentment and violence. The Final Judgment reads:

In conclusion, after having considered all the evidence, the Chamber finds beyond reasonable doubt that the Prosecution has proven that “Twasazareye,” “Nanga Abahutu” and “Bene Sebahinzi” [properly titled “Akabyutso” and “Intabaza”] manipulated the history of Rwanda to extol Hutu solidarity. It further finds that “Nanga Abahutu” and “Bene Sebahinzi” characterized Tutsi as Hutu enslavers, enemies or enemy accomplices, blamed the enemy for the problems in Rwanda, encouraged Hutu solidarity against a common foe, the Tutsi, and finally supported the spirit of the Hutu Ten Commandments published in *Kangura*. Although the evidence does not establish Bikindi’s intention in composing “Twasazareye” in 1987 for the purpose of celebrating the Silver Jubilee of Rwandan Independence, the only reasonable inference in the Chamber’s opinion is that Bikindi composed “Nanga Abahutu” and “Bene Sebahinzi” with the specific intention to disseminate pro-Hutu ideology and anti-Tutsi propaganda, and thus to encourage ethnic hatred.<sup>10</sup>

Eugene Shimamungu served as the expert witness for the Defense. He is a linguist and historian who has published books criticizing Kagame and the RPF. He once taught at the National University of Rwanda but fled the country and is now director of the publishing house, Editions Sources du Nile, located in Brussels. Rebuffing Mbonimana and Karangwa’s claims, he wrote in his Expert Report:

We cannot say [the songs] encouraged ethnic hatred, because for one thing, the lyrics are very difficult to discern and understand... What the Prosecutor’s expert witnesses have

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Judgment, p. 106.



proven is that they lent to Bikindi's songs a malicious intent, and yet, nobody knows what he even meant. The common person does not understand these songs. That is not abnormal, but the experts are interpreting transcripts of the lyrics that are incomplete and only approximate. That is intellectually dishonest... Their conclusions are based on *a priori* assumptions, not on the text itself.<sup>11</sup> [Translated from French by McCoy]

### **Conflicting Interpretations of the Songs**

On the basis of Mbonimana's and Karangwa's report, the Prosecution claimed that Bikindi articulated and promoted three interrelated strategic goals with the intent to incite genocide and increase participation in it: the *solidarity* of Hutu, the *demonization* of Tutsi, and the *memory* of Hutu enslavement under the Tutsi-dominated monarchy which finally ended with the 1959 Revolution. No doubt, Bikindi's lyrics pled for solidarity among a violently fractured polity in the face of the RPF onslaught; they deplored the monarchial and colonial regimes and drew symbolic associations between them and the RPF; and they called for Rwandans to study and remember the past so that its mistakes and injustices would not be repeated. The question is whether these exhortations were intended along the lines of a baldly simplistic dichotomy between Hutu and Tutsi, with Hutu as the good guys and Tutsi as the enemies, or whether Bikindi was addressing political identities, relations, and tensions that were far more multi-layered, dynamic, and complex.

"Intabaza," for example, dwells on how the *bene Sebahinzi*, once subjugated under the monarchy, are now fighting amongst themselves. The term means "children of the Father of Farmers" and has long been a common euphemism for Hutu.<sup>12</sup> Bikindi argued that he invoked the name in reference to all Rwandans who farm in order to survive—a category that includes not just most Hutu, but most Tutsi and Twa as well. Upwards of 95% of Rwanda's population farms or owns farms tended by others. *Bene Sebahinzi* thus comprise the *rubanda nyamwinshi*—"the majority people." Bikindi contends that the main message of the song was that Rwandans should cease with partisan violence, hold elections, and unite behind their chosen leaders in order to repel the RPF lest they find themselves suffering through the same oppressive circumstances that they did during the monarchy. Addressing the farming population links to broader issues of

---

<sup>11</sup> Eugene Shimamungu, Expert Report prepared for the ICTR for The Prosecution vs. Simon Bikindi. Case no. ICTR-01-72-T.

<sup>12</sup> Tutsi were commonly called "*bene Sebatunzi*"—"children of the Father of Cattle Breeders."

social class. Most farmers are peasants who receive little formal education and are far removed from the centers of political and economic power. Partisan violence was waged in part by poorer young men, most hailing from such peasant farming families, who were bribed by party officials into terrorizing and killing the supporters of their rivals. The song thus sets up a conflict between a peasantry whose material need and ignorance of the larger political picture is exploited by a small but self-serving and corrupt ruling class. If the ordinary masses fail to recognize this scheming for what it is, then it will bring ruin to the whole country, and the only beneficiary will be the RPF.

When I shared with participants Bikindi's explanation that *bene Sebahinzi* referred to all farmers and not just Hutu, none believed him. A group of about a half dozen Tutsi genocide survivors and RPF supporters burst out into incredulous laughter at Bikindi's explanation, with a couple men exclaiming, "He is lying; he is lying!" Even those who defended Bikindi found his claim hard to swallow. Jeanette simply stated, "No. *Everybody* knows that *bene Sebahinzi* means Hutu." She saw little problem with this though. It was, after all, mainly Hutu who were engaged in partisan warfare, and to her, there was nothing wrong with Bikindi telling them to stop fighting among themselves.

The song does, in fact, explicitly include Tutsi and Twa within the category of *bene Sebahinzi*. Bikindi pens the line, "May they come! None of the children of Sebahinzi, neither Hutu, Twa, or Tutsi, should do wrong and have an unrealizable dream of taking power by force." "Akabyutso" continues in a similar vein, but unlike "Intabaza," Bikindi explicitly chastises Hutu and only Hutu who engage in bribery, corruption, violence, and other misdeeds. Much of his scorn is also directed at those Hutu who have forgotten or are ignorant of the past. Bikindi claims that he was referring to partisan loyalists who were fighting each other, often for a small bribe from their party leaders. His critics maintain that this was all a rhetorical scheme intended to shame those Hutu who refused to fight against Tutsi.

"Intabaza" mentions a number of Rwanda's clans, many of which had historically engaged in territorial and political rivalry with one another. Each clan included both Hutu and Tutsi among its members. The clans are mentioned in the context of a speech delivered by a powerful diviner, Biryabayoboke, in which he boasts of how he foretold the defeat of these clans under the monarchy. The song thus communicates a commonality of oppression among Rwandans. Regional unification is also a theme found throughout the songs. "Twasazareye,"

for example, praises both President Kayibanda, whose base of support was among the Banyanduga in southern-central Rwanda, and President Habyarimana, whose base of support was among the Bakiga in the northern-western regions. These two regions had historically been in conflict, and Habyarimana eventually overthrew Kayibanda for overly favoring his constituency at the expense of the Bakiga. Bikindi claims that his general message in these songs was that Rwandans should forgive and forego these past clan and regional rivalries and instead promote the general welfare of the country and its citizens as a whole, an ideology quite similar to what the RPF preaches today. His critics contend that the references to clan and regional rivalries were a veiled way of calling on Hutu to relinquish their internecine disagreements and to instead unite against Tutsi.

### **Political Allegiances and Conflicting Interpretations**

Assumptions about Bikindi's intentions and the consequent interpretations of his songs tend to correlate with political allegiances. I found that most participants who supported the RPF had a negative view of Bikindi and his lyrics, whereas those critical of the RPF had a more positive view. A Foucauldian analysis concerning the reciprocal relationship between power and knowledge could very well apply here. Foucault's fundamental argument was that social discourse is primarily shaped by power interests. Because discourse is the wellspring of collective knowledge, what people think and believe is thus determined in large part by how thought and belief legitimizes and advances their power interests as they perceive them. The more powerful that people are within a given social milieu, the more influence they will have over social discourse and thus what others within their social milieu think and believe.<sup>13</sup> This engenders a self-perpetuating cycle in which power begets certain knowledge that in turn further legitimizes power interests, and so on and so on. Applying this to present-day Rwanda, as power continues to be contested between the RPF and its opponents, sociopolitical actors on both sides try to manipulate discourse on ethnicity, politics, and history in order to either produce or suppress knowledge in ways that will further legitimize their power interests, increase the size and zeal of their base of support, and subvert the power interests of their competitors and diminish their support. Bikindi's songs represent a rebuke of the RPF's power, and so

---

<sup>13</sup> Foucault's theorization on the reciprocal relationship between power and knowledge is interwoven through much of his work. As a good primer, see *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

interpretations of his songs are suspended to a large extent between the struggle for power in Rwanda.

### **Experiences of the Genocide and Its Aftermath and Conflicting Interpretations**

Identifying issues of power interests is only of limited analytical use unless it is tethered to people's social and psychological experiences. Otherwise, the discussion quickly veers off into jingoistic abstraction. Alongside people's political allegiances, I found that assumptions about Bikindi's intentions and the consequent interpretations of his songs also tended to correlate with people's experiences of the genocide and its aftermath, experiences that in turn play a large role in determining people's political allegiances. Among the participants in my research, those who were targeted during the genocide and believed they were saved by the RPF now support the RPF and the ideological perceptions it imparts; indeed, they actively spread those perceptions. Those who have since been persecuted by the RPF obviously are critical of the RPF and contest the discourse from which pro-RPF ideology emerges.

It is important, though, to consider the quality of the experiences themselves: the physical agony, psychological terror, tumultuous disruption of everyday life during the war and genocide, alongside the feelings of hope, sense of safety, and anticipation of prosperity since the RPF takeover. These also influence the meaning that people impute to Bikindi's songs. Those participants who were targeted during the genocide or suffered great personal loss were more prone towards a negative view of Bikindi, all the more so if they had since experienced greater security and prosperity under the RPF. But this was not just because Bikindi's lyrics are subversive of the RPF and thus the benefits its supporters have gained under its rule. Perceptions of Bikindi and his music are not solely hostage to the struggle for power. Rather, some participants were hindered from objectively analyzing the songs, because the songs were linked on a deeply emotional and cognitive level with the memories of their own terror and sorrow. The songs were played during the genocide and used to encourage their tormenters; to borrow from the lexicon of semiotics, the songs thus stood as an indexical symbol of their suffering and of the evil they believe had caused it. Many listeners were thus prone to an *a priori* assumption that genocide was Bikindi's intent, and their interpretations of his lyrics comported with this assumption.

## **Perceptions of Bikindi among Hutu vs. Tutsi Participants**

All Tutsi participants denounced Bikindi. Hutu participants, in contrast, defended Bikindi outright, took a neutral stance, or if they did criticize him were equivocating in their criticisms. I shared this in an e-mail with Jeanette. She responded:

These findings are very meaningful! Hutu and Tutsi do not have the same judgment [of Bikindi and his songs]. I'm wondering if their judgments are mostly linked to how each of them perceives the political events rather than the songs themselves? Maybe this shows that Rwandan society at the time of your interviews is still divided in two groups: the genocide survivors and those who were not targeted!

The harshest criticism from a Hutu came from a good friend whom I will call John. Before the RPF takeover he was an Anglican priest. Sometime after, he was defrocked by the local diocese and replaced by a Tutsi. The diocese claimed that its decision was due to John's engagement in ministry that was not officially sanctioned by the church (he used his own property to teach impoverished neighbors sustainable gardening practices and built a small school where he taught tailoring skills). He later learned through various channels what he had suspected, that the likely reason he was replaced was due to the new regime's desire to install more Tutsi in positions of power in order to rebalance the overall ethnic power structure in Rwanda. John's sunny disposition and his desire for peace precluded him from holding a grudge, and he remains highly appreciative and supportive of Kagame and the RPF for its many socially and economically progressive policies, lack of corruption, and for instilling security.

John did not believe that Bikindi intended to incite genocide or that he had a negative view of Tutsi at all. The problem, as he put it, was that Bikindi was "excessively patriotic" and encouraged Rwandans to go to war with the RPF rather than seek a peaceful resolution:

...To me, he is too excessive a patriot. Through music, we can transmit a teaching, a message. Not only a message to please the ears or to—yeah—to please people. But also you know that through music you can teach people, and what he's teaching, for me, was too, too patriotic. Excessively. On the other hand, any patriot obviously would have sung the same thing. Because the RPF was invading the country. And anybody would have encouraged the army to fight the invader. And that's what Bikindi is singing about,

hmm? And I think that—I think that this is one of the things that he’s being judged for. For being too patriotic. He can be judged for it wrongly or justly, because he sided with the enemies of the Tutsis—the actual leaders of the country. He’s also prophetic in some of his songs, because he tells people, “If the RPF wins, this is what will happen to you.” And he’s also warning the Hutus not to fight one another, hmm? “Don’t be traitors.” So he’s telling them, “Don’t fight one another. Don’t kill another. Let’s fight our common enemy.”

### **Perceptions of History and Conflicting Interpretations of the Songs**

The debate over Bikindi’s songs reflects the broader debate over Rwandan history (see Chapter 2). Each of the three songs is cast in the form of a narrative of Rwandan history with considerable focus on the monarchy, characterized by Bikindi as deceitful, self-serving, and cruel. Less is said about colonialism, but when it is mentioned, it too is characterized as exploitative and callous to the interests of Rwandans.

The Prosecution argued that the songs glorify the 1959 Revolution, an event that resulted in Rwanda’s independence but also the systematic persecution of Tutsi. Mbonimana’s and Karangwa’s report claims that the songs “suggest that the real history of Rwanda in general and of Hutu in particular began in 1959.” The Revolution is mainly celebrated in “Twasazareye,” which is not surprising since the song was composed to commemorate Rwanda’s independence. True, Bikindi fails to mention the suffering of Tutsi, emphasizing only the emancipation of Rwandans from the monarchial and colonial regimes. Nowhere, though, does he celebrate the suffering of Tutsi. His praise for Kayibanda and the other architects of the Revolution is spare. More praise is given to Habyarimana who overthrew Kayibanda (and, of course, happened to be president at the time the song was composed). “Intabaza” briefly honors the Revolution, calling on Rwandans to safeguard their newfound democracy (even as this “democracy” was ruled by unanimously elected dictators). “Akabytuso” makes no mention at all of the Revolution, leaping from the time of the monarchy to the tumultuous 1990s.

Not all Rwandans believe that the monarchy was so bad. RPF historiography regards it as having been fairly benign. Bikindi’s critics thus charge him with falsely demonizing the monarchy, doing so in order to symbolically ascribe its negative qualities to all Tutsi. For example, Francis stated:

When [Bikindi] considers what happened in the courts of the king, it would sound like the king was a bad person...Maybe he was a dictator when it came to war, but with other things, he wasn't bad. I mean, you can be ruthless in war and kill, but that is not in your nature—killing. But in his singing, Bikindi makes it seem like the king is a bad person, as if the monarchy is a bad system. But I mean, every king, every leader, has some good things and some bad things. So [Bikindi] picks only the bad things in the monarchy and brings it into the songs.

Boniface was in her late nineties when I met her. In her younger days, she was a singer in the courts of Rwanda's last two kings, Rudahigwa and Ndahindurwa. She fondly remembered the time of the monarchy as an era of peace, tranquility, and order. One wall of her living room was still decorated with a photo of Ndahindurwa. She was deeply saddened when he was forced into exile. As a royal musician and Tutsi, she was favored by the king and exempted from forced labor (save, of course, for the requirement that she sing). She and her family were threatened after the Revolution by PARMEHutu and so fled to Burundi to escape danger. Once the RPF secured the country, it was safe for her to return, and for this, she believed that the goodness she associated with the monarchy had likewise returned.

However good or bad the monarchy may have been, Bikindi resents the accusation that he intended to transfer the negative imagery of the monarchy to all Tutsi. His argument is that while the monarchy was ruled by Tutsi, more significantly it was the purview of two clans, the Abanyiginya and Abega, not an entire ethnic group, and so it is baseless to assume that he meant to implicate all Tutsi. His critique is of a political system, not an ethnic group, and his message is intended as a warning to his listeners of the consequences when power is taken by force and concentrated in the hands of a few without representational input from the greater population.

### **The Spoken and Unspoken in Kinyarwanda Discourse**

A vexing issue that confronted judges during Bikindi's trial was that nowhere in the songs did he explicitly denigrate or call for violence against Tutsi. As the Prosecution's Expert Report admits, "...the Tutsi is only alluded to or not mentioned." The only time when Tutsi are specifically mentioned is in several lines near the end of "Intabaza," where the song's heroic protagonist, Mutabazi (M), consults with the powerful diviner, Biryabayobo (B), as to the

solution to Rwanda's social and political woes. As I have organized the lyrics and enumerated them, the relevant lines are 105-133, 124-126, 135, and 152-159:

- (105) **B:** *Nibaze! Bene Sebahinzi bagomba kumenya ko uru Rwanda rugizwe n'uturere twinshi, kandi ko utwo turerere aritwo turugira u Rwanda rugari rutuwe n'abanyarwanda.*  
May they come! The children of the Father of Farmers must know that Rwanda is composed of several regions that make up the greater Rwanda inhabited by the Rwandan people.
- (106) **M:** *Rwose!*  
Indeed!
- (107) **B:** *Bene Sebahinzi bagomba kumenya kandi ko abo banyarwanda batuye u Rwanda barimo amoko atatu: Gahutu, Gatwa na Gatutsi.*  
The children of the Father of Farmers must know also that the Rwandans who inhabit Rwanda are comprised of three ethnic groups: Hutu, Twa, and Tutsi.
- (108) *Ibyo ntibihinduka rwose.*  
All those things cannot be changed.
- (109) **M:** *Ibyo ntibihinduka .*  
Those things cannot be changed.
- (110) **B:** *Twese tugomba kwemera ko nta wasabye kuvuka ari umuhutu, umutwa cyangwa umututsi.*  
All of us must realize that no one asked to be born a Hutu, Twa, or Tutsi.
- (111) **M:** *None se?*  
And so?
- (112) **B:** *Bityo tukemera ko nta wusumba undi.*  
Therefore, we must accept that no one is superior to another.
- (113) *Tukemera ko nta wugomba kuryamira undi kandi ko inyungu za rubanda-nyamwinshi arizo zigomba gushyirwa imbere!*  
We must accept that no one may oppress another and that priority must be given to the benefits of the majority people!
- \*\*\*\*\*
- (124) **B:** *Nibaze! Bene Sebahinzi bagomba kumenya ko Inkotanyi ziramutse zitsindishije amasasu—uretse ko bidashoboka—amashyaka barimo yose yazima burundu abayarimo bagashirira ku icumu, nk'uko abahinza b'Abahutu bashiriye ku icumu, mu gitondo umututsi agacyuza imihigo agira, ati "Harabaye ntihakabe, hapfuye imbwa n'imbeba hasigaye inka n'ingoma!"*



May they come! The children of the Father of Farmers must know that if the *Inkotanyi* win with the bullets of guns—even though this is impossible—then all the political parties will disappear forever and their members killed by the spear, just as the Hutu chiefs were killed by the spear, [after which] in the morning a victorious Tutsi boasted, saying “As it was, it will never be again—the dog and rat were killed, replaced by the cow and the drum!”

(125) *Aho ntibahibuka rwose!*

They don't remember all that!

(126) **M:** *Aho ntibahibuka we!*

Oh, they don't remember that!

\*\*\*\*\*

(135) **B:** *Nibaze! Bene Sebahinzi, yaba umuhutu, umutwa cyangwa umututsi, nta n'umwe ugomba kwibeshya cyangwa ngo anarote mu nzozi ko yafata ubutegetsu ku ngufu akoresheje intwari.*

May they come! None of the children of the Father of Farmers, neither Hutu, Twa, nor Tutsi, should do wrong or have an inconceivable dream of taking over the government through force of arms.

\*\*\*\*\*

(152) **B:** *Nimusabe amatwari rero.*

So, call for elections.

(153) *Nihatorwa umuhutu, twemere atuyobore!*

If a Hutu is elected, let us accept that person to lead!

(154) **M:** *Yee!*

Yeah!

(155) **B:** *Nihatorwa umututsi, twemere atuyobore!*

If a Tutsi is elected, let us accept that person to lead!

(156) **M:** *Yee!*

Yeah!

(157) **B:** *Nihatorwa umutwa, twemere atuyobore!*

If a Twa is elected, let us accept that person to lead!

(158) **M:** *Twemere atuyobore.*

Let us accept that person to lead!

(159) **B:** *U Rwanda ni urwacu uko turi batatu. Twese ntawusumba undi!*

This Rwanda is for all three of us. No one is greater than another!

It is difficult to determine Bikindi's intentions in the above passages. Three of the passages (105-113, 135, and 152-159) clearly seem to express an ideology of ethnic equality and the need for mutual respect, but one of the passages (124-126) seems to place Tutsi in a bad light, claiming that Hutu chiefs were killed by a Tutsi after which the Tutsi boasted. Participants informed me that the phrase is an ancient and well-known saying attributed to Ruganzu Ndori. When his soldiers vanquished their enemies and annexed their territories, this was supposedly their cry of victory. The "cow and drum" are obvious references to the monarchy; I am told that the "dog and rat" were once derogatory symbols for Hutu and Twa respectively (more debate on this passage will be presented in the following chapter).

A number of participants shared that they believed evasion, allusion, and metaphor were customary not just within Kinyarwanda poetic contexts, but throughout everyday discourse in Rwanda. If so, this would not be a distinctively Rwanda cultural trait, yet several participants indicated that they believe that it was. They had a culturally self-essentializing view of Kinyarwanda discourse. One participant claimed that "Rwandans, we don't say things directly," and another that "We are by nature secretive." Others made similar comments. A self-deprecating joke that Rwandans often seem to tell foreigners to illustrate this (based on my interactions with foreign aid workers who mentioned that they had heard the same joke) goes something like this: A woman runs into her neighbor on the street corner. The neighbor asks, "Where are you going?" The woman replies, "Nowhere." To which the neighbor then asks, "Oh, when will you get there?" The humor is in the neighbor's (likely correct) assumption that the woman is going somewhere even though the woman states otherwise. When a friend told me the joke, she explained that the woman did not want her neighbor to know her business, but if she were to just respond, "I'd rather not say" or "It's none of your business," the neighbor would find it strange or rude.

One afternoon, Francis and I had the opportunity to have lunch with a high-ranking officer in Rwanda's military. To convey this enculturated perception of Kinyarwanda discourse, he provided the following hypothetical example:

Say you and I are here drinking tea, and a man that I know walks into this restaurant.  
And this man—we have not spoken in many years, and in fact, we have become kind of

like enemies. I would not say to this man to his face that we have a problem with each other. Instead, I would say to him across the room, “Do we still take tea together?”

Or perhaps you, as my friend, you come, but still I say, “Do we still take tea together?” So, you see? This is the problem. But to my enemy, I will say it like this—“Do we still take tea?” [\*cocks his head back, crosses his arms, and closes his eyes halfway\*]. And to you, I will say like this—“Do we still take tea?” [\*leans forward, elbow resting on the table\*].

The officer relayed a basic principle of communications that the same utterance can contain multiple meanings, depending on its paralinguistic and kinesic character,<sup>14</sup> its context, and the assumptions that the speaker and the listener have of one another and of the quality of their relationship. To me, there was nothing uniquely Rwandan about this, but like other participants, the officer suggested that there was.

Beyond matters of custom and etiquette, to address a topic through indirect, allusional, and metaphorical means is considered a mark of cleverness and wisdom. Obfuscation is prized in Kinyarwanda poetics. Bikindi’s rhetorical mastery in this regard is a major reason why his songs are so compelling for many Rwandans. Participants who greatly enjoyed listening to the songs cited as the main reasons for their enjoyment as, first, the quality of the music itself, and second, the lyrics, which they regarded as an intriguingly complex semantic puzzle for them to solve. As a young Tutsi woman who was not familiar with Bikindi’s work until I shared it with her said, “It is like unlocking a mystery!”

Bikindi also riddles his lyrics with archaic terms, phrases, proverbs, and references. His knowledge and usage of such language impresses listeners and adds further layers of obscurity into which they must delve. In “Twasazareye,” for example, he uses the term “*imitaga*” for “days” instead of the more commonly used term, “*iminsi*.” Many of the archaic references are difficult even for Rwandans to decipher. The opening refrain to “Intabaza” begins as follows:

- (1) *Icyampa akana kari amanyamaaa...nkagira n’akandi kari amaguruuu...*  
If I could have an audacious child and another who has [fast] legs,
- (2) *Nkabitumira kuri Muhinzi,*

---

<sup>14</sup> Paralinguistics concerns verbal but non-lexical modes of expression such as tone of voice, inflection, and cadence. Kinesics is more commonly known as body language.

- I would send them to *Muhinzi* [“The Farmer”],
- (3) *Umwe wahinguje Gashaka, agahinda abagisha b’i Mwima na Mushirarunguuu...*  
The one who chased off the cattle herders of Mwima and Mushirarungu who had stopped Gashaka from farming.

Mwima and Mushirarungu are the names of two hills in Nyanza, the seat of the monarchy. The passage thus suggests that Muhinzi, a heroic personification of farmers (“*muhinzi*” translates as “farmer”), fought off the monarchy and reclaimed their grazing lands for agricultural use. However, no one whom I consulted had any idea who Gashaka was, and unfortunately, in the limited amount of time Francis and I had with Bikindi, we neglected to bring it up. The translation that Bikindi provided me translates this line as, “The one who struggled for independence, national sovereignty, and the abolition of the feudal monarchy whose seat was in Mwima and Mushirarungu”<sup>15</sup>—clearly not a direct translation.

Much of the metaphorical content of the lyrics are found in these archaic references and proverbs, as evinced in the opening refrain of “Akabyutso”:

- (2) *Intumva yabyaye intumbwe.*  
Those who can’t understand give birth to the foolish,
- (3) *Umutisiga abyara umusazi.*  
The idiot gives birth to a crazy person,
- (4) *Igihuru kibyaye igihunyira, se rungano!*  
The bush gives birth to an owl, my dear old man!
- (5) *Ukuri guca mu ziko ntigushye,*  
The truth passes through fire without burning up,
- (6) *Kandi kuvugisha ukuri ntibyica umutumirano mwa bagabo mwe!*  
And to tell the truth does not destroy good relations, you men!

These proverbs are open to a number of interpretations, but the self-essentializing belief among many Rwandans that they are by nature covert and evasive in their discourse promotes the assumption of malicious intent on Bikindi’s part. For example, many listeners assume that

---

<sup>15</sup> Translated from French by McCoy.

“the foolish” refers to Hutu who refuse to kill Tutsi. Even when it comes to lines that are straightforward, many assume that Bikindi did not mean what he plainly seemed to mean. When his songs mention the oppressive practices of the monarchy, his critics charge that he was really referring to all Tutsi. When the songs call for peace, he really meant that peace could only come about through genocide. When the songs emphasize the need for mutual respect among the three ethnic groups in Rwanda, what he really meant was that Tutsi should recognize the superiority of Hutu. Bikindi’s pleas for peace and equality may also serve as a diversionary tactic from his “true message” of hatred and violence. Mbonimana and Karangwa’s Export Report, in fact, altogether ignores any lines that call for peace and equality. It is also as much a matter of what Bikindi does *not* say. “Intabaza” may not often explicitly mention Hutu or Tutsi but instead dwells on the “children of the Father of Farmers,” understood by most as a euphemism for Hutu. “Akabytuso” does not mention Tutsi either but instead chastises Hutu who are in the wrong.

Bikindi’s critics argue that in disguising his message, it made it all the more powerful. Mbonimana and Karangwa’s report states:

[The lyrics] oscillate between anarchism and modernity, poetry and prose, which are a lot more appreciated by Rwandans who praise the composer’s knowledge of the language and the culture. As L. Nkusi (1987: 85) put it: “*kumenya ikinyarwanda*” (to know Kinyarwanda), is not only to have a good command of one’s language, to be versed in morpho-syntactical and lexical forms, but also to know the customs of the country and, of course, the everyday language.” Even when listeners do not understand the whole meaning, they still admire the composer, with Rwandans’ relationship to their language being such that, paradoxically, the more the usage is complicated, the more it is appreciated.<sup>16</sup>

Prosecution Witness BKW argued that the message was clear to listeners, despite Bikindi’s obfuscatory rhetoric. He put it bluntly:

It is true that he spoke in indirect words, but the lyrics...called for murder and killing.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Karangwa and Mbonimana 2006, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Witness BKW, T. 18 October 2006, p. 11.

## The Historical and Political Role of Rwandan Musicians

Bikindi's political songs comprise only a small portion of his total output. Most of his songs had to do with themes of romantic love, weddings, marriage, the moral education of children, nature, and even Christmas and other holidays. Whenever there was cause for ceremony or celebration, Bikindi would compose a song, and so when the social and political climate in Rwanda deteriorated in the early 1990s, it was expected that he would address the situation but do so in a way that still supported the nation's leaders.

Historically, Rwandan musicians were expected to demonstrate their support for the rulers and military through both praise songs and songs that denounced or belittled their enemies. Musicians in the royal court composed songs that honored the king and his family and kept a record of his deeds and those of his forebears. Songs were composed and deployed during the 1959 Revolution in order to cultivate support for the movement, the new government, and to forge a new nationalist identity. When Habyarimana took power in 1973, his government organized numerous performing arts troupes to sing the praises of Rwanda and its people and government.<sup>18</sup> Bikindi's songs follow in the same tradition. My friend Andreas, a performer and scholar of traditional Rwandan music informed me that when Bikindi composed "Akabyutso" and "Intabaza" during the war with the RPF:

If you did not compose songs to encourage soldiers, you could lose your job or opportunities to perform. Your career could be over. All ballets competed to prove their loyalty, so that they could continue on. Bikindi did not want to be suspected. Composers were obliged to create songs supporting the ruling party.

Andreas took me one evening to meet one of his mentors, an elderly man named Thomas Kirisu. Until he passed away the following year, Kirisu was the last surviving instrumentalist of the royal court. He and Bikindi had been professional colleagues before the genocide. Bikindi went to him to learn about the dynastic poetry, history, and musical stylings of the court. In return, he taught Kirisu about the musical innovations that he and other younger musicians were developing and which were becoming popular.

---

<sup>18</sup> The two most popular of these groups were *Abamararungu* and *Impala*.

Kirisu shared his belief that Bikindi's songs did "side with the [Hutu] tribe" but that he should be forgiven, because he was only doing what all musicians did at the time. He believed that Bikindi was "contaminated by the politicians." Speaking of himself, he said, "Whoever rules this country, I will praise them"—MRND, RPF, Habyarimana, Kagame, it would not matter. He too had submitted a song to RTLM in the hopes of receiving more publicity and the financial gain that would come with it. Kirisu confessed that his song also "sided with the [Hutu] tribe," but fortunately, it was never chosen for airplay. Laughing, he recalled of the moment, "I was rejected! I don't know if it was because of God's grace that I was rejected!"—implying that if RTLM had broadcast his song, it may have been him as well who ended up in prison. Kirisu did not seem to harbor any ill feelings towards Tutsi. His mother was Tutsi, and for this reason, he and his family were targeted during the genocide, and some of his relatives were killed.

Kirisu's defense of Bikindi may appear uncomfortably similar to the infamous defense of "I was only following orders," offered by Nazi defendants during the Nuremberg Trials. The two situations, however, are not wholly comparable. There is a difference between "following orders" and following a long and deeply instilled cultural and historical tradition. The message in the songs dovetails with the nationalist rhetoric expressed by many political leaders at the time, some of which was hostile towards Tutsi, but there is no evidence that Bikindi knew that genocide was being planned, nor is there any evidence proving that political leaders told Bikindi what to sing or that Bikindi sought their approval. Bikindi testified that he was *not* following orders. He claimed full responsibility for his songs, because he did not believe that they contained anything spurious.<sup>19</sup>

### **Notes on Translation Methods and Orthography**

Translation requires striking a balance between the literal and the literary. To better achieve this balance, and because I have only a rudimentary grasp of Kinyarwanda, I worked with seven native speakers who were also fluent in either English or French. This group consisted of the following:

---

<sup>19</sup> Witness Simon Bikindi, T. 2 November 2007, p. 10.

- Jeanette and Augustin, my Hutu friends who fled the RPF and now live in the U.S. Both once worked in the education sector in Rwanda, Jeanette as a language instructor.
- Ferdinand, a Congolese Hutu and former refugee, eleven members of whose extended family were killed by RPF-backed forces in Goma.
- Edward, a lecturer in linguistics at the National University of Rwanda, ethnicity unknown.
- Laurent, a Tutsi university student who had a deep interest in and knowledge of Rwandan history.
- Julius, a Tutsi pastor who likewise had a deep interest in and knowledge of Rwandan history.
- Simon Bikindi.

With Jeanette, Augustin, and Julius, I sat down with each and went through the lyrics line-by-line and word-for-word, asking them to provide the most literal English term or phrase that they could think of. We also discussed the historical and cultural references made throughout the songs. With Edward and Laurent, I provided them a recording and asked them to first transcribe the lyrics as best as they could, then translate them. I wanted to know how capable well-educated Rwandans might be in discerning and deciphering the lyrics from the audio alone. As mentioned by Shimamungu (the expert witness for the Defense), many of the lyrics are difficult to discern from a recording, and sure enough, both men soon returned to me, flustered with their inability to transcribe the lyrics. I then provided them a transcription and they worked from there. Bikindi's French translation was the last I received, and his was by far the least literal. I regard his translation more as his preferred interpretation or explanation.

As an example of the sort of disagreements I confronted among the translators, take the first few lines of "Intabaza." Under each Kinyarwanda line is as literal an English translation as I could conceive:

- (1) *Icyampa akana kari amanyamaaa...nkagira n'akandi kari amaguruuu...*  
 If I could have a child who is audacious/intelligent/eloquent/daring and a child who is legs,



- (2) *Nkabitumira kuri Muhinzi*  
I would send them to Farmer,
- (3) *Umwe wahinguje Gashaka agahunda abagisha b'i Mwima na Mushirarunguu...*  
The one who prevented Gashaka farming chased off cattle herders from Mwima and Mushirarungu
- (4) *Uti: "Gira utabare bwangu!*  
Say: "Come rescue quickly!
- (5) *Yarose inka zameze impengeri ku muteme,*  
One dreamt cows' udders are diseased with rashes,
- (6) *Isake zitakibika, inkokazi zitagiteraaa..."*  
The roosters are no longer crowing, the hens are no longer laying eggs!"

While the general meaning may be clear, a literal translation is grammatically and syntactically clunky, especially in line 3. Below are the translations that I received from each translator. Ferdinand's name is missing, because his main role was to critique my final translation and so he never worked out an original translation. Bikindi's translation is separated from this group because of its conspicuously interpretive quality. I have identified each translator by a letter code: JA for Jeanette and Augustin, ED for Edward, LA for Laurent, and JU for Julius.

- (1) *Icyampa akana kari amanyamaaa...nkagira n'akandi kari amaguruuu...,*  
JA: If I could have an audacious, adorable child and another who is a fast runner  
ED: If I could get two children: one who is very eloquent and another who is very fast  
LA: If I could have a daring child and a brave child  
JU: If I could have a wise and a brave child
- (2) *Nkabitumira kuri Muhinzi*  
JA: That I could send to Muhinzi  
ED: Then I would send them to Muhinzi  
LA: So that I send them to Muhinzi  
JU: So that I can send them to Muhinzi
- (3) *Umwe wahinguje Gashaka agahunda abagisha b'i Mwima na Mushirarunguu...*  
JA: The one who saved the sorghum harvesters and pushed away the cattle breeders from Mwima and Mushirarungu

ED:Who once rescued and revitalized those who were swallowed up by sadness at Mwima and Mushirarungu

LA:Who saved harvesters while expelling the breeders of Mwima and Mushirarungu

JU: He who saved harvesters by chasing away the cattle breeders of Mwima and Mushirarungu

(4) *Uti: "Gira utabare bwangu!*

JA: You say: "Come quickly in help!

ED:Tell him to come swiftly to the rescue

LA:Say to him: "Rescue!

JU: Say: "To the rescue!

(5) *Yarose inka zameze impengeri ku muteme,*

JA: He dreamt that rashes are sprouting on the udders of cows (preventing them from producing milk),

ED:I have had bad dreams that cows are now growing unusual breasts,

LA:[Unable to translate this line]

JU: [Unable to translate this line]

(6) *Isake zitakibika, inkokazi zitagiteraaa..."*

JA: The roosters sing no more, the hens lay no more eggs."

ED:Cocks are no longer crowing and chickens are no longer laying eggs."

LA:And the roosters did not sing anymore, nor did the hens lay anymore."

JU: Cocks were no longer crowing and chickens no longer laying. "

There is consensus as to the general meaning of this passage, but there are differences in grammar and syntax and in the precise translation of certain words. Part of the problem is that there is no precise English translation for some of these words. For example, "*amanyama*," found in the first line, refers to some combination of intelligence, eloquence, audacity, and daring—a sort of heroic persona. Here is how Bikindi translated these lines:

*Si je pouvais trouver un homme intelligent, clairvoyant, habile d'esprit, logique et humaniste;*

*Si je pouvais trouver un homme physiquement rapide, adroit, habile et fort;*

*Pour qu'ils soient mes messagers auprès de Muhinzi, celui-là même qui a lutté pour l'indépendance, la souveraineté nationale et pour l'abolition de la monarchie féodale don't le siege était à Mwima et Mushirarungu!*

*Je leur chargerais d'aller lui dire:*

*“Viens vite au secours, il a fait de mauvais rêves et dans ses rêves, les vaches étaient maigrichonnes et maladies, les coqs ne chantaient plus et les poules ne pondaient plus!”*

[If I could find a man who is intelligent, perceptive, sharp-witted, reasonable, and humanitarian;

If I could find a man who is physically quick, skillful, clever, and strong;

In order for them to be messengers to Muhinzi, the same one who fought for independence, sovereignty, and the abolition of the feudal monarchy, the seat of which was at Mwima and Mushirarungu!

I would order them to tell him:

“Come quickly to the rescue, he has bad dreams, and in his dreams, cows were skinny and diseased, roosters sang no more and hens laid no more eggs!”<sup>20</sup>

Bikindi omits in his translation any references to the conflict between farmers and cattle breeders, because these are closely associated with Hutu and Tutsi. Bikindi translates this passage to say that Muhinzi fought for independence, sovereignty, and the abolition of the monarchy, not that he defended farmers by chasing off the royal cattle breeders. Bikindi's rhetorical sleight of hand in his translation may be subtle, but it masks the ethnically associated meaning many listeners ascribe to this passage.

Once the translators completed their work, I then blended their translations together in a way that I hoped would reflect, as close as possible, the literal meaning of the lyrics while maintaining grammatical and syntactical coherence. Once back in the U.S., I continued to work with Jeanette, Augustin, and Ferdinand to render a final translation that satisfied all four of us. I then used footnotes to further explain certain terms and references that were not obvious in the text alone.

---

<sup>20</sup> Translated from French by McCoy.

Kinyarwanda orthography tends to be bereft of punctuation, save for that used to mark the ends of sentences. One can read a Kinyarwanda newspaper report and find hardly a single comma, semi-colon, or other marker to indicate separate clauses (though some writers will use more punctuation than others). I asked Jeanette, a former a language instructor, if there were any established rules for punctuation, and she responded that there were not. Keep in mind that Kinyarwanda was not written down until the arrival of colonialism, and so punctuation was historically never a consideration.<sup>21</sup> The syntactical and grammatical structure of Kinyarwanda is such that separate clauses are expressed through the use of prefixes, infixes, and suffixes joined to root words, and so punctuation is not as necessary as it is in Western languages. I preserved Bikindi's punctuation in the Kinyarwanda transcriptions but employed conventional rules in the English translations. Therefore, there is much discrepancy in the punctuation between the two.

### **Concerning Issues of Intellectual Property Rights**

Authors are usually legally required to obtain copyright permission when citing lyrics in full; however, an exception may be made in this case for the following reasons. First and foremost, the lyrics to these three songs constitute core trial evidence. In the U.S., whether trial evidence is a matter of public record or not is still being legally debated.<sup>22</sup> When the question involves international criminal trials and various national laws regarding intellectual property rights, things become even murkier. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the 1947 case of *Craig v. Harney* that “what transpires in the courtroom is public property.”<sup>23</sup> Courts may still override this, though, if they determine that releasing evidence during a trial may unduly sway the jury and compromise the defendant's right to a fair trial, or if releasing it at anytime may impinge upon subsequent trials. Courts may also prohibit the release of evidence if they believe it would gravely intrude upon the privacy of others or cause great emotional harm. The cases in the U.S. in which representatives of the press wrestled with legal bodies over access to and publication of evidence all involved photographs or video footage.<sup>24</sup> In the case of the ICTR, all trial evidence,

---

<sup>21</sup> Though punctuation is also non-existent in many languages that have been written down for millennia, e.g., most East Asian languages.

<sup>22</sup> See Mara Zimmerman, “Now You See It, Now You Don't: Few guidelines exist for gaining access to evidence after trial,” in *The News Media & The Law* (Spring 2010), p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

save for that which has been classified or redacted, is now in the public domain and, as of this writing, may be freely accessed through the court's website at <http://trim.unictr.org/>. The lyrics to the three songs were cited in full in the expert reports rendered for both the Prosecution and Defense. These reports are part of the trial record and are likewise also freely available at the above website. Second, the war and genocide so demolished Rwanda's infrastructure that countless legal records were lost, making it nearly impossible to locate necessary documents related to copyright. While these factors provide legal cover, they nevertheless do not exempt me ethically. Third, then, I would emphasize that Bikindi gave me tacit approval to publish his lyrics. As mentioned in Chapter 1, pp. 15-16, he personally handed me a copy of his lyrics in order to ensure that the transcriptions I provide are correct. He viewed this dissertation as another avenue for him to defend himself, and to that end he recognized the necessity of presenting his lyrics in full.

### **“Twasazareye” (“We Bade Farewell”)**

“Twasazareye” was composed in mid to late 1986 in anticipation of Rwanda's twenty-fifth anniversary of independence. The lyrics articulate an ideal of national unity that transcends regional factionalism. It commemorates the abolition of the monarchy, the end of colonialism, and the establishment of the independent nation-state, specifically paying tribute to the 1959 Revolution and the three men—Mbonyumutwa, Kayibanda, and Habyarimana—who had since led the nation. At the time of the song's composition, Habyarimana had been endeavouring at to garner support among southern Rwandans, culminating in the famous state-sponsored reburial of Mbonyumutwa on July 25, 1986 at the *Stade de la démocratie* in Gitarama, the same site where Rwanda's independence was first formally announced on January 28, 1961. Mbonyumutwa was a southern leader of the 1959 Revolution and prominent member of PARMEHutu. He served as transitional president before Kayibanda formally assumed the presidency. The northern-western Bakiga, whom Habyarimana represented, eventually came to resent the way in which Mbonyumutwa, Kayibanda, and other southern-central Banyanduga politicians favored their constituents. When Habyarimana took power, the Banyanduga in turn began to resent him for favoring the Bakiga. The burial of Mbonyumutwa was a symbolic gesture of good faith on Habyarimana's part towards the Banyanduga.

“Twasazareye” was Bikindi’s submission for a national music and dance competition jointly sponsored and organized by the Ministries of Youth and Culture, Scientific Research, and Higher Education, in addition to a few other governmental departments. The competition was held on January 18, 1987, at Nyamirambo Regional Stadium in Gisenyi. Participants were required to compose a song centered on themes of independence and patriotism. Bikindi won first prize, for which he received 250,000 Rwandan francs (roughly \$500). His song was then selected for performance for the nation’s largest silver jubilee festival, held on July 1, 1987 at Amahoro Stadium in Kigali. An enormous ensemble of over 1,500 singers, dancers, and instrumentalists, comprised of troupes from all over Rwanda, performed the song under Bikindi’s direction. Mbonimana and Karangwa went so far as to claim that the song’s performance was based on North Korean government-orchestrated demonstrations, a rather questionable claim.<sup>25</sup> With subsequent regular airplay on Radio Rwanda, the song soon gained wide popularity throughout the country.

Bikindi sings the opening line and parts of the last section, but otherwise, the entire song is sung by choir. The song begins with a refrain (*inyikilizo*), which is sung seven times throughout. Five verses (*intero*) and a concluding call-and-response section are then interspersed between each refrain. An *icyivugo* section is inserted between the third refrain and fourth verse. *Icyivugo* is a highly energetic feature of many traditional warrior/hunter songs and dances, during which a male dancer, portraying a warrior/hunter, loudly and quickly “raps” several lines in which he boasts of his valor, prowess, and heroic accomplishments. The delivery is so rapid that even native Kinyarwanda speakers often struggle to comprehend much of what is said (it was not until I received a copy of the lyrics from Bikindi that the translators with whom I worked were able to understand the *icyivugo* section in “Twasazareye”).

The refrain’s lyrics remind Rwandans that, thanks to the Revolution, they no longer have to endure the harsh conditions forced upon them by the monarchy and colonialism, and so Rwandans should come together and revel in the joy and liberty of their newfound democracy. Each of the five verses takes the audience through a linear history of Rwanda, beginning with the slave-like experiences of *ubuhake* and other patron-client policies and concluding with the reign of President Habyarimana. Throughout this narrative Bikindi presents the monarchial and colonial regimes in a negative manner, conjuring imagery of whippings, long marches, and

---

<sup>25</sup> Mbonimana and Karangwa 2006, p. 9

forced labor so that against this miserable background, the victory obtained through the Revolution seems all the more glorious. Two leaders of the Revolution are specifically mentioned in the fourth verse, Mbonyumutwa and Kayibanda, and they are presented as heroes to whom Rwandans should be indebted. This was significant in that it was the first time since Habyarimana overthrew Kayibanda that Kayibanda's name had been publicly honored in a song performed at a state function. The fourth verse eulogizes these two men and the other architects of the Revolution. Here, the accompaniment thins out so that the effect is one of reverence and poignancy. The full accompaniment then returns, and in the fifth verse, Habyarimana is presented as an even more gallant and magnanimous figure. Mbonyumutwa and Kayibanda are regarded as relics of the past, but Habyarimana, some fifteen years their junior represents a new generation of leaders.<sup>26</sup> Whereas Mbonyumutwa and Kayibanda are folded into a verse honoring all of the Revolution's architects, Habyarimana receives a verse all to himself.

"Twasazareye" is bifurcated both structurally and poetically, paralleling the division of Rwanda's history into the pre-independence and post-independence eras. The first part of the song discusses the oppression and misery of Rwandans under the monarchy and colonialism, and the second part expresses the joy of independence and exalts those who fought to attain it. Structurally, the two parts are divided by the *icyivugo* section. As *icyivugo* is a traditional musical practice, it makes sense to conclude the part of the song that focuses on the past with this section. The *icyivugo* section also functions as a transition to the more triumphant second part of "Twasazareye." During the *icyivugo*, the performer boasts of various deeds in which he came to the rescue of Rwandans who wasting away due to hunger and weariness or who were in danger of being executed by the king for failing to fulfill their duties. What seems at first to be a permanent and inescapable state of despair is shown to be something that can be overcome, but only through the heroic efforts of the younger generation symbolized here by the young warrior/hunter.

The lyrics also employ a subtle poetic shift as they move from the first to the second part of the song, from a state of despair to a state of triumph. Notice that the narrative voice switches from the second-person to the first-person point-of-view, both of which serve to personalize the song for the audience. This shift in perspective, in fact, occurs in the transitional *icyivugo* section. In the first part of the song, Bikindi not only encourages his listeners to reflect on what

---

<sup>26</sup> Mbonyumutwa was born in 1921, Kayibanda in 1924, and Habyarimana in 1937.

the elder generations endured under the monarchy; he addresses his elders directly, prompting them to remember what “you” experienced. The severe *uburetwa* and *ubuhake* systems were not abolished until 1949 and 1954 respectively, and only then under heavy pressure from the United Nations Trusteeship Council. At the time of the song’s premiere, most Rwandans in their forties and older thus had firsthand knowledge of life under the monarchy. Bikindi, though, was born in 1954. Switching to the first person point-of-view, the song acknowledges that he and others of his generation did not experience what their elders endured and are thankful to them for their struggle. He thus appeals to a younger generation to honor their elders and to not take their hard-fought independence for granted. In the concluding call-and-response section between Bikindi and the chorus, he switches back to the second-person, directly calling on all generations to remember the past and to be grateful for the present. Such cross-generational unity is a salient theme throughout much of Bikindi’s work.

The song was composed some four years before the RPF invasion and nearly eight years before the genocide, and yet the Prosecution chose to include the song in its indictment as evidence of Bikindi’s intent to incite genocide. Interestingly enough, Mbonimana was a member of the jury panel that awarded Bikindi first prize. Mbonimana defended himself during the trial by claiming that not all the jury members, including himself, approved of the lyrics and agreed that Bikindi should have received first prize.<sup>27</sup>

#### (INSTRUMENTAL INTRODUCTION)

##### REFRAIN (*INYIKILIZO*) (0’07”):

- (1) *Twasazareye ingoma ya cyami,*  
We said farewell to the drum of the regime/kingdom,<sup>28</sup>
- (2) *Ingoyimbi ya gihake na gikolonize birajyanaaaa...!*  
The bonds<sup>29</sup> of *ubuhake*<sup>30</sup> and colonialism went with it!

---

<sup>27</sup> Witness Gamaliel Mbonimana, T. 16 February 2006, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> The drum, or *ingoma*, is a common trope throughout Africa that symbolizes power. Like many other African royal courts, the courts of Rwanda included its own set of drums as well as a single ‘great drum’ (for the Abanyiginya dynasty, it was called *Kalinga*) that embodied and projected the king’s divine authority.

<sup>29</sup> “*Ingoyimbi*,” translated here as “bonds,” refers to ropes used to bind the hands and feet of slaves or to bind slaves together. The term is also used to refer to handcuffs. Many listeners who participated in this study heard the term, “*ingoma*” instead, which, as explained in the above footnote, refers to “drum” or “regime/kingship.” Bikindi urged me to emphasize that the term he used is “*ingoyimbi*,” not “*ingoma*,” because the former refers more to the experience of peasants under the harsh client-patron system rather than the monarchy itself.



(3) *Tubona demokarasi itwizihiye.*  
We see a democracy which is right for us.

(4) *Muze twishimire Ubwigengeee...!*  
Come, let's rejoice for Independence!

**VERSE 1 (INTERO) (0'25"):**

(5) *Terera amaso inyuma Munyarwanda, yeee...!*  
Turn your eyes back,<sup>31</sup> you Rwandan!

(6) *Ibuka ikiboko wibuke shiku,*  
Remember the whip, remember the harsh labor,<sup>32</sup>

(7) *Wibuke iminsi wamaraga ukorera umutware ntanaguhembee...!*  
Remember the days you spent working for the chief without any compensation!

(8) *I maze wishimire Ubwigengeee...!*  
So then, let's rejoice for Independence!

**(REFRAIN) (0'47")**

**VERSE 2 (1'04"):**

(9) *Ibuka imitaga wilirwaga ugenda,*  
Remember how long and hard you used to have to walk,<sup>33</sup>

(10) *Amajoro menshi urara rubundaaa...!*  
The many nights you spent outdoors!

(11) *Utuye i butware cyangwa se i bwami,*  
Bearing things to the residences of the chiefs or kings,

(12) *Ukabigomwa abawe babikeneye,*  
Giving up things that your family needed,

(13) *Kandi iyo ubijyanye ukabigezayo,*  
And upon arriving there,

(14) *Byagushenguye ntibanagushimeee...!*

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ubuhake* here is found in the word, “*gihake*.”

<sup>31</sup> In other words, “remember the past.”

<sup>32</sup> “*Shiku*,” translated here as “harsh labor,” refers to the cultivation of fallow earth. The same root word is used in the verb, “*gushikura*,” which means “to forcefully pull something out.”

<sup>33</sup> Part of the forced labor policies under the later monarchial and colonial eras required transporting goods and equipment for the king, high-level chiefs, and colonial administrators. Rwanda's terrain, especially in the western half of the country, is rugged and hilly, making long travel on foot an exhausting affair.

So worn down, the receivers were not even thankful!

(15) *Maze uze twishimire Ubwigengeee...!*

So then, come, let's rejoice for Independence!

**(REFRAIN) (1'30")**

**ICYIVUGO (1:46"):**

(16) *Ndi Rudahungumuruho,*

I am *Rudahungumuruho* ["One who never flees from difficulties"],

(17) *Ikindi kandi ngira impuhwe!*

And also, I have compassion!

(18) *Mu mpinga ya Mpanga,*

At the crest of Mpanga,<sup>34</sup>

(19) *Nimanye Mpunga wa Mparirwa,*

I came to the rescue of Mpunga of Mparirwa.<sup>35</sup>

(20) *Impamba imushiranye aguye isari.*

His provisions were gone and so he was nearly dead.

(21) *Nimanye Ruhara mu Ruhango.*

I came to the rescue of Ruhara in Ruhango.

(22) *Uruboho rw'itabi rumugize imbohe.*

He was exhausted from bearing a heavy load of tobacco.

(23) *Yibaza ukuntu arugeze i Nyanza.*

He asked himself how he could make it all the way to Nyanza.<sup>36</sup>

(24) *Nimanye Gatsitsi i Gatsibo.*

I came to the rescue of Gatsitsi at Gatsibo.

(25) *Umutsama yagomba gutura utuzuye.*

The pot of honey he should be taking [to the king] was not full.

(26) *Ndi Urukinabarenzi,*

I am *Urukinabarenzi* ["One who admires/imitates the wise"],

(27) *Ruhanga bankikana kuw'inkike.*

*Ruhanga*, praised for his selfless dedication.

---

<sup>34</sup> A hill near Nyanza, the seat of the monarchy.

<sup>35</sup> These are fictional characters, perhaps given their names because of their alliterative relationship to Mpanga.

<sup>36</sup> Nyanza was where the royal palace was located

- (28) *Ndi umuhungu urengera ingabo*  
I am a boy who protects the army
- (29) *Iminsi igeze mu mahina!*  
During the days of troubles!
- (30) *Ndi Rusakaranamisakura,*  
I am *Rusakaranamisakura* [“One who brings out the arrows”],
- (31) *Mugucubya akarengane kariho icyo gihe,*  
In stopping injustices during that time.
- (32) *Mvunyishiriza mu ntambara.*  
I announce myself [ready for] war.
- (33) *Ingabo ntware ni igitare,*  
[My] shield is a “white rock,”
- (34) *Itontoma nk’iya bene Gahutu,*  
Loudly moaning like the children of the lowliest Hutu,<sup>37</sup>
- (35) *Ndi inkiranyi ya Nyagahinga.*  
I am a talented fighter from Nyagahinga.<sup>38</sup>
- (36) *Ndi Nyiringango mwene Nyagahinga.*  
I am Nyiringango, son of Nyagahinga.<sup>39</sup>
- (37) *Ndi umugemanshuro wa Kirenga.*  
I am a famous warrior from Kirenga.<sup>40</sup>
- (38) *Ndi imbabaza abafuzi.*  
I am the one who makes the archers<sup>41</sup> suffer.

**VERSE 3 (2’18”):**

- (39) *Ndi muto cyane ibyo sinabibonyeee...!*  
I am very young and did not witness all this!<sup>42</sup>
- (40) *Narabibwiwe ndanabisoma,*  
It was told to me and I read about it,

<sup>37</sup> “Gahutu” refers to those Hutu at the very bottom of society or those who were the most oppressed during the monarchial era.

<sup>38</sup> Nyagahinga is an area located in the far west of Rwanda near the banks of Lake Kivu, an area that long remained outside of the central monarchy’s dominion and would continue to put up resistance after being annexed.

<sup>39</sup> Again, this names were created for their alliterative relationship to Nyagahinga. See fn. 19.

<sup>40</sup> Kirenga is near Nyanza.

<sup>41</sup> Archers may refer to the king’s soldiers. Anti-Tutsi propaganda cartoons often featured archers as symbols of Tutsi. See Taylor 1999.

<sup>42</sup> Born in 1954, Bikindi was 31 or 32 at the time he composed this song.

- (41) *I maze kubyumva ndamya Rurema*  
And then upon understanding it I praised the Creator
- (42) *Yo yandinze uwo muruhooo...!*  
For sparing me from such grief!
- (43) *Ngiyo impamvu itumye by'umwihiriko*  
And for this particular reason,
- (44) *Njyewe nishimira Ubugenge!*  
Me, I rejoice for Independence!

**(REFRAIN) (2'37")**

**VERSE 4 (2'56"):**

- (45) *Ndashimira rwose byimazeyo*  
I am thankful with all my heart<sup>43</sup>
- (46) *Abarwanashyaka batubohoyeee...*  
[For those] militants who liberated us!
- (47) *Uwari ku isonga akaba Kayibanda,*  
At the head of whom was Kayibanda,
- (48) *Nkazirikana cyane Mbonyumutwa*  
I think especially of Mbonyumutwa
- (49) *N'izindi ntwari bari kumwe,*  
And the other heroes/brave ones who were with them,
- (50) *Aribo dukeshya ubu Bwigenge.*  
Those from whom we received this Independence.

**(REFRAIN) (3'11")**

**VERSE 5 (3'37"):**

- (51) *Uzaba intwari ntibabara imyaka yeee...!*  
Among those heroes/brave ones, you don't count their years, yes!<sup>44</sup>
- (52) *Habyarimana muri icyo gihe*  
Habyarimana at that time

---

<sup>43</sup> More literally, "with all my effort."

<sup>44</sup> In other words, age does not matter.

- (53) *Yari ku isonga ayoboye ingabo,*  
Was at the top, leading the army,
- (54) *Yakunze amahoro kuva mu mavuko,*  
He loved peace from the day he was born,
- (55) *Na n'ubu akiyahanira. [\*impundu\*]*  
And now continues to strive for it. [\*cheering\*]
- (56) *Tuguhaye impundu shema ry'abato,*  
We cheer for you, pride of the youth,
- (57) *Ukomeze umurego uyobore ingabo!*  
Continue to valiantly lead the army!

**(REFRAIN) (4'04")**

**CALL-AND-RESPONSE BETWEEN BIKINDI AND CHOIR (4'20"):**

- (58) *Tumaze ingahe mbe Banyarwanda? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Hey, Rwandans, how many [years of independence] has it been for us?!<sup>45</sup> (Twenty-five!)
- (59) *Tumaze ingahe mbe Banyarwanda? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Hey, Rwandans, how many has it been for us?! (Twenty-five!)
- (60) *Rubyiruko rw'u Rwanda aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Young people of Rwanda, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (61) *Yemwe bahungu aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
You boys, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (62) *Yemwe bakobwa aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
You girls, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (63) *Yemwe bahungu aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
You boys, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (64) *Rubyiruko rw'u Rwanda aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Young people of Rwanda, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (65) *Tumaze ingahe mbe Banyarwanda? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Hey, Rwandans, how many has it been for us?! (Twenty-five!)
- (66) *Bagabo b'ibikwerere murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Grown-up men,<sup>46</sup> do you know this? (Twenty-five!)

---

<sup>45</sup> More literally, "How many have we spent?"

- (67) *Bagore b'amajigija aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Grown-up women,<sup>47</sup> do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (68) *Murayibabwire yemwe basaza! (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Tell them, you old men! (Twenty-five!)
- (69) *Bakecuru namwe murayibabwire! (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Old women, tell them! (Twenty-five years!)
- (70) *Nimwe mwaraye ayo majoro! (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
None of you will spend those nights [again]!<sup>48</sup> (Twenty-five!)
- (71) *Yemwe bahungu aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
You boys, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (72) *Yemwe bakobwa aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
You girls, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (73) *Bagabo b'ibikwerere murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Grown-up men, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (74) *Bagore b'amajigija aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Grown-up women, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (75) *Abangavu ingimbi aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Teenage girls and boys, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (76) *Abangavu ingimbi aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Teenage girls and boys, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (77) *Yemwe bahungu aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
You boys, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (78) *Yemwe bakobwa aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
You girls, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (79) *Rubwiruko rw'u Rwanda aho murayizi? (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Young people of Rwanda, do you know this? (Twenty-five!)
- (80) *Imitaga nk'iyu ntimukayitunge! (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
Such hardships are not easy to discuss! (Twenty-five!)

---

<sup>46</sup> *Abagabo*, translated as “grown-up men” usually refers to men who are married, which, according to Rwandan custom, denotes those who are fully mature adults. If men are not married, they are often still considered as “*abagabo*,” young, unmarried boys not yet fully mature, even if they may be in their 30s or older.

<sup>47</sup> As in fn. 14, “*abagore*” refers to married women; that is, women who are fully mature adults. Otherwise, they are referred to “*abakobwa*.”

<sup>48</sup> Referring to the long nights spent outdoors bearing goods to kings and chiefs. See line 10.

- (81) *Amajoro nk'ayo ntimukayarare! (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
 May such nights never be mentioned again! (Twenty-five!)
- (82) *Imitaga nk'iyoyo ntimukayitunge! (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
 Such hardships are not easy to discuss! (Twenty-five!)
- (83) *Amajoro nk'ayo ntimukayarare! (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
 May such nights never be mentioned again! (Twenty-five!)
- (84) *Ibihe nk'ibyo ntimukabitunge! (Makumyabiri n'itanu!)*  
 May such times never be experienced again! (Twenty-five!)

**(REFRAIN) (6'27")**

### **“Akabyutso” (“The Awakening”)**

Bikindi composed “Akabyutso” in March 1993, a time that seemed for Rwandans as if the world was falling apart. The RPF had broken a cease-fire the month prior and taken over much of the north. Intense partisan violence raged throughout the streets, forests, and hills. The Arusha Accords were still being hammered out, and no one knew if or when they would be fully implemented and what they would entail for Rwanda’s political future. This period became known as *Igihirahiro*: “the time of uncertainty, confusion, or chaos.”

The song unfolds as a tirade against “bad Hutu” (*ibihutu*), especially those of the younger generation. The song is commonly known as “Nanga Abahutu”—“I despise Hutu”—as this phrase recurs often. Bikindi adopts the moniker *Mutaba*, meaning “savior,” and takes on the voice of a fatherly figure complaining to an elderly man, dismayed by the attitudes and behavior of these misguided Hutu. This unnamed elder periodically interjects in order to underscore the various points Bikindi makes throughout his diatribe (in the following transcription, his interjections are shown in parentheses). In parallel with the two characters, the accompaniment is comprised of a duet performed by Bikindi on *inanga* and by the other man on *ikembe*, the Kinyarwanda name for a metal-keyed lamellophone (the same instrument is called “*likembe*” elsewhere in Central and East Africa). The dialogue between Bikindi and the elderly man is segmented by a refrain performed by Bikindi five times throughout the song.

Bikindi sings that he despises those Hutu who are arrogant, disrespectful, greedy, selfish, corrupt, ignorant, violent, and who in behaving so have somehow renounced their identity as Hutu. Did Bikindi mean then to imply then that instead of fighting against one another, they

should unite against Tutsi, or that by behaving so immorally, they were behaving like Tutsi? The song castigates those Hutu who are ashamed of being Hutu. Was this a way of denouncing Hutu who supported the RPF and were sympathetic to Tutsi, accusing them of betraying their own kind and doing so only for selfish gain? Why did he not sing that he also despises Tutsi—or all Rwandans for that matter—who engage in such wrongful behavior? Did he intend to subtly imply that Tutsi were so inherently despicable that it was not worth pointing out? If he did intend to incite hatred and violence against Tutsi, why did he not just sing, “I despise Tutsi,” and portray them in a similarly caustic manner? The more charitable interpretation, the one that Bikindi would hope his listeners make, is that the song was intended to address partisan violence, and since it was mainly Hutu who perpetrated this violence, Bikindi singles them out.

#### (INSTRUMENTAL INTRODUCTION)

#### REFRAIN (*INYIKILIZO*) (0’41’):

- (1) *Hmmm...Ngire? Ngire nte uyu mwana muto uteye nyina agahinda, agatera se uruhagararo se rungano?*  
 [\*Humming\*] What am I to do? What am I to do with this small child who causes sorrow for his/her mother and worry for his/her father, my old man?<sup>49</sup>
- (2) *Intumva yabyaye intumbwe.*  
 Those who can’t understand give birth to the foolish,
- (3) *Umutisiga abyara umusazi.*  
 The idiot<sup>50</sup> gives birth to a crazy person,
- (4) *Igihuru kibyaye igihunyira, se rungano!*  
 The bush gives birth to an owl,<sup>51</sup> old man!
- (5) *Ukuri guca mu ziko ntigushye,*  
 The truth passes through fire without burning up,
- (6) *Kandi kuvugisha ukuri ntibyica umutumirano mwa bagabo mwe!*  
 And, to tell the truth does not destroy good relations, you men!

<sup>49</sup> “*Rungano*” refers to a person or people of the same generation as the speaker. In this song, Bikindi, himself an older man, is complaining to another older man.

<sup>50</sup> “*Umutisiga*” refers literally to a person who does not use lotion or cream to protect his or her skin. It is used here as an insult suggesting laziness and stupidity.

<sup>51</sup> The owl is a symbol of misfortune and death in Rwandan culture (as it is in many African cultures). One participant believed it referred to the RPF, because its soldiers often camped in the harsh wilderness (the “bush”) of the Virunga mountain chain and attacked at night.



- (7) *Mbwirabumva.* (x4)  
I speak to those who understand. (x4)
- (8) *Ndarire Imana.*  
I had a revelation from God.
- (9) *Ndarire Imana, mbambure imanzi, se rungano!*  
I had a revelation from God, I am reviving<sup>52</sup> the old heroes,<sup>53</sup> my old man!
- (10) *Ndarire Imana, mbambure imanzi rwakizima.*  
I had a revelation from God, I am reviving the old heroes back to life.<sup>54</sup>

**VERSE 1 (INTERO 1) (1'43'')**:

- (11) *Njyewe nanga Abahutu. Njyewe nanga Abahutu.*  
Me, I despise Hutu. Me, I despise Hutu.
- (12) *Njyewe nanga ibihutu, kandi nanga ibyihuture rungano.*  
Me, I despise those bad Hutu,<sup>55</sup> and I despise those Hutu who are ashamed of their identity,<sup>56</sup> old man.
- (13) *(Ngo-ngo-ngo-ngo ugize ngo iki Mutaba?!)*  
*(Wh-wh-wh-what is this you say, Mutaba [lit. "savior"?])<sup>57</sup>*
- (14) *Mureke mbivuge ntuza we, intimba inziritse umutima cyane. Mbabwire impamvu mbanga ye.*  
(x2)  
Let me say it, oh *ntuza*,<sup>58</sup> great sorrow overwhelms my heart. I will tell you why I despise them.  
(x2)
- (15) *Njyewe nanga Abahutu, banga ubwoko bwabooo...bwo kuba Abahutu aba buzuye.*  
Me, I despise those Hutu, those who despise their own kind,<sup>59</sup> who are ashamed to be Hutu.
- (16) *(Yee, aho ho turi kumwe!)*  
(Yes, on these things I agree!)
- (17) *Njyewe nanga Abahutu, basuzugurana cyane, ngo aha baruta abandi, bakanena abandi Bahutu, rungano.*

<sup>52</sup> “*Mbambure*,” translated here as “revive,” comes from the verb, “*kubambura*,” which literally means “to remove a hide from pegs after drying/curing.”

<sup>53</sup> “*Imanzi*” refers to great heroes who are now deceased.

<sup>54</sup> The root word of “*rwakizima*” is “*-zima*,” which means wholeness or healthfulness.

<sup>55</sup> The “*ibi-*” in “*ibihutu*” is a negative, connoting something or someone who is bad, stupid, wicked, rotten, etc.

<sup>56</sup> “*Ibyihuture*” is a term that refers to Hutu who somehow try to deny or disguise their identity, for instance, by claiming they are Tutsi.

<sup>57</sup> Lines in parantheses are uttered by an older man whom Bikindi addresses throughout the song.

<sup>58</sup> “*Ntuza*” may be used to address a man when his name is not known, like saying “Mr. So-and-So”.

<sup>59</sup> “Their own kind” is translated from “*ubwoko*,” which often refers to ethnicity but can also refer to clan.

Me, I despise Hutu, those who really disrespect others, who think they are superior to other Hutu, who despise other Hutu, old man!

- (18) *Njyewe nanga Abahutu, Abahutu b'inda ndende, babandi b'ibisahiranda, bakunda guhakwa batunzwe no guhakirizwa, rungano!*

Me, I despise Hutu, those Hutu with fat stomachs, who feed only themselves, and who enjoy gaining favor through flattery and begging, old man!

- (19) *(Icyo hari uwakikugayira se?)*

(Can you be blamed for this?)

- (20) *Abo niba mbanga ndamaze (x2).*

If I despise those people, then so what. (x2)

- (21) *Imana tugira iwacuuu...ni uko ari bake cyane, rungano.*

Fortunately for us,<sup>60</sup> there are very few of them, old man.

- (22) *(Ni bake cyane abarindagiye bo!)*

(It is very few who are so thoughtless!)

- (23) *Imana tugira iwacuuu...ni uko ari bake cyane, rungano.*

Fortunately for us, there are very few of them, old man.

## REFRAIN (3'17")

### VERSE 2 (4'21"):

- (24) *Njyewe nanga ibihutu, njyewe nanga ibihutu, bigendera inzira ubugari.*

Me, I despise bad Hutu. Me, I despise bad Hutu, those idiots who walk a path only because it is wide.<sup>61</sup>

- (25) *Njyewe nanga ibihutu, ibihutu bidashishoza...*

Me, I despise bad Hutu, bad Hutu who are undiscerning...

- (26) *(Bitareba!)*

(Unable to see!)

- (27) *...bateranya bigatemana, bikegura bikarwana intambara, bitazi imvano yayo, rungano!*

---

<sup>60</sup> Literally, "*Imana tugira iwacu*" means "God/fate we have in our home." "*Imana*" does not necessarily refer to the Judeo-Christian God (though the same name is used) but can also refer to a less personal, more abstract spiritual force or even fate. This line could be translated as, "The luck/fortune we have in our home..." The translators with whom I worked insisted that the English colloquialism, "fortunately for us," was the closest approximation of what this phrase conveys.

<sup>61</sup> This comes from an old proverb, "*kugendera inzira ubugari*," which means "to walk a path only because it is wide." It can refer to people who do things without thinking about why they do them or without thinking about the consequences. The prefix "*(i)bi-*" denotes a person or people who are bad, stupid, lazy, rotten, etc., the same as in "*ibihutu*."

...who are easily manipulated, who tear themselves apart and fight in a war they don't even understand, old man!

(28) *(Bakamarama! Urumva atari ishyano koko!)*

(They are annihilating one another! This is truly a tragedy!)

(29) *Njyewe nanga umuhutu, umuhutu uhabwa igiceri akica umuntu, kandi akica umuhutu, rungano.*

Me, I despise a Hutu, a Hutu who receives a coin<sup>62</sup> to kill a person, and then kills a Hutu, old man!

(30) *(Yego ra!)*

*(Yes indeed!)*

(31) *Abo niba mbanga ndamaze. (x2)*

If I despise those people, then so what. (x2)

(32) *(Nanjye ndacye, ndacye, ndacye.)*

(Me as well, as well, as well.)

(33) *Imana tugira iwacuuu...ni uko ari bake cyane rungano. (x2)*

God be with us, there are very few of them, old man! (x2)

## **REFRAIN (5'22")**

### **VERSE 3 (6'09"):**

(34) *Njyewe nanga Abahutu, ba Bahutu batibukaaa...Nzira ya Muramira, ngo bibuke urwo yapfuye, bibuke icyamwishe, rungano!*

Me, I despise Hutu, those Hutu who don't remember Nzira, son of Muramira,<sup>63</sup> that they don't remember he died, they don't remember how and why he died, old man!

(35) *(Bibuke urwo yapfuye, mwana wanjye.)*

(They don't remember he died, my child.)

(36) *Njyewe nanga Abahutu, ba Bahutu batibukaaa...Mashira ya Sabugabo, hariya i Nyanza, ngo bibuke urwo yapfuyeee...bibuke icyamwishe, rungano!*

Me, I despise Hutu, those Hutu who don't remember Mashira, son of Sabugabo,<sup>64</sup> there in Nyanza, that they don't remember that he died, they don't remember how and why he died, old man!

---

<sup>62</sup> In other words, a very small amount.

<sup>63</sup> Nzira was king of Bugara. According to legend, he was killed by Ruganzu Ndori who infiltrated Nzira's household disguised as a servant.

<sup>64</sup> Mashira resided in Nyanza and was a member of the Ababanda clan. He was known for his powers to conjure rainfall. He was killed by the Ruganzu Ndori after Ndori gave him a girl to marry.

(37) *(Bwa bwenge buke se?!)*

(Have they no sense?!)

(38) *Njyewe nanga Abahutu, ba Bahutu batibukaaa...ngo bibuke Nyagakecuru mu bisi bya Huye!  
Ngo bibuke urwo yapfuye, bibuke icyamwische, rungano!*

Me, I despise Hutu, those Hutu who don't remember Nyagakecuru of the hill of Huye!<sup>65</sup> That they don't remember that she died, they don't remember how and why she died, old man!

(39) *(Hari ubyibaza!)*

(No one thinks about this!)

(40) *Njyewe nanga Abahutu, ba Bahutu batibukaaa...ngo bibuke rya jambo rivuga ngo: "Muhere ruhande, mwise Mpandahande," hariya i Butare, rungano!*

Me, I despise Hutu, those Hutu who don't remember, who don't remember the slogan that was said over there in Butare: "Starting at one side, kill everyone, [even] Mpandahande,"<sup>66</sup> old man!

(41) *Njyewe nanga , ba Bahutu batibuka rwa Bishingwe, Basebya we na Ndungutse mu Ruhengeri rw'Umurera, ngo bibuke icyabishe rungano.*

Me, I despise Hutu, those Hutu who don't remember Rukara, son of Bishingwe,<sup>67</sup> nor Basebya,<sup>68</sup> nor Ndungutse<sup>69</sup> in Ruhengeri at Murera, that they don't remember why and how they died, old man!

---

<sup>65</sup> This refers to a well-known legend in Rwanda. Nyagakecuru was an old diviner who lived with her kin atop a mountain in the southern region of Huye. According to legend, she was protected by a large snake (or possibly many smaller snakes) that hid in the bushes surrounding her abode. Royal emissaries sent by Ruganzu Ndori came and offered her goats as a tribute. It was a trick, as the goats ate the leaves of the bushes, exposing the snake(s) and thus allowing warriors to invade Nyagakecuru's home and kill her and her family. Curiously, I have run into some disagreement over whether Nyagakecuru was a man or woman. The name literally means "old woman," but some have told me that this was a kind of joke and that Nyagakecuru was actually a man. According to one informant, she was a member of the Abungwe clan and the mother of the last king of the Abenengwe dynasty.

<sup>66</sup> This is an ancient slogan credited to Ruganzu Ndori during his expeditions to seize and annex the southern lands of Rwanda where Butare is located. The slogan reflects the ferocity for which Ndori was known. Mpandahande was an important chief in the area.

<sup>67</sup> Rukara, son of Bishingwe, was an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century leader of an anti-colonial and anti-monarchical revolt. He was a powerful chief of the Abarashi clan whose members mostly inhabited northern Rwanda. Rukara claimed to be a descendent of the Gisaka lineage, once the ruling dynasty in the region, and that he would resurrect the dynasty as a sovereign kingdom separate from the central monarchy. He acquired a large following. In 1910, several of his men killed a German priest, Paulin Roupas, while Rukara was meeting with him (Rukara ducked as his men shot the priest with bows and arrows). Father Roupas was the first German casualty since the colonial administration began formally working with the monarchy. With Basebya and Ndungutse, Rukara continued the rebellion which had come to a head by November 1911. In April 1912, Rukara was betrayed by Ndungutse and handed over to German soldiers. He was then hung in Ruhengeri under orders of the German Lieutenant Gedovius. Rukara's rebellion would venerate him as a hero among many Rwandans in the region. See Ian Linden, *Church and Revolution in Rwanda* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1977): 35-36, 82-96, and 105-107. Also Alison Des Forges, *Defeat Is the Only Bad News: Rwanda Under King Musinga, 1896-1931* (Madison: WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011): 114-15 and 121-27

<sup>68</sup> Basebya was the Twa chief of Murera who with Rukara and Ndungutse led the 1911 northern rebellion against King Musinga and the German colonial administration. He was tricked into captivity by Musinga's envoy,

- (42) *(Yego koko, mwana wanjye!)*  
(Yes, truly, my child!)
- (43) *Ba Bahutu batibukaaa...Rukara rwa Bishingwe*  
Those Hutu who don't remember Rukara, son of Bishingwe...
- (44) *(Ngo bibuke uko ya manitwse!)*  
(That they don't remember that he was hung!)
- (45) *...Basebya we na Ndungutse mu Ruhengeri rw'Umurera, ngo bibuke icyabishe rungano?*  
...nor Basebya, nor Ndungutse in Ruhengeri at Murera, that they don't remember why and how they died, old man!  
*(Akagambane ka Rwubusisi!)*  
(Betrayed by Rwubusisi!)<sup>70</sup>
- (46) *Abo niba mbanga ndamaze (x2).*  
If I despise those people, then so what . (x2)
- (47) *Imana tugira iwacuuu...ni uko ari bake cyane rungano! (x2)*  
Fortunately for us, there are very few of them, old man! (x2)

## REFRAIN (8'40")

### VERSE 4 (9'32"):

- (48) *Njyewe nanga . Njyewe nanga Abahutu badashyira mu gisenge undi muhutu wabakoshereje ngo bamuhanire iyo ngiyooo...ariko ubumwe bukomeze, rungano.*  
Me, I despise Hutu. Me, I despise those Hutu who don't privately discipline another Hutu who is in the wrong,<sup>71</sup> so that unity may be maintained, old man!

---

Rwubusisi, then brought to the German outpost where he was immediately shot by Gedovius. See Linden 1977, pp. 105 and 120, fn. 124. Also Des Forges 2011, pp. 104-7 and 115-120.

<sup>69</sup> Ndungutse, likely a Tutsi, was the third ringleader of the northern rebellion. He, like Rukara, also pronounced himself king, concocted various myths about his lineage, and promoted the view that he possessed supernatural powers that could overcome German technological superiority. Unlike Rukara, he considered himself the rightful king of all Rwanda. His claims and goals eventually led to rivalry with Rukara, and so Ndungutse betrayed him and had him handed over to the Germans. Some sources claim that Ndungutse fled to Uganda when German soldiers assailed his encampment and burned it to the ground (his betrayal of Rukara turned out not to earn him any favor with the Germans). Others claim that he was killed in the assault. See Linden 1977, pp. 105-14 and Des Forges 2011, pp. 126-27.

<sup>70</sup> Rwubusisi was King Musinga's envoy who tricked Basebya into surrendering. Accompanied by four African soldiers carrying ornate grass mats, he told Basebya that he brought gifts. Hidden inside the rolled up mats were rifles, which Rwubusisi and the soldiers used to capture Basebya. See Des Forges 2011, p. 127.

<sup>71</sup> More literally, "who don't take another Hutu under the roof and discipline him/her there." The idea is that criticism and discipline should be done in private so that the one who is in the wrong is not publicly shamed, thus maintaining a unified front.

- (49) *(Ahubwo bagahogera).*  
(Instead, they walk around like fools!)
- (50) *Njyewe nanga Abahutu badashyira mu gisenge undi muhutu wabakoshereje ngo bamuhanire iyo ngiyoooo...ariko ubumwe bukomeze rungano.*  
Me, I despise those Hutu who don't privately discipline another Hutu who is in the wrong, so that unity may be maintained, old man!
- (51) *(Inda gusa!)*  
(Such selfishness!)<sup>72</sup>
- (52) *Abo niba mbanga ndamaze. (x2)*  
If I despise those people, then so what. (x2)
- (53) *Imana tugira iwacuuu...ni uko ari bake cyane rungano!*  
Fortunately for us, there are very few of them, old man.
- (54) *[\*Caka, caka, caka, caka...\*]*  
[Chaka, chaka, chaka, chaka...]<sup>73</sup>
- (55) *Abo niba mbanga ndamaze.*  
If I despise those people, then so what.
- (56) *Imana tugira iwacuuu...ni uko ari bake cyane rungano!*  
Fortunately for us, there are very few of them, old man!

## INSTRUMENTAL INTERLUDE

### VERSE 5 (11'25"):

- (57) *Njyewe nanga Abahutu, Abahutu b'inda ndende, babandi b'ibisahiranda, bakunda guhakwa, yeee...batunzwe no guhakirizwa, rungano!*  
Me, I despise Hutu, those Hutu with fat stomachs, who feed only themselves, and who enjoy gaining favor—yes!—through flattery and begging, old man!
- (58) *Njyewe nanga Abahutu, basuzugurana cyane, ngo aha baruta abandi, bakanena abandi Bahutu, rungano!*  
Me, I despise Hutu, those who really disrespect others, who think they are superior to others, who despise other Hutu, old man!
- (59) *(Hari unena mwabo ra?!)*  
(Who can despise their own?!)

<sup>72</sup> Literally, “only the stomach.”

<sup>73</sup> These are vocables used to imitate the sound of clapping.

- (60) *Njyewe nanga ibihutu, kandi nanga ibiyihuture rungano.*  
Me, I despise those bad Hutu, and I despise those Hutu who are ashamed of their identity, old man.
- (61) *Njyewe nanga ibihutu, njyewe nanga ibihutu, bigendera inzira ubugari.*  
Me, I despise bad Hutu. Me, I despise bad Hutu, those idiots who walk a path only because it is wide.
- (62) *(Nk'ibihuna!)*  
(They can't see!)
- (63) *Njyewe nanga ibihutu, ibihutu bidashishoza bateranya bigatemana, bikegura bikarwana intambara, bitazi imvano yayo, rungano!*  
Me, I despise bad Hutu, bad Hutu who are undiscerning, who are easily manipulated, who tear themselves apart and fight in a war they don't even understand, old man!
- (64) *(\*Nndtya!\*)*  
(\*sound of tongue clicking in derision\*)
- (65) *Njyewe nanga umuhutu, umuhutu uhabwa igiceri akica umuntu... kandi akica umuhutu, rungano.*  
Me, I despise a Hutu, a Hutu who receives a coin to kill a person...
- (66) *(Akica ndakakwambura!)*  
(To kill, I could lose you!)
- (67) *...kandi akica umuhutu, rungano.*  
...and then kills a Hutu, old man!
- (68) *Abo niba mbanga ndamaze. (x2)*  
If I despise those people, then so what. (x2)
- (69) *(Oya uramaze!)*  
(No, you're right!)
- (70) *Imana tugira iwacuuu...ni uko ari bake cyane rungano! (x2)*  
Fortunately for us, there are very few of them, old man! (x2)

### **REFRAIN (12'59")**

- (71) *Mbwirabumva, ngwino wumve...*  
I speak to those who understand, come listen...(repeated several times)

## “Intabaza” (“The Alert”)

Bikindi composed “Intabaza” in late March or early April 1993, immediately after finishing “Akabyutso.” Among this dissertation’s participants, the song seemed to spark the most excitement and interest. The lyrics reflect Bikindi’s background in theater in that they present an adventuresome tale about a hero, Mutabazi (similar to Mutaba from “Akabyutso” and having the same meaning as “hero” or “savior”). Mutabazi travels throughout the nation, and everywhere he goes he sees destruction and violence. As he makes this journey, he specifically mentions the various regions he encounters, identifying some of them by their historical names. Mutabazi observes that everywhere he goes, the *bene Sebahinzi*—“the children of the Father of Farmers”—are tearing each other apart. In this way, the song makes an appeal for nationalist unity above regional factionalism, informing listeners that no matter where they come from, they are all suffering in equal measure. Mutabazi then seeks out the great diviner, Biryabayoboke, in order to discover what can be done to bring peace to the land. The diviner first boasts of his abilities, recalling various clans and famous historical figures for whom he predicted their fates—again, another way in which the song calls for nationalist unity, but now a nationalism that transcends clanship. Each person mentioned by Biryabayoboke was someone who was either killed by Ndori or later kings or by German colonial officers. Finally, Biryabayoboke performs his rituals and concludes that the only solution to Rwanda’s woes is to hold free and fair elections and for everyone to honor the results, no matter who wins.

The dialogue between Mutabazi and Biryabayoboke is divided throughout by three separate refrains, referred to in the following as refrains “A,” “B,” and “C.” These are sung by a choir which, as in “Twasazareye,” represents the common people (*abaturatione*). The song begins with an instrumental introduction, performed on electric guitar, bass, and drumset, followed by the “A” refrain. The refrain describes the apocalyptic horrors that Mutabazi witnesses as he traverses the country. The “A” refrain occurs three times. The “B” refrain first occurs after Mutabazi meets Biryabayoboke. As Biryabayoboke recounts the terrible things that Rwandans once endured, the chorus celebrates that “these things have disappeared,” then exhorts the *bene Sebahinzi*—“the children of the Father of Farmers”—to remain vigilant so that such evils remain outside the country. “Such evils” may have been intended to refer to the RPF, but to many listeners it was a thinly veiled reference to all Tutsi. The “B” refrain is sung four times. The “C” refrain then occurs after Biryabayoboke provides Mutabazi with the solution to Rwanda’s



problems. Here, the people call for elections and for acceptance of whichever leaders are chosen, whether they be Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa. The “C” refrain then repeats three times as it closes out the song.

Questions to ponder when examining the lyrics including the following. When Bikindi invokes such symbolic imagery as “*umuzimu utera aturutse ishyanga*”—“a spirit that attacks from a foreign place”—was this intended as a veiled reference to all Tutsi, whom many historians claim and many Rwandans believe migrated to Rwanda from the north long after Hutu had already settled the region? Or was it meant only as a reference to the RPF, which assaulted Rwanda from its foreign base in Uganda? When Bikindi addresses “the children of the Father of Farmers,” was he referring only to Hutu, long identified with farming while Tutsi were identified with cattle breeding?<sup>74</sup> Or was he referring to all farmers, which comprise upwards of 95% of Rwanda’s population and include most Tutsi and Twa? Perhaps “the children of the Father of Farmers” referred not just to farmers but more generally to the vast peasant population *vis-à-vis* a small but powerful urban ruling class which Bikindi perhaps saw as exploiting the ignorance, fear, and material need of the peasant masses for political gain. In the same vein, to whom did Bikindi intend to refer when he states that priority should be given to the benefits of *rubanda nyamwinshi*—“the majority people”? This was the central political philosophy of the 1959 Revolution and was used to justify the ethnic quota system that finally placed Hutu at the top of the political and socioeconomic ladder. When Bikindi exclaims that preference should be given to the majority, did he mean only Hutu, or could one reasonably interpret it, like “the children of the Father of Farmers” as a reference to all farmers or peasants, no matter their ethnicity? This passage occurs in the context of a broader call for fair and free elections in which the chosen leaders, whether Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa, should be respected. Perhaps, then, in invoking the terminology of *rubanda nyamwinshi*, Bikindi was demanding that politicians respect the wishes of voters; in other words, it is those candidates who garner the majority of votes who should be allowed to lead, not those who attempt to seize power through warfare, terror, corruption, or vote rigging. Still another way to look at it is that Bikindi was calling for political leaders to legislate on behalf of the majority of the citizenry rather than curry the favor and money of an elite minority at the expense of the majority.

---

<sup>74</sup> Tutsi were commonly referred to as *bene Sebaturuzi*—“the children of the Father of Cattle Breeders.”

## (INSTRUMENTAL INTRODUCTION)

### “A” REFRAIN (*INYIKILIZO*), SUNG BY CHOIR (0’57’):

- (1) *Icyampa akana kari amanyamaa...nkagira n’akandi kari amaguruuu...*  
If I could have an audacious child<sup>75</sup> and a child who is very fast,<sup>76</sup>
- (2) *Nkabitumira kuri Muhinzi,*  
I would send them [with this message]<sup>77</sup> to *Muhinzi* [“The Farmer”],<sup>78</sup>
- (3) *Umwe wahinguje Gashaka agahunda abagisha b’i Mwima na Mushirarunguuu...*  
The one who drove off the cattle breeders of Mwima and Mushirarungu who prevented Gashaka from farming.<sup>79</sup>
- (4) *Uti: “Gira utabare bwangu!*  
Tell him: “Come rescue us quickly!
- (5) *Yarose inka zameze impengeri ku muteme,*  
One dreamt that the cows’ udders are diseased<sup>80</sup>,
- (6) *Isake zitakibika, inkokazi zitagiteraaa... ”*  
The roosters are no longer crowing, the hens are no longer laying eggs.”
- (7) *Uti: “Gira utabare bwangu!*  
Tell him: “Come rescue us quickly!”
- (8) *Yarose ya nyambarabishahu yongeye guhabwa umurishyooo...*  
One dreamt that *Inyambarabishahu* [“One who dresses up in male genitals”]<sup>81</sup> was being drummed again,
- (9) *Bene Sebahinzi bongeye kuyitamirizwaaa... ”*  
The children of the Father of Farmers<sup>82</sup> were decorating it.”<sup>83</sup>

<sup>75</sup> “*Akana kari amanyama*” refers to an especially good child, one who is audacious, clever, wise, and brave.

<sup>76</sup> Literally, “a child who is legs/feet,” a euphemism meaning a child who is very fast.

<sup>77</sup> *Nkabitumira* translates more literally as “I will send something from myself,” implied here as a personal message.

<sup>78</sup> The word for “farmer” is “(u)*muhinzi*.” Here, however, Bikindi is employing it as a proper noun, a heroic personification of farmers in general.

<sup>79</sup> Mwima and Mushirarungu are the names of two hills in Nyanza, the seat of the central Rwandan monarchy.

<sup>80</sup> The phrase, “*zameze impengeri ku muteme*,” refers to rashes that appear on the udders, perhaps due to a disease such as *ulcerative mammilitis*, a herpes virus that can rapidly spread throughout a herd of dairy cattle and prevent proper lactation.

<sup>81</sup> Another of Bikindi’s neologisms, this word is created through combining the verb “*kwambara*,” “to wear,” with the verb “*gushahura*,” “to castrate”. It refers to *kalinga*, the dynastic drum of the Abanyiginya. As the Abanyiginya dynasty expanded to encompass much of present-day central Rwanda, the *kalinga* was adorned with the castrated genitals of fallen enemies.

<sup>82</sup> *Bene Sebahinzi* is a featured trope throughout this song (in fact, the song is commonly known as “Bene Sebahinzi”). “*Bene*” is translated here as “children,” though the term refers to all descending generations of a kinship group. The term “descendents,” however, lacks the intimate connotations that are also implied by “*bene*.”

- (10) *Uti: "Gira utabare!*  
Tell him: "Come rescue us!
- (11) *Interanyabagabo yabagezemo*  
*Interanyabagabo* ["One who causes discord among men"]<sup>84</sup> has come among you,
- (12) *None barumuna na bakuru bawe bongeye kumaranaaa...*  
And the elderly and the youth<sup>85</sup> are killing each other off."
- (13) *Uti: "Gira utabare!"*  
Tell him: "Come rescue us!
- (14) *Inshimutamugabo umwe wanganyye na mwene Bishingwe yahashinze ibirindiro,*  
*Inshimutamugabo*<sup>86</sup> ["One who steals men"], the one who is the enemy of the son of  
Bishingwe,<sup>87</sup> has settled in the area,
- (15) *None uduhunda tugiye guhenera ijuruuu...*  
And the rear tips of the spears are now pointed towards the sky."<sup>88</sup>
- (16) *Uti: "Gira utabare!*  
Tell him: "Come rescue us!
- (17) *Yarose ababyeyi bagiye gucura imiborogooo...*  
One dreamt that parents will be crying in sorrow,
- (18) *Ndetse abana basigaye ari imfubayi gusa gusaaa...*  
The children will become orphans."
- (19) *Yeee...Bene so bararuriye. Tabaraaa...!*  
Yes! Your brothers and sisters are eating Rwanda.<sup>89</sup> Rescue us!

---

In Rwandan churches, for example, the congregation will refer to themselves as "*bene data*," that is, "children of the Father (God)."

<sup>83</sup> Refers to the genitals of vanquished soldiers, chiefs, and kings being used to "decorate" the *kalinga*.

<sup>84</sup> Bikindi translates "*Interanyabagabo*" as "demagogues, schemers, and manipulators."

<sup>85</sup> Properly speaking, "*barumuna*" refers to a younger sibling of the same gender as oneself. "*Bakuru*" refers to an older sibling of the same gender.

<sup>86</sup> Regarding "*Inshimutamugabo*" translated as "the one who steals men," one translator claimed that the term referred specifically to white slave traders. Others stated that the term referred to white people in general. Bikindi translates the term as "something from abroad."

<sup>87</sup> The same Rukara mentioned in "Akabyutso."

<sup>88</sup> The phrase "*uduhunda tugiye guhenera ijuru*" translates more literally as "the rear tips of the spears are 'moonin'g' the sky," as when a person exposes their buttocks in public. I am told this refers to an old warrior custom whereby when warriors appeared in peace, their spear tips would be pointed up, but when warriors appeared ready for war, their spear tips would be pointed down, making it easier to throw. The rear tips of the spears, now pointed up, were also sharpened. In other words, "*uduhunda tugiye guhenera ijuru*" means that war has come.

<sup>89</sup> The reference to Rwanda is found in the infix "-ru-" in "*bararuriye*." In this context, to say that someone is "eating Rwanda" means that they are exploiting the political and economic situation for their own personal gain or that they are consuming the nation's resources and leaving nothing for others. Tropes of eating large amounts of food and becoming fat are common metaphors for greed and selfishness.

- (20) *Yeee...Bene so bararutanze. Tabaraaa...!*  
Yes! Your brothers and sisters are giving Rwanda away.<sup>90</sup> Rescue us!

**SOLO, SUNG BY MUTABAZI (“SAVIOR”)<sup>91</sup>, PERFORMED BY BIKINDI (2’26”):**

- (21) *Naje Ndorwa, Amayaga, Umutara woseee...*,  
I traveled through Ndorwa, Mayaga, and all of Mutara,  
(22) *Mubari, Ubuliza, Ubwanacyambweee...*,  
Mubari, Buliza, Bwanacyambwe.,  
(23) *Naje Ubuganza no mu Bugeseraaa...*,  
I traveled through Buganza and within Bugesera,  
(24) *Yemwe Igisaka cyose nakigenzee...hose ntwari...*  
Even through all of Gisaka—everywhere, brave ones...<sup>92</sup>

**CHORAL RESPONSE:**

- (25) *Nasanze bene Sebahinzi ari bo bamaranaaa...!*  
I saw that the children of the Father of Farmers were killing off one another!

**SOLO, MUTABAZI (2’55”):**

- (26) *Naje Ubuyenzi, Ubwanamukarii...*,  
I traveled through Buyenzi and Bwanamukari.  
(27) *Naje Ubusanza no mu Bufunduuu...*,  
I traveled through Busanza and within Bufundu.  
(28) *Naje Nduga, Ndiza, Ubudaha bwoseee...*,  
I traveled through Nduga, Ndiza, and all of Budaha.  
(29) *Naje Ubumbogo no mu Bukonya, Ubugoyi bwose nabugenze, hose ntwari,*  
I traveled through Bumbogo and within Bukonya, and saw the whole of Bugoyi—everywhere,  
brave ones...

---

<sup>90</sup> As in the above line, the reference to Rwanda is found in the infix *-ru-* in *bararutanze*.

<sup>91</sup> “*Mutabazi*” comes from the verb, “*gutabara*,” which means “to save.” One translator noted that the name is sometimes given to sons in the hope that they would help lift the family out of poverty or other unfortunate circumstances. I am also told that the name is occasionally bestowed upon popular leaders. The new government that briefly formed during the genocide was called “*guverinoma y’abatabazi*” (“the government of the saviors”). Here, Bikindi is portraying a heroic character.

<sup>92</sup> The names listed here and in the following lines are the historical names of various regions that comprised much of Rwanda. Some of the names are still in use while others are not.

**CHORAL RESPONSE:**

(30) *Nasanze bene Sebahinzi ari bo bamarana!*

I saw that the children of the Father of Farmers were killing off one another!

**“A” REFRAIN REPEATS (3’20”)**

**SOLO, MUTABAZI (4’52”):**

(31) *Naje mu Kanage k’Abashakambaaa...,*

I traveled through Kanage and Abashakamba,

(32) *Ubwishaza bwose nabugenzeee...,*

I saw the whole of Bwishaza,

(33) *Naje Rusenyi na Nyantangooo...,*

I traveled through Rusenyi and Nyantango,

(34) *Ikinyaga cyose nakigenzeee...hose ntwari...*

I even traveled through all of Kinyaga—everywhere, brave ones...

**CHORAL RESPONSE:**

(35) *Nasanze bene Sebahinzi ari bo bamaranaaa...!*

I saw that the children of the Father of Farmers were killing off one another!

**“A” REFRAIN REPEATS (5’15”)**

**SPOKEN DIALOGUE BETWEEN MUTABAZI [M] AND BIRYABAYOBOKE [B],  
PERFORMED BY ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE TROUPE (6’44”):**

(36) **M:** *Yemwe kwa Biryabayoboke muraho? Kwa Biryabayoboke muriho?*

Hey, is Biryabayoboke<sup>93</sup> there in his home? Is Biryabayoboke alive in his home?

---

<sup>93</sup> Here, *Biryabayoboke* is the name of a diviner. According to Mbonimana and Karangwa, *Biryabayoboke* translates as “only the faithful eat it.” This is affirmed by a few of the translators for this dissertation as well. One explained that “*biry-*“ comes from the verb “*kurya*,” “to eat.” Grammatically, “*biry-*“ means “something to be eaten by.” “*Abayaboke*” means “followers.” Therefore, “*Biryabayoboke*” translates as “something to be eaten by the followers.” Another translator believed that the meaning was that loyalty will be rewarded. Another translator claimed that *Biryabayoboke* was a common name for diviners in Rwanda. He added that it was a name that mocked other diviners from whom clients had received bad counsel. In other words, *Biryabayoboke*, by claiming that name for himself, indicates to his clients that if they are loyal to him, then they will receive true wisdom and that other diviners are mere frauds. I am also informed that the name was claimed by those who did not seek out clients, but rather, those desiring counsel had to go and search for such diviners in order to demonstrate their loyalty.

- (37) **B:** *Ni nde yo kagira Imana?*  
Who is this person who is blessed by God [or fate or fortune]?
- (38) **M:** *Ni Mutabazi.*  
It is Mutabazi.
- (39) **B:** *Injira. Mutaba ko watinze? Njye nari nzi ko utakije. Ngaka akarago icara.*  
Come in. Why are you late? I thought that you would never come. Have a seat on this mat.
- (40) **M:** *Mba nageze ino kare. Mba nageze ino kare ariko amayira ntameze neza.*  
I would have arrived sooner. I would have arrived sooner, but the pathways are not good.
- (41) **B:** *Mm-hmm.*  
Mm-hmm.
- (42) **M:** *Mm-hmm...Bene Sebahinzi baricana, barasenyera, barasahurana. Yewe Biryabayoboke sinakubwira ibisigaye muri uru Rwanda.*  
Mm-hmm...The children of the Father of Farmers are killing one another, destroying each other's houses, looting each other's property. My dear Biryabayoboke, I don't know what is happening in this Rwanda.
- (43) **B:** *Ngaho rero zihe ubuhoro maze nkurebere.*  
Then, give us peace, and I will check for you.<sup>94</sup>
- (44) **M:** *\*Puu-puu\* Ubuho! Ubuho mu Rwanda, ubuho ku barutuye, ubuho ku muryango mugari wa Sebahinzi. Maze Biryabayoboke mwana wa mama ukambwira imvano y'uyu mwirya? Maze Biryabayoboke mwana wa mama ukambwira imvano y'uyu mwirya muri bene Sebahinzi, muri bene data bagiye kumarana? Ukanshakira intsizi yatsinda aya macakubiri ari hagati ya bene Sebahinzi ikagarura amahoro mu Rwanda.*  
[\*Spitting\*] Peace! Peace be upon Rwanda, peace be upon its inhabitants, peace be upon the entire family<sup>95</sup> of the Father of Farmers. Then, Biryabayoboke, child of my mother, can you tell me the origin of this discord? Then, Biryabayoboke, child of my mother, can you tell me the origin of this discord among the children of the Father of Farmers, among the children of

---

<sup>94</sup> When Biryabayoboke tells Mutabazi to “give us peace,” he is telling him to spit in a small clay vessel containing special grains or seeds used in divination rituals, allowing Biryabayoboke can commune with the spirit world on Mutabazi's behalf. Telling Mutabazi to “give us peace” means that Mutabazi's intentions should be peaceful and not selfish; in other words, through spitting on the grains, Mutabazi is giving over a part of himself to the spirits; that is, being a peaceful man, he is giving over part of “his peace.” In vernacular English, it is somewhat similar to telling someone to “give me your blessing” or “give me your love.”

<sup>95</sup> The term “*muryango mugari*” refers to all the generations of a family that may possibly still be alive—parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, cousins, aunts, uncles, etc.

my father who risk annihilating one another? Find for me the solution that will put an end to this division between the children of the Father of Farmers and restore peace in Rwanda.

- (45) **B:** [*Aritsamura*]...*Araseka. Araseka. Mutabazi Muhinzi mwene Sebahinzi agira (7'42'')* *impagarike, ntakenyuka si igikenyeri, si igihezabugingo, si inyama ya nyamunsi. Mutabazi ntafatwa n'ibibi, ntarumwa n'inshira kandi ntasamwa n'umuzimu utera aturutse ishyanga. [\*Sneeze\*]<sup>96</sup>...He is smiling/laughing. He is smiling/laughing. Mutabazi Muhinzi, child of the Father of Farmers, has good health; to die young is not his fate; he does not have a weak spirit; he will not become dead meat.<sup>97</sup> Mutabazi cannot be reached by evil, he cannot be struck by the spitting cobra,<sup>98</sup> and also, he is not possessed by the spirit which attacks from a foreign place.<sup>99</sup>*
- (46) *Naraziraguye mu Basindi n'Ababanda; naraziraguye mu Bega n'Abazigaba; naraziraguye mu Baguyana n'Abagesera.*  
I performed divination among the Abasindi and Ababanda; I performed divination among the Abega and Abazigaba; I performed divination among the Abaguyana and Abagesera.<sup>100</sup>
- (47) [*Aritsamura*]...*Naraziraguye kwa Rurenge imihigo itashye, ati: "N'itende ryari risigaye mu kibindi nibariguhe!"*  
[\*Sneeze\*]...I performed divination for Rurenge<sup>101</sup> who, astounded, said, "Take the rest of the sorghum beer in the pot, including the very last dregs in the bottom."
- (48) [*Aritsamura*]...*Naraziraguye ndagurira umuhutu Mashira ya Sabugabo hariya i Nyanza mubwira ko umukobwa bamushyingiye atari umugore gusa ko ahubwo ari intasi yo kugira ngo bazabone uko bamwica.*  
[\*Sneeze\*]...I performed divination and predicted for the Hutu Mashira of Sabugabo, there in Nyanza, that the girl he was given to marry was actually a spy who was plotting to kill him.<sup>102</sup>
- (49) **M:** *Intasi rwose!*  
Really, a spy?!
- (50) **B:** *Yanze kubahirizia ibyo namubwiye abe bose bashirira ku icumu.*  
He didn't heed my advice, and all his people were wiped out.

---

<sup>96</sup> Ritual sneezing (*aritsamura*) signifies that Biryabayoboke has connected with the spirit world and received the mystical power needed for divine consultation.

<sup>97</sup> "*Inyama ya nyamunsi*" literally translates as "meat/flesh that is dead."

<sup>98</sup> In anti-Tutsi political rhetoric, snakes were a common euphemism for Tutsi, though such imagery was also used to refer to the RPF.

<sup>99</sup> Again, either a reference to the RPF only or to all Tutsi.

<sup>100</sup> These are names of some of the twenty clans that historically populated Rwanda.

<sup>101</sup> I do not know if Rurenge is a fictional or historical character as this name does not appear in any historiographical literature that I have researched. Rurenge is the name of a town in southern-central Rwanda.

<sup>102</sup> Mashira was also mentioned in "Akabytuso."

- (51) *Naraziraguye ndagurira Nyaruzi rwa Haramanga mu Mukindo wa Makwaza.*  
I performed divination and predicted for Nyaruzi, son of Haramanga, in Mukindo in Makwaza.
- (52) *Naraziraguye ndagurira Benginzage Nyagakecuru mu bisi bya Huye mubwira ko ihene bamubikije ari umutwe we bashaka. Bwarakeye baramwivugana da.*  
I performed divination and predicted for Benginzage, known as Nyagakecuru, over in the hilly ranges of Huye, telling her that the goats she was given to care for was really a trick to get her head. The next day she was quickly killed.<sup>103</sup>
- (53) **M:** *Baramwivugana Biryabayoboke wanyte!*  
Oh, my Biryabayoboke, she was killed!
- (54) **B:** *Bamugize umwe rwose!*  
Indeed, she was killed in one stroke!
- (55) *Naraziraguye ndagurira Gisurere inshuti ya Baniga hariya mu Bunyambiriri.*  
I performed divination and predicted for Gisurere, friend of Baniga, there in Bunyambiriri.
- (56) *Ndagurira Ndagano umuhinza w'Ubukunzi n'Ubusozo.*  
I predicted for Ndagano, the chief of Bukunzi and Busozo.
- (57) *Naraziraguye ndagurira umuhutu Nzira ya Muramira mubwira ko Ruganzu ataje kuba umuja, ko ahubwo ari umubisha w'umutasi atunze mu ngabo ze!*  
I performed divination and predicted for the Hutu Nzira, son of Mugarura, telling him that Ruganzu had not come to serve him, but had come as someone wanting to cause harm and as a spy who had infiltrated his army.<sup>104</sup>
- (58) *Yanze kubahiriza ibyo namubwiye abe bose Ruganzu abamarira ku icumu.*  
He didn't heed my advice, and so all his kin were wiped out by Ruganzu.
- (59) **M:** *Abamarira ku icumu!*  
They were all wiped out!
- (60) **B:** *Naraziraguye ndagurira Ndungutse.*  
I performed divination and predicted for Ndungutse.<sup>105</sup>
- (61) *Ndagurira Basebya ba Nyirantwari hariya mu Ndorwa, mbabwira ko bagambaniwe ko bagiye kwicwa Rukara akabambwa.*  
I predicted for Basebya,<sup>106</sup> son of Nyirantwari, there in Ndorwa, telling them that they had been betrayed, and that Rukara would be hung [lit. "attached to something"].

<sup>103</sup> Nyagakecuru was mentioned also in "Akabyutso."

<sup>104</sup> Each of these men were local sovereigns that were conquered during the expansion of the Abanyiginya kingdom.

<sup>105</sup> Ndungutse was also mentioned in "Akabyutso."

<sup>106</sup> Basebya was also mentioned in "Akabyutso."



- (62) **M:** *Rukara akabambwa! Biryabayoboke wa kagira Imana we!*  
Rukara would be hung! Biryabayoboke, you shall be blessed by God [or fate or fortune].
- (63) **B:** *Bwarakeye biraba da.*  
It happened the next day.
- (64) **M:** *Baramumanika!*  
They hung him! [lit. “he was placed or attached above”]
- (65) **B:** *Naraziraguye ndagurira Mbonyumutwa ndi kumwe n'igihangange Habyarimana Yosefu Gitera igihugu kigeze mu mahina.*  
I performed divination and predicted for Mbonyumutwa<sup>107</sup> while I was with the great Gitera Joseph Habyarimana,<sup>108</sup> during the time when the country was in great danger.
- (66) *Induru ivugiye i Byimana impuruza yumvikanira i Kanyanza ka Ndiza.*  
The shout went out from Byimana and was echoed in Kanyanza in Ndiza.<sup>109</sup>
- (67) *Icyo gihe bene Sebahinzi bishyize hamwe intsinzi mbahaye ibabera umutsindo.*  
At that time, the children of the Father of Farmers united, and the solution I provided them led to victory.
- (68) *Uburetwa n'ubucakara bigenda nka nyomberi.*  
*Uburetwa* and slavery<sup>110</sup> disappeared forever.
- (69) **M:** *Bigenda nka nyomberi rwose!*  
They completely disappeared forever!
- (70) **B:** [*Aritsamura*]...*Mutaba! Mutabazi oroshya nawe ngushakire imvano n'intsinzi.*
- (9'17") [*\*Sneeze\**]...*Mutaba! Mutabazi, calm down and listen, for I will tell you the cause and solution to this problems.*
- (71) [*Aritsamura*]...*Mpinga yanjye! Ntunteterenze, shaka imvano y'uyu mwiryane n'amacakubiri muri bene Sebahinzi. Ushake imvano yagarura amahoro hano mu Rwanda.*  
My divination tools!<sup>111</sup> Do not disappoint me; reveal to me the cause of this disagreement and discord among the children of the Father of Farmers. Show me what has prevented peace here in Rwanda.

<sup>107</sup> Dominique Mbonyumutwa was a leader of the Revolution and served as the provisional president of the newly independent nation.

<sup>108</sup> Not to be confused with the later president, Gitera Joseph Habyarimana was an important leader of the Revolution. In 1957, he created the *Association Pour la Promotion Sociale de la Masse* or APROSOMA (Association for the Social Promotion of the Masses) and founded the political journal, *Ijwi rya Rubanda Rugufi* (*The Voice of the Common People*).

<sup>109</sup> These are small towns near Gitarama where the Revolution was centered.

<sup>110</sup> *Uburetwa* was the most hated patron-client policy of the late monarchial and colonial-monarchial eras. *Uburetwa* affected only Hutu; Tutsi were exempt.

- (72) *Hiii! Dore imvano Mutaba!*  
Hey! Look, Mutaba, here is the cause!
- (73) *Ibi byago byose murimo biraterwa n'uriya muzimu utera aturutse ishyanga.*  
All these problems are due to the spirit that attacks from abroad.
- (74) *Ariko ahanini biraterwa n'ubujiji n'inda nini bya bamwe muri bene Sebahinzi.*  
But they are especially due to the ignorance and greed [lit. "large stomachs"] of the children of the Father of Farmers.
- (75) **M:** *Inda nini ndakakubura.*  
Greed, I tell you the truth!<sup>112</sup>
- (76) **B:** *Mbe Mutabazi! Uyu muzimu ko afite amayeri menshi turabikika dute?*  
Hey, Mutabazi! How shall we face this spirit that has so many tricks?
- (77) **M:** *Inda nini rwose!*  
Greed, entirely!
- (78) **B:** *Turamukika dute Mutabazi? Ahubwo iyo utagera hano ko kari kabaye!*  
Mutabazi, how shall we overcome this? If you had been any later, it would have been disastrous!
- (79) *Dore nguyu yigize umugore.*  
See it [the spirit] here, appearing as a woman.
- (80) *Nguriya kandi abaye umukobwa.*  
And also appearing as a girl.
- (81) *Dore nguyu yigize umwana mu rugo Mutaba.*  
See it here, appearing as a child at home, Mutaba.
- (82) *Dore kandi abaye ikirura.*  
See, and also appearing as a wolf.
- (83) *Dore nguyu yigize umuhinzi ariko isuka ye yakwikiye mu rwubati.*  
See it here, appearing as a farmer, but in the shaft of his hoe is a blade!
- (84) **M:** *Mu rwubati!*  
A blade!
- (85) **B:** *Mbe Mutaba! Uyu muzimu ariyuburura.*  
Hey, Mutaba! This spirit is changing its form.

---

<sup>111</sup> "Mpinga" refers to the divination instrument, most likely the small clay vessel holding Mutabazi's saliva and the divination seeds.

<sup>112</sup> *Ndakakubura* is a Kinyarwanda figure of speech that means something like, "If I am not telling you the truth, may I lose you as my friend."

- (86) *Dore nguwo ruswa ayisesekaje mu bisahiranda.*  
See it there, spreading bribes among the greedy and corruptible.
- (87) *Dore nguwo abaye muramu wa Ntibibuka*  
See it there, appearing as the brother-in-law of *Ntibibuka* [“One who forgets”],
- (88) *Dore kandi abaye umukwe wa Mbonabihita.*  
And see it appearing as the son-in-law of *Mbonabihita* [“One who is careless”].
- (89) *Mbe Mutaba! Dore nguriya sinzi mwene Sebahinzi ashukisha inka!*  
Hey, Mutaba! See it here, bribing a child of *Sebahinzi* by offering cows!
- (90) *Mutaba, n’ubwo uyu muzimu afite amayeri menshi...*  
Mutaba, though this spirit has many clever tricks...
- (91) **M:** *Yego ye!*  
Yes, yes!
- (92) **B:** *...igishimishije cyane ni uko inzuzi zanjye zayavumbuye yose.*  
...the good news is that my divination seeds have discovered them all.
- (93) **M:** *Ni, ni.*  
It is, it is.
- (94) **B:** *Kumutsinda biroroshye cyane rwose. Turamutsinda tunamuhadike!*  
It is very easy to totally defeat. We will defeat it and keep it from returning!
- (95) **M:** *Turamuhadike rwose!*  
We will keep it from ever returning!
- (96) **B:** *Dore intsinzi Mutaba.*  
Look, Mutaba, here is the solution.
- (97) *Fata ingoma uyishyire ku murengo, uhamagare bene Sebahinzi baze baze mbahe intsinzi.*  
Take the drum to the highest peak and call all the children of the Father of Farmers together, for I shall give them the solution.
- (98) *Bahamagare Mutaba!*  
Call them all, Mutaba!

**SOLO, SUNG BY MUTABAZI (10’44’):**

- (99) *Mbe yewe! Mbwirabumva, mbwirabumvaaa...*  
Hey you! I speak to those who understand, I speak to those who understand!<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> More literally, “I speak to those who hear/listen,” but implies understanding or comprehension.

**RESPONSE, SHOUTED BY ABATURAGE [“THE PEOPLE”]:**

(100) *Turi maso turakumva, turakumva, turakumva yeee...!*

We are awakened, and we understand, we understand, we understand,<sup>114</sup> yes!!!

**“B” REFRAIN, SUNG BY CHOIR (10’54”):**

(101) *Uburetwa, ubucakara, ikibokooo..., shiku n’umujishiii..., byari byarajambaguje rubandaaa...!*

*Uburetwa*, slavery, the whip! The laborious farming,<sup>115</sup> and the carrying of the king and dignitaries that exhausted the common people!<sup>116</sup>

(102) *Ibyo byaciwe ruhenu keraaa...!*

All these were long ago banished forever!

(103) *Yewe rubanda-nyamwinshi murabe masooo...!*

You people in the majority, stay awake!

(104) *Kandi bene Sebahinzi nimwihuzeee...iryoy shyano ryo gahera iyo i shyangaaa...ntwari ritazaruka mu Rwandaaa...!*

And children of the Father of Farmers, be united! So that the curse that must remain outside, brave ones, will never return to Rwanda!<sup>117</sup>

**SPOKEN DIALOGUE BETWEEN MUTABAZI AND BIRYABAYOBOKE (11’23”):**

(105) **B:** *Nibaze! Bene Sebahinzi bagomba kumenya ko uru Rwanda rugizwe n’uturere twinshi kandi ko utwo turerere aritwo turugira u Rwanda rugari rutuwe n’abanyarwanda.*

May they come! The children of the Father of Farmers must know that Rwanda is composed of several regions that make it the “Great Rwanda” inhabited by the Rwandan people.

(106) **M:** *Rwose!*

Indeed!

(107) **B:** *Bene Sebahinzi bagomba kumenya kandi ko abo banyarwanda batuye u Rwanda barimo amoko atatu: Gahutu, Gatwa na Gatutsi.*

The children of the Father of Farmers must know also that the Rwandans who inhabit Rwanda are comprised of three ethnic groups (*amoko*<sup>118</sup>): Hutu, Twa, and Tutsi.

(108) *Ibyo ntibihinduka rwose.*

All those things cannot be changed.

---

<sup>114</sup> More literally “we are hearing/listening.” See above footnote.

<sup>115</sup> *Shiku* refers to especially difficult farming conditions such as when trying to cultivate fallow land.

<sup>116</sup> During the time of the monarchy, the king and other royal family members and dignitaries were transported on a sort of litter that was supported on the heads and shoulders of their servants.

<sup>117</sup> Another likely reference to the RPF, interpreted by some listeners as a reference to all Tutsi.

<sup>118</sup> “*Amoko*,” the plural of “*ubwoko*” once referred to clans but is used now to refer to ethnic identities.

(109) **M:** *Ibyo ntibihinduka .*

Those things cannot be changed.

(110) **B:** *Twese tugomba kwemera ko nta wasabye kuvuka ari umuhutu, umutwa cyangwa umututsi.*

All of us must realize that no one asked to be born a Hutu, Twa, or Tutsi.

(111) **M:** *None se?*

And so?

(112) **B:** *Bityo tukemera ko nta wusumba undi.*

Therefore, we must accept that no one is superior to another.

(113) *Tukemera ko nta wugomba kuryamira undi kandi ko inyungu za rubanda-nyamwinshi arizo zigomba gushyirwa imbere!*

We must accept that no one may oppress another and that priority must be given to the benefits of the majority people!

(114) **M:** *Rwose!*

Indeed!

(115) **B:** *Ayiii...! Ayiii...! Bahamagare rwose bene Sebahinzi baze mbahe intsinzi.*

[\*Cheering\*] Call all the children of the Father of Farmers together, for I shall give them the solution.

**SOLO, SUNG BY MUTABAZI (12'05"):**

(116) *Mbe yewe! Mbwirabumva, mbwirabumvaaa...*

Hey you! I speak to those who understand, I speak to those who understand.

**RESPONSE, SHOUTED BY ABATURAGE ["THE PEOPLE"], WOMEN ONLY:**

(117) *Turi maso turakumva, turakumva, turakumva yeee...!*

We are awakened, and we understand, we understand, we understand, yes!!!

**"B" REFRAIN REPEATS (12'15")**

**SPOKEN DIALOGUE BY BIRYABAYOBOKE (12'43"):**

(118) **B:** *Nibaze! Mwene Sebahinzi uwo ariwe wese, atiriwe areba ishyaka arimo, agomba kumenya akamaro n'ibyiza by'umurage rubanda-nyamwinshi dukesha Revolisiyo ya mirongo itanu n'icyenda.*

May they come! A child of the Father of Farmers, whoever she/he is, no matter her/his political affiliation, must know the importance of the benefits that the majority people inherited from the Revolution of 1959.

(119) *Uwo murage ugomba kurindwa, ntuhungukirwe.*

We must carefully guard this heritage, that it is never lost.

(120) *Ahubwo abo wagiriye akamaro tukawusigasira, tukawusinginza ubuzira herezo, tukazawuraga ubuvivi n'ubuvivure.*

Also, we who have benefited from it must sustain it and pass it on forever to our grandchildren and great grandchildren.

(121) *Ayiii...! Ayiii...! Hamagara rwose bene Sebahinzi baze mbahe intsinzi.*

[\*Cheering\*] Call all the children of Sebahinzi together, for I shall give them the solution.

**SOLO, SUNG BY MUTABAZI (13'22"):**

(122) *Mbe yewe! Mbwirabumva, mbwirabumva.*

Hey you! I speak to those who understand, I speak to those who understand.

**RESPONSE, "SHOUTED" BY ABATURAGE ["THE PEOPLE"]:**

(123) *Turi maso turakumva, turakumva, turakumva yeee...!*

We are awakened, and we understand, we understand, we understand, yes!!!

**"B" REFRAIN REPEATS (13'22")**

**SPOKEN DIALOGUE BETWEEN BIRYABAYOBOKE AND MUTABAZI (14'01"):**

(124) **B:** *Nibaze! Bene Sebahinzi bagomba kumenya ko Inkotanyi ziramutse zitsindishije amasasu—uretse ko bidashoboka—amashyaka barimo yose yazima burundu abayarimo bagashirira ku icumu, nk'uko abahinza b'Abahutu bashiriye ku icumu, mu gitondo umututsi agacyuza imihigo agira, ati "Harabaye ntihakabe, hapfuye imbwa n'imbeba hasigaye inka n'ingoma!"*

May they come! The children of the Father of Farmers must know that if the *Inkotanyi* win with the bullets of guns—even though this is impossible—then all the political parties will disappear

forever and their members killed by the spear, just as the Hutu chiefs were killed by the spear, [after which] in the morning a victorious Tutsi boasted, saying “As it was, it will never be again—the dog and rat were killed, replaced by the cow and the drum.”

(125) *Aho ntibahibuka rwose!*

They don't remember all that!

(126) **M:** *Aho ntibahibuka we!*

Oh, they don't remember that!

**SOLO, SUNG BY MUTABAZI (14'23''):**

(127) *Mbe yewe! Mbwirabumva, mbwirabumvaaa...*

Hey you! I speak to those who understand, I speak to those who understand.

**RESPONSE, “SHOUTED” BY ABATURAGE [“THE PEOPLE”]:**

(128) *Turi maso turakumva, turakumva, turakumva yeee...!*

We are awakened, and we understand, we understand, we understand, yes!!!

**“B” REFRAIN REPEATS (14'32'')**

**SPOKEN DIALOGUE BY BIRYABAYOBOKE (15'01''):**

(129) **B:** *Babwire baze rwose! Bene Sebahinzi bagomba kumenya ko abo rubanda-nyamwinshi bagomba kwishyira hamwe.*

Tell them all to come! The children of the Father of Farmers must understand that the majority people have to be united.

(130) *Bakaba impuzamugambi kugira ngo inyungu zabo zidahohoterwa.*

They should be those who share the same goal [*impuzamugambi*<sup>119</sup>] in order to protect their interests.

(131) *Bene Sebahinzi rero bagomba gushyigikira byimaze yo ingabo z'igihugu bakitanga batizigamye, byaba ngombwa bose bakazinjira mo, kugira ngo barengere urwababyaye n'ubusugire bwa Republika.*

Then, the children of the Father of Farmers must support their nation's military with all their effort, give themselves completely to this, and if needed, they should join the military in order to protect their homeland and the sovereignty of the Republic.

---

<sup>119</sup> *Impuzamugambi* was also the name of the youth brigade affiliated with the CDR party. Like the *Interahamwe*, members of *Impuzamugambi* carried out much of the genocidal killing.

- (132) Ayiii...! Ayiii...! Bahamagare rwose bene Sebahinzi baze!  
(\*Cheering\*) Call all the children of Sebahinzi together!

**SOLO, SUNG BY MUTABAZI (15'37"):**

- (133) *Mbe yewe! Mbwirabumva, mbwirabumvaaa...*  
Hey you! I speak to those who understand, I speak to those who understand.

**RESPONSE, "SHOUTED" BY ABATURAGE ["THE PEOPLE"], MEN ONLY:**

- (134) *Turi maso turakumva, turakumva, turakumva yeee...!*  
We are awakened, and we understand, we understand, we understand, yes!!!

**"B" REFRAIN REPEATS (15'46")**

**SPOKEN DIALOGUE BY BIRYABAYOBOKE (16'16"):**

- (135) **B:** *Nibaze! Bene Sebahinzi, yaba umuhutu, umutwa cyangwa umututsi, nta n'umwe ugomba kwibeshya cyangwa ngo anarote mu nzozi ko yafata ubutegetsi ku ngufu akoresheje intwaro.*  
May they come! None of the children of the Father of Farmers, neither Hutu, Twa, nor Tutsi, should do wrong or have an inconceivable dream of taking over the government through force of arms.
- (136) *Bene Sebahinzi rero, nimusabe ko amatora yategurwa kandi akaba vuba na bwangu!*  
Therefore, children of the Father of Farmers, call for elections to be held and for the voting to be done immediately!
- (137) *Kuko intwari zaragaragaye!*  
Because the heroes have made themselves known.
- (138) *Abakunda u Rwanda baragaragaye.*  
The ones who love Rwanda have made themselves known.
- (139) *Abanzi b'amahoro mwarabibonye, ba babikubiramuyabo na bakirumirahabiri mwarababonye.*  
You have seen the enemies of peace, the greedy schemers<sup>120</sup> and duplicitous ones<sup>121</sup> are known.

---

<sup>120</sup> *Babikubiramuyabo* translates more literally as, "the ones who gather everything for themselves."

<sup>121</sup> *Kirumirahabiri* is a snake with a head at both ends. It can refer to someone who constantly switches sides, betraying one and then the other.



(140) *Nimusabe amatora rero, kandi uzabaha ruswa muzayirye, ibanga ryanyu riri ku mutima. Abo muzatora murabazi!*

Therefore, call for elections; furthermore, if someone offers you a bribe,<sup>122</sup> then accept it, for your secret is in your heart. You know who you really voted for!<sup>123</sup>

**SOLO, SUNG BY MUTABAZI (16'48"):**

(141) *Mbe yewe! Mbwirabumva, mbwirabumvaaa...*

Hey you! I speak to those who understand, I speak to those who understand.

**RESPONSE, "SHOUTED" BY ABATURAGE ["THE PEOPLE"]:**

(142) *Turi maso turakumva, turakumva, turakumva yeee...!*

We are awakened, and we understand, we understand, we understand, yes!!!

**"C" REFRAIN, SUNG BY CHOIR (16'58"):**

(143) *Dushyigikiye demokarasi isesuye izira uburyaryaaa...!*

We support a true democracy, one without pretense<sup>124</sup>!

(144) *Demokarasi izira amasasu, demokarasi izira amacengaaa...!*

A democracy without bullets, a democracy without trickery<sup>125</sup>!

(145) *Maze rubanda-nyamwinshi tubone urubugaaa...rwo kwihitiramo abayoboziii...!!*

Therefore, we, the majority people, seek a forum for electing our leaders!

(146) *Kandi byange bikunde tuzatsindaaa...!*

For no matter what, we shall be victorious!

**SPOKEN DIALOGUE BETWEEN BIRYABAYOBOKE AND MUTABAZI (17'22"):**

(147) **B:** *Nibaze. Bene Sebahinzi bagomba kumenya ko muri iyi nkubiri turi mo yo gushimangira Republika na demokarasi isesuye, rubanda-nyamwinshi aribo batanga ubutegetsi biciye mu matora azira uburyarya.*

The children of the Father of Farmers must know that in this struggle for the Republic and for true democracy, it is the majority people who gives [us] the government through voting that is free of pretense.

---

<sup>122</sup> "Bribe" is translated from "*ruswa*," which can also be translated as "corruption."

<sup>123</sup> More literally, "you know who your favored one is."

<sup>124</sup> "*Uburyarya*," translated here as "pretense," could also be translated as "hypocrisy" or "duplicitousness."

<sup>125</sup> Though translated here as "trickery," *amakenga* refers to the ability to dodge or evade. It is often used in sporting events, for instance, to describe a player's ability to dodge a defender.

- (148) *Ikigaragaza demokarasi nyayo si amasasu, si uburiganya.*  
The sign of a true democracy is not bullets, it is not dishonesty.
- (149) **M:** *Mm-hmm...*  
Mm-hmm...
- (150) **B:** *Abayobozi abaturage bashaka babagaragariza mu matora asesuye azira uburyarya.*  
The people will show which leaders they choose through elections that are free of pretense.
- (151) **M:** *Rwose.*  
Indeed.
- (152) **B:** *Nimusabe amatora rero.*  
So, call for elections.
- (153) *Nihatorwa umuhutu, twemere atuyobore!*  
If a Hutu is elected, let us accept that person to lead!
- (154) **M:** *Yee!*  
Yeah!
- (155) **B:** *Nihatorwa umututsi, twemere atuyobore!*  
If a Tutsi is elected, let us accept that person to lead!
- (156) **M:** *Yee!*  
Yeah!
- (157) **B:** *Nihatorwa umutwa, twemere atuyobore!*  
If a Twa is elected, let us accept that person to lead!
- (158) **M:** *Twemere atuyobore.*  
Let us accept that person to lead!
- (159) **B:** *U Rwanda ni urwacu uko turi batatu. Twese ntawusumba undi!*  
This Rwanda is for all three of us. No one is greater than another!
- (160) [Aritsamura]. *Mutaba, ndaragura simvura nyamunsi.*  
[\*Sneeze\*] Mutaba, I [only] perform divination, not provide the cure for death.
- (161) **M:** *Oya, kuragura byo urabizi rwose!*  
No, your divination is most true!
- (162) **B:** *Nta n'umukimbo mbatse, ahubwo muzakurikize ibyo mbabwiye gusa.*  
I don't even ask you for payment. Instead, just do what I have told you.
- (163) *Hamagara rwose bene Sebahinzi baze biyunge.*  
Call all the children of the Father of Farmers, that they may be united.

**SOLO, SUNG BY MUTABAZI (18'05"):**

(164) *Mbe yewe! Mbwirabumva, mbwirabumvaaa...*

Hey you! I speak to those who understand, I speak to those who understand.

**RESPONSE, "SHOUTED" BY ABATURAGE ["THE PEOPLE"]:**

(165) *Turi maso turakumva, turakumva, turakumva yeee...!*

We are awakened, and we understand, we understand, we understand, yes!!!

**"C" REFRAIN REPEATS x3**

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **COMMENTARY ON THE SONGS**

The following commentary on the songs is drawn from personal conversations and trial testimony. Trial witnesses and lawyers commented and debated on each individual song in a detailed, rigorous manner. In contrast, comments that arose through personal conversations as participants listened to the songs were usually more general in nature, reflecting their feelings about Bikindi and the broader intentions they believed he had. This chapter is thus divided into two sections. The first presents commentary that emerged from my conversations with participants. My purpose is to not only to provide an overview of the conflicting beliefs about Bikindi and his music but to show how political affiliations, ethnic identity, and experiences of the genocide and its aftermath correlate with people's interpretations and views. For each person, I provide some brief background information relevant to this. What will emerge is a pattern in which those who are pro-RPF, Tutsi, and especially who lost loved ones during the genocide or were themselves physically harmed tend to denounce Bikindi and his music. Those who are critics of the RPF, Hutu, and especially who have been persecuted by the new regime, have a more supportive or neutral view. There tended to be much overlap in the comments, so rather than present all that was shared, I have isolated a few statements from individuals that I found particularly expressive and serve to demonstrate the polarization of opinion surrounding Bikindi and his music.

The second part of this chapter presents comments and debates from the trial. This information is organized by song and then by Prosecution testimony and Defense testimony. The debates that arose throughout the trial were quite extensive, with much attention given to specific words, lines, and passages, and the relationship these have with Rwandan history and the political and ethnic conflict of the early 1990s. As with commentary drawn from personal encounters, there was much overlap in the arguments of various witnesses, and so likewise, I do not present everything that was said in relation to the songs (it would take a few hundred pages to do so!). Instead, I tried to construe the overarching views and arguments. I then identified those excerpts that I felt most clearly articulated these views and arguments. Ample space is

given to Bikindi's explanations, as the exchanges between him and the Prosecution and Defense were especially revealing.

### **Commentary from Personal Conversations**

My friend Erick is a middle-aged evangelist, leader in his local community, and pig breeder. A Tutsi, he was born and raised in an exile settlement in southern Uganda, later making his home in Rwanda after the RPF takeover. He is a strong supporter of Kagame and the RPF. As he listened to the songs, he was struck by the ways in which the coordinators and instigators of the genocide used every social instrument at their disposal to compel and coerce people to kill. "I tell you," he said, "during the genocide, they used each and every thing, including music."<sup>1</sup> Erick had no doubt that Bikindi sought to incite genocide.

Immanuel is a middle-aged Tutsi who works at the Murambi Genocide Memorial, a former technical training school where approximately forty to sixty thousand people were killed over the course of a few days. Included in those murders were Immanuel's wife and children. He supports Kagame and the RPF for restoring peace and justice to Rwanda. Though certain that Bikindi intended to incite genocide, he regarded the songs as a potentially effective way of teaching others about the origins of the genocide, stating:

People ask me, "How did it start?" And I'm saying that if you could put this music somewhere, like here [at this memorial site], so that people could come and listen to it, then they would know how it started.<sup>2</sup>

I met Gaspard, another Tutsi and RPF supporter, in Arusha where he worked as an interpreter and translator for the ICTR. He honed in on how Bikindi supposedly hid his true intent of ethnic hatred and violence. "For those who don't understand Kinyarwanda," he said, "they may think that he is not calling them to kill. But when you listen well or when you read the text, he's asking them to kill."<sup>3</sup>

Bosco is a middle-aged preacher and good friend. He was in Kigali with his wife, son, and two daughters when Habyarimana was killed and the genocide began. In the ensuing chaos

---

<sup>1</sup> Personal conversation, May 2011, in English.

<sup>2</sup> Personal conversation, July 2009, with aid of interpreter

<sup>3</sup> Personal conversation, May 2011, in English

and tumult, they got separated. Bosco and his son ran into an abandoned apartment building, and his wife and daughters fled to a building across the street. Bosco soon heard a loud explosion and looked across the street to find that the building where his wife and daughters had taken shelter had been demolished by a mortar strike, certainly killing everyone within. It took years to overcome his grief. Eventually, he remarried, had several other children, and now pastors one of the largest evangelical churches in Rwanda. A Tutsi and fervent RPF supporter, here is what he had to say:

What I can tell you is that [Bikindi] was a talented man who had a group of singers. I remember he liked to wear traditional clothes so that he attracted the attention of all Rwandans before genocide. He attracted people in Rwanda so that everyone was willing to hear the songs of Bikindi. He was loved so much in Rwanda because of his skillful songs, because of his good songs... Suddenly, when genocide started, he started to sing those songs that could attract people to kill. Racism songs. Those bad songs. You know, there are those kind of melodies which—I am not a musician, so I cannot tell, but I can feel them. There are those songs full of sorrows, there are songs full of different kinds of emotions, songs that arouse anger... As I listen to this song now, I feel [\*deep breath\*] *fear*—fear tremendously. How can anyone say that Bikindi is not guilty? He is one-hundred percent guilty, because of this—this [music] is very strong mobilization. You see, what do we do when we want to mobilize people for Jesus? Now we sing! Now we worship! People come to hear, to worship. They hear the worship, and they hear the message through songs. It is like that with Bikindi. So, this man was a first-class organizer of genocide.<sup>4</sup>

Victor, a Tutsi journalist, lecturer at the National University, and RPF supporter, simply exclaimed, “Ai! Bikindi—that guy is crazy!!!”<sup>5</sup>

Beata, a young Tutsi woman, lost her father and brother, the latter whose death she witnessed. She was hiding behind some bushes near her house when some *Interahamwe* members dragged her brother from the house, bound him in dried banana leaves, and then set fire to the leaves. She shared:

---

<sup>4</sup> Personal conversation, May 2011, in English

<sup>5</sup> Personal conversation, June 2008, in English

Bikindi was awakening the Hutus “to work,” because the enemy was the Tutsi...He had a purpose, even though he was only playing music. He knew the genocide would occur...Truly, I know that [his songs] influenced Hutu to kill others.<sup>6</sup>

Several other Tutsi participants also stated that Bikindi was calling for people to “get to work”—a well-known trope during the genocide that regarded killing as form of labor (“cutting down the grass” was another common euphemism).

Francoise works with Imanuel at the Murambi Genocide Memorial. A Tutsi and RPF supporter, he too lost his wife and children during the attacks that occurred there. Listening to Bikindi’s songs, he situated them in the months leading up to the genocide. He believed Bikindi’s purpose was “to prepare” his audience for the genocide. As with Beata, Francois insinuated that Bikindi knew genocide was being planned and was thus complicit in instigating it. He stated, “He is waking up the Hutu. He is preparing them, sensitizing them, so that they can be united and be prepared and ready for the genocide.”<sup>7</sup>

Stephán is a Hutu, but like most Hutu, he had no desire to kill his Tutsi neighbors. One day a group of *Interahamwe* came knocking on his door and threatened him, telling him that if he did not join them, they would kill him. Stephán accompanied this gang for several days and observed as they massacred over forty people. When the RPF took power and enacted the *gacaca* court system, Stephán was tried and convicted for complicity in genocide, even though he claimed not to have killed anyone. Nevertheless, he was remorseful and pled for forgiveness from the judges. He received a reduced sentence of ten years, during which time he encouraged other inmates to come forward with their crimes, cooperate with authorities in uncovering evidence, and work to bring about reconciliation in Rwanda. He now supports the RPF. He described to me what it was like to witness people killing. He then contextualized Bikindi’s songs within the genocide, claiming that their main role was to encourage those who had killed to continue killing:

When I saw those people killing, they had turned like wild animals...Their hearts were full of hatred. When the heart is full of hatred, even a person’s appearance changes. The thing that made me think they were like wild animals—they would kill many people, and

---

<sup>6</sup> Personal conversation, July 2009, with aid of interpreter

<sup>7</sup> Personal conversation, July 2009, with aid of interpreter

their color, their face changed. There were those who wore dried banana leaves, others who wore colorful *kitanga*,<sup>8</sup> some who even wore dresses. Somebody who kills many people, there comes a time when they become, like, traumatized—no understanding, no humanity—they are just like animals, wild animals, running up and down because of the blood they have shed...They drank a lot, with cocaine, tobacco, other drugs. It would enter their blood and their brains, and they would become, like, mad people...They listened to [Bikindi's songs] on the radio a lot. Every day, they were on the radio, all the time...The words of Bikindi penetrated the Hutu who were here. But there were also other Hutu who were on the side of the RPF, who were trying to fight against the genocide mind. And that's why Bikindi says, "People who say they are your friends, they're actually coming to take over the country." And that's why he said, "Quickly, defend your nation." That's why the people who were hurting and killing others shouted it. That's why genocide was done to Tutsis and to other Hutus who refused to participate in the genocide...Yes, the songs of Bikindi, we used to listen to them on the radio. Because of the killings that were already happening all around, they were really encouraging people to kill more. They had powerful words to remove fear so that they may go on killing. They really, especially, helped Hutus with killing Tutsis.<sup>9</sup>

Jean-Baptiste is an RPF supporter and elderly Tutsi farmer whose wife and six children were killed in a church where they had sought sanctuary. The sacrality of churches did nothing to deter the *génocidaires* and only served to bait large groups of potential victims thinking they would be safe. Churches were thus the sites of some of the largest-scale massacres. Jean-Baptiste commented on the quality of the music itself, suggesting that the catchy melodies and rhythms made people more receptive to the message. He suspected that Bikindi received orders from the government as to the themes and topics on which he should compose. Near the end of our conversation, Jean-Baptiste then shared the emotional impact that the songs had on him as he listened to them sixteen years after his family was killed. Though he showed very little outward emotion, the experience was apparently overwhelming for him:

---

<sup>8</sup> A *kitanga* is a large, brightly patterned cloth that women wrap around their bodies as skirts or dresses.

<sup>9</sup> Personal conversation, July 2009, with aid of interpreter



The drums, the music are very nice, but the problem is this music created evil. They were really planning the genocide for such songs to have been sung...See, I believe that this was the way it was with music: it was as if the government allowed Bikindi to sing. He tells [his audience], "Be clear about what you are doing. Instead of killing each other, see who is among you, who is a Tutsi. So instead of killing each other, you should kill them." He is saying, "We are from one father, and we must fight the Tutsis, not one another. Instead of fighting each other, we should stop. Now, tighten your belts and go and kill the Tutsis who are trying to kill us"...Maybe when you called me it was just to come and talk, but [listening to these songs], it makes my heart stop and my mind go wild. I used to see people singing these songs, dancing and rejoicing. But when I came to understand the words, they were really bad.<sup>10</sup>

Bernardin is also an elderly Tutsi farmer whose wife and children were killed. He was stoned by *génocidaires* but survived the attack. He expressed that he believed that Bikindi intentionally incited genocide and that his sentence was too light:

Fifteen years is not enough! Life imprisonment would be good. Execution would be better...Even now, if it could happen that I could see him face to face, I would either go into like a coma or lose my mind. Because of his music—encouraging people to come and kill us and all that took place because of it. After all that happened to me. Being stoned. Because of the wounds I received.<sup>11</sup>

Turning now to those who had a more forgiving view of Bikindi, Thomas Kirusu was the last surviving instrumentalist of the royal court until he passed away in 2011. His father was Hutu and his mother Tutsi, and therefore, his family was targeted during the genocide, and several members were killed. He supports the RPF. Given his experience in the court, he understood well the traditional relationship between musicians and state power. He believed that Bikindi knew that his songs were provocative, but that he composed them out of fear of the government:

---

<sup>10</sup> Personal conversation, July 2009, with aid of interpreter

<sup>11</sup> Personal conversation, July 2009, with aid of interpreter

At that point [when the RPF was invading], when he sings such songs, you realize that these are songs that would create hatred. He also knew that what he did was not right, because he fled to the Netherlands even though no one was accusing him yet...But during those times when the RPF was approaching Kigali, [the Rwandan government] would just kill you if you spoke out against them...So I would forgive Bikindi, because there is this temptation—artists tend to lean towards the government.<sup>12</sup>

Nathaniel is a Twa and former dancer in *Irindiro* and so had a subordinate but close professional relationship with Bikindi. His view, similar to Thomas's, was that Bikindi composed songs on topics or themes suggested to him by the government. He claimed that Bikindi was simply acting out the historical role of musicians in supporting their rulers, and that he did so in order to make a living:

I would consider him as someone who was just working for a living...When we performed at political meetings, we got 7,000 francs, so that's why I see him from the viewpoint of earning a living. Should we remain alone as musicians? Our job is to create songs for others. A person comes with money and says, "This is the theme I want you to create a song about." So someone says, "Create a song about the soldiers fighting on the front." [\*Laughs\*] Can we stop? Can we stop our creativity in dance and in songs? For example, I couldn't imagine a situation where we didn't have Habyarimana. He was the only leader I knew. I thought he was powerful. I couldn't imagine a situation where he was gone, and so if he instructed me to perform, I would do it...I wouldn't punish Bikindi severely. He was a guy looking for money to survive.<sup>13</sup>

Sentore, a Hutu drummer in his late 30s or early 40s was also once a member of *Irindiro*. He effectively articulated a central point of this dissertation, that interpreting Bikindi's lyrics is an entirely subjective matter. He believed, though, that due to the negative meaning so many ascribe to the songs and the mistrust and resentment still simmering throughout much of Rwandan society that they would be more dangerous now than in 1994. It was unclear whether he meant that this was because the songs were more capable of inciting violence or whether this

---

<sup>12</sup> Personal conversation, July 2009, with aid of interpreter

<sup>13</sup> Personal conversation, July 2009, with aid of interpreter

was because they might bring suspicion to someone who was discovered listening to and enjoying them:

On one side, some people might think that he intended to kill through these songs. Some people may think this. But on the other side, some may think something different. For example, on a positive note, Bikindi sings, “If we elect a Hutu, let him rule us; if we elect a Tutsi, let him rule us; if we elect a Twa, let him rule us.” So, it depends on the listener and how he hears it and conceives of it...But today, these songs are dangerous. Maybe they weren’t in the past, before 1994, but now, the consequences are real.<sup>14</sup>

I come now to a few Hutu participants who criticized the RPF and defended Bikindi. Because of the fear that people have of speaking out against the RPF, I encountered far fewer opponents than supporters—in fact, only seven in all, three of whom now live in the U.S., well out of harm’s way.

Ferdinand is a Congolese Hutu who lives in the U.S. with his wife and five children. Eleven members of his extended family were killed in Goma, Congo by RPF-backed forces. When I asked Ferdinand what he thought of Bikindi’s songs, he exclaimed, “There is nothing wrong with this music! It is just history!”<sup>15</sup>

Joseph is a middle-aged Hutu living in western Rwanda whose three brothers were imprisoned by the RPF without charge and released only when a Tutsi lawyer and family friend argued on their behalf. A fourth brother was given a life sentence. Understandably, he does not share a kind opinion of the RPF. Like Ferdinand, he also stated, “For me, there is nothing wrong with his music; it is just history.”<sup>16</sup>

An elderly Hutu Catholic priest and friend of Joseph was rather blunt when I asked him why many Rwandans have a negative view of the songs. He replied, “The reason people think Bikindi’s songs are bad is because the RPF wants to keep everyone stupid.”<sup>17</sup>

Augustin’s life was threatened by the RPF for reasons he claims are unclear to him. He fled Rwanda and was separated from his wife, Jeanette, and two sons for six years later. Jeanette and Augustin also characterized the songs simply as a recounting of history. Jeanette even

---

<sup>14</sup> Personal conversation, July 2009, with aid of interpreter

<sup>15</sup> Numerous personal conversations between 2008 and the present, in English

<sup>16</sup> Personal conversation, June 2008, in English

<sup>17</sup> Personal conversation, June 2008, with aid of interpreter

viewed the songs as almost prophetic, stating, “Everything that Bikindi said happened [in the past] *happened*, and everything he said would happen [if the RPF took power] *has happened!* But we did not understand at the time.” Though the couple believed that the songs played a role in inciting genocide, they did not think that this was Bikindi’s intent.<sup>18</sup> Augustin compared the songs to the *panga*, the machete-like blade that was normally used for domestic and agricultural work but became a weapon of choice during the genocide:

I say, Bikindi, his songs are good, but it depends on who is listening. For me, they are good, because the music was really good. You can dance to them, and if you like Rwandan history, you can listen to them. There are many things you can learn from his songs. That is a good thing. But they are bad, because...during the genocide, people, some people, used the songs to—especially let’s say Hutu—they were mobilized by the songs against Tutsi. There was war between RPF which was Tutsi and the Rwandan army, and the Rwandan army was mostly Hutu. So some people inside Rwanda used the songs to mobilize, so that was really bad, because [the songs] “go far away” [meaning the songs were heard all over Rwanda].

This doesn’t mean Bikindi’s guilty! But this doesn’t mean—I say that, because Bikindi, he created some tools, and people could use them in a good way or bad way. It’s like someone who created the machete. People, in fact, use machetes. In the beginning, it was an agricultural tool, but that tool was used to kill other people. So, the guy who created the machete, it is like saying to him, “*You* are guilty!” That is exactly what happened [to Bikindi]. That is my understanding.

Everyone I spoke to, no matter their view of Bikindi, all agreed that he was immensely talented. Edward, one of the translators with whom I worked, had this to say when he heard the songs for the first time since the genocide: “He was somehow like a genius!” He then shook his head and sighed, “There will never be another like him.”<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Personal conversation, March 2010, in English

<sup>19</sup> Personal conversation, July 2009, in English

## **Commentary from the Trial: “Twasazareye” (“We Bade Farewell”)**

### **Testimony from Prosecution Witnesses**

Witness AJZ was a cousin of a member of *Irindiro*. He claimed not to have been a member of *Interhamwe* but was given orders to man a roadblock during the genocide and report to authorities whenever any Tutsi tried to pass through. During the trial, he testified regarding the alleged rape and killing of the nurse Ancilla and others, but the Chamber found that his testimony was riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions. In the following, the Prosecution inquired AJZ as to his interpretation of “Twasazareye.” He contextualized the reception of “Twasazareye” within the genocide, suggesting that the song further intensified negative attitudes towards Tutsi that some Hutu already shared. Examination-in-chief carried out by Prosecutor Ian Morley, September 25, 2006:

P: What was the attitude towards the Tutsi in this song?

W: Thank you. You can understand, yourself, that the Tutsi were not well perceived in that song.

P: Well, what do you mean, “not well perceived”? What was the attitude towards them? Can you elaborate, please?

W: They were persecuted. They were being searched for in order to be killed.

P: Did that song contribute in any way to the persecution of Tutsi, and if so, how?

W: I have told you briefly that this was a song of division. You see, at that time the Tutsi were persecuted. They were dislodged from their land; they were persecuted, their property was looted after they left, and so on and so forth.<sup>20</sup>

Witness AJY was a taxi driver and former professional football player. As with AJZ, his testimony was key to the Prosecution’s case that Bikindi oversaw the rape and murder of Ancilla and others, and like AJZ, the Chamber determined that his testimony lacked credibility. Not knowing the song’s title, AJZ referred to “Twasazareye” as “Remember 1959” and emphasized Bikindi’s appeal to the youth to remember their history, testifying that Bikindi warned them that

---

<sup>20</sup> Witness AJZ, T. 25 September 2006, p. 46

what happened to their elders could happen to them if they failed to eliminate Tutsi.

Examination-in-chief conducted by Veronica Wright, Sept. 27, 2006:

W: As far as I know, I will refer to it as “*Ibuka itanu ni icyenda*” [meaning, “Remember 1959”]. It is a song whose message was taught to people. Kinyarwanda is the language which was used and it was a highly literary language, but I was a driver and I enjoyed the rhythm of that song which said, “Remember 1959 when you used to carry, when you were flogged, at the times you carried the king, you were subjugated to the king’s service without remuneration. Remember that you were under the yoke,” and the message was for the youth, calling on the youth to be vigilant, claiming that we had been attacked by the Tutsi, and, therefore, they should wake up, wake up and look for the accomplices, wake up and look for the Tutsis; kill them. “They are coming to overthrow your regime.” In broad strokes, that was the message of that song. Then, again, it is a song which is full of lessons and I’m not in a position to talk about all those lessons. I did not experience the situation first hand. I was simply made aware of these messages that targeted the youth.<sup>21</sup>

AEY was once an *Interahamwe* member and at the time of the trial was serving a life sentence for genocidal murder. Here, his testimony concerned the allusional and metaphorical content of the song. He concluded that Bikindi intended for listeners to associate the monarchy with all Tutsi. From cross-examination carried out by former Lead Defense Counsel Wilfred Nderitu, Oct. 12, 2006:

D: Now, in [“Twasazareye”], did you hear the words or something to the effect that colonialism had also ended?

W: Now, Counsel, I don’t know whether you are a Rwandan, but Bikindi’s songs are couched in a very—a Kinyarwanda which is full of imagery. Even as a Rwandan, sometimes it’s difficult to understand what he is saying. Now, when he was talking about the monarchy, he was referring to the fate of our ancestors under the Tutsi, and he was saying that such an evil regime should not be restored because it will bring suffering, so it is difficult for me to explain these things because you are not a Rwandan. Our ancestors were tied up; they were beaten up by the Tutsis; they

---

<sup>21</sup> Witness AJY, T. 27 September 2006, p. 29.

worked for the Tutsis without getting any remuneration. Bikindi did not witness that, but it is our [elders] who told him the story... The message in that song was referring to the fate of our [elders]. And when we were being told of that, we understood that we were no longer expected to live in a congenial atmosphere with the Tutsis, because he said that the monarchy had been abolished. And when he talked about the evil of that regime, it was a message that was clear and which touched us deeply.

D: Thank you. Now, in that song, do you remember the use of the word “Tutsis”—yes or no?

W: When reference is made to people being tied up, the allusion is clearly to Tutsi, so you are asking—you should ask Bikindi whether he, himself, lived under the monarchy. And so when he talks about the monarchy he is clearly referring to the Tutsi.<sup>22</sup>

Following is Expert Witness Karangwa’s interpretation of the song. He refused to believe that when Bikindi addresses “*Munyarwanda*”—“the Rwandan”—in the first verse that this included all Rwandans and not just Hutu (see p. 181, line 5). He dwelt at length on Bikindi’s praise of the southern leaders, Mbonyumutwa and Kayibanda, and the northern leader, Habyarimana, which he regarded as a rhetorical strategy for uniting Hutu from both regions against Tutsi. From re-examination carried out by William Egbe, Feb. 13, 2007:

W: So the main message is as follows: The Rwandans must remember the past. The Rwandans had got rid of the feudal and monarchical regime that had subjected them for centuries and centuries, so the Rwandans have to remember what happened in the past in order to make sure that this regime would no longer come back to power. And when we analyze the song, we note that the Rwandans it is addressed to are not the Tutsi, because they were associated with the monarchy that subjected them, even if he says “*Munyarwanda*.” But when he uses the word “*Munyarwanda*,” one should understand that he is focusing mainly on the Hutu who benefited from independence. He refers to colonization only in passing, because, in the collective memory of Rwandans, colonization was considered as being much better than what the Tutsis did subsequently. So he insists on that aspect, on this memory, and wishes for it to be a source of inspiration for the conduct of Hutus and those to whom the message is

---

<sup>22</sup> Witness AEY, T. 12 October 2006, pp. 26-27.

addressed. And, in a nutshell—well, if you want further details, I can give them to you, but everything focuses on the memory that people should have of the monarchical regime to which the Tutsi was associated in order to make sure that it is behind them...

Regarding... Kayibanda, the former president of the republic, he died soon after the 1973 coup d'état, in his house in conditions that were not dignified. Mbonyumutwa, since 1973—these two come from the central region of Rwanda and you cannot rally all Rwandans together without forgetting them. Let me try to be more detailed. Kayibanda, as the father of independence, is removed from power in 1973, and he is completely forgotten... Since the overthrow of Kayibanda in 1973, it is the first song that refers to him. Now, to come back to him and to Mbonyumutwa, who was not worried at all and who was the chancellor of the national order, is, in a way, to show the Hutus of the south—who love Kayibanda and who love Mbonyumutwa, and who have always considered them as their heroes and who always considered that Kayibanda was overthrown by the people from the north—was a way of rallying all Hutus around the same cause. Habyarimana, he was president, so let me not dwell on that, but for these two, in particular, it was a way for [Bikindi] to rally all the people who had been opposed to the 1973 coup d'état, which overthrew those people who were in power from 1973 and who were from the south. It was a way of rallying them around. And each time there was a problem in the post-independence era, they needed to look for the majority Hutu, and you cannot get that unity without mentioning Kayibanda, without mentioning Mbonyumutwa, who were the main leaders of independence. So, through them, all the Hutus are targeted, be they from the north, from Habyarimana, or from the south in the region of Kayibanda and Mbonyumutwa. So it was like a way of rehabilitating somebody who was killed in 1973, and to use this image to rally the Hutus around them and, particularly, to avoid a split. It was a way of saying that whether you are for Kayibanda, Mbonyumutwa or Habyarimana, we are together.<sup>23</sup>

Bikindi conducted the cross-examination of Karangwa. Their debate focused on the problems inherent in interpreting the monarchy as symbolic of all Tutsi. From cross-examination conducted on Feb. 14, 2007:

---

<sup>23</sup> Expert witness Jean de Dieu Karangwa, T. 13 February 2007, pp. 15, 25-26.



- D: Professor, when we were leaving this courtroom we were on the song “Twasezereye,” and I had asked you—I had asked you to point out from the song a word or a sentence by which I may have called upon the Hutu to kill the Tutsi. Please show this to the Chamber?
- W: Thank you for your question. It is not a matter of taking a word or a sentence. It is not that simple. It is the message as a whole. And as I said just before the lunch break, when the song came out in 1986, it came out, people danced. When you take the words that it contains, words that refer to the monarchy, which was associated or identified with the Tutsi, to my knowledge, and to the evil deeds they inflicted on another category of the population as these deeds were described, one may wonder if one can criticize these deeds that you are condemning and which are set forth very clearly in the first and last stanzas or verses. Now, the question is—the question I ask myself is this: How may one criticize the acts without, by the same token, criticizing those who committed those acts? And here it is not enough to say that you are directly inciting hatred. But the good Rwandan that you are, that we all are, there is the spoken and the unspoken. And I believe I have answered your question...
- D: Professor, in your capacity as a researcher, in your capacity as a linguist, will there be a difference between a regime and the rest of the population?
- W: I did not quite understand your question.
- D: I—my question was simple. That from your knowledge, would you say that there is a difference between a regime—a system—and the people?
- W: Yes. The regime will pass or move on, but the people will remain.
- D: Now, in the song “Twasezereye,” was I referring to the regime? In the song “Twasezereye,” according to you, was I referring to the regime or to the Rwandan people?
- W: You were talking about—you are referring to both.
- D: Please explain to the Chamber where the distinction is?
- W: You make reference to the feudal monarchy, and then you make reference to the people that you referred to as *Munyarwanda*, “the Rwandan.”
- D: Please explain to the Bench, according to this—according to the song, what is the relationship that exists between the regime and “the Rwandan” from this song?
- W: According to you, the regime has brutalized the people, “the Rwandan.”
- D: Thank you, Professor. You, yourself, yesterday stated in your evidence-in-chief that

- that regime, feudal monarchy and colonial, had a certain practice which—which had certain practices. You made reference to the whip and forced labour and you seemed to ascribe this practice to colonization. Is that to say that before colonization these practices did not exist?
- W: Yes. It was to say that before colonization it was not as structured as during—or in the era of colonization and the perpetrators who were mainly Tutsi.
- D: Thank you, Professor. Thank you for your answer, because I am going to request you to tell the Chamber based on the best of your knowledge whether *uburetwa*, *ubucakara*, *ubuhake*, *umujishi*—I have several words, but let me limit myself to that. To the best of your knowledge, please explain the meaning of these words to the Chamber.
- W: *Uburetwa* was forced mandatory labour. *Ubucakara* was translated as “slavery.” *Umujishi* is the yoke. And the last one was what—yoke?
- D: Thank you, Professor...Professor, so these practices that we are referring to did not exist under the feudal monarchy? They did not exist before the colonial era? I am referring to *uburetwa*.
- W: Yes, they existed.
- D: Thank you. And if I were to put it to you that, in fact, these practices were the causes of the 1959 Revolution, would I be right or wrong?
- W: You would be right.
- D: In other words, if I did not say it, and I sung it, I would still have been right?
- W: Obviously you would still have been right.
- D: Would I have been accused of that, according to you?
- W: If you spoke of what happened at the time. It all depends on the way you put it and under what circumstances particularly.
- D: So, according to you—you are aware I sung this song in 1987? This was the twenty-fifth anniversary of independence and the abolition of the monarchy, yes? But was one forbidden to speak about that?
- W: No, and that is what appears in the report. Nowhere did we say that one was prevented or precluded from talking about that.
- D: Thank you very much, Professor.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Expert witness Jean de Dieu Karangwa, T. 14 February 2007, pp. 33-35.

## Testimony from Defense Witnesses

Witness XVBR was a dancer in *Imbonezamihigo*, the massive ensemble that performed “Twasazareye” during the 1987 silver jubilee celebration. He is a Tutsi whose daughters were killed during the genocide. Even so, his interpretation of the song was that it simply celebrated the abolition of the monarchial-colonial regime and was not in any way meant to indict all Tutsi. His testimony indicates that those who knew Bikindi personally refused to believe that he intended his songs as anti-Tutsi or pro-genocide propaganda. Not a single one of the Prosecution’s witnesses had a personal relationship with Bikindi. Examination-in-chief carried out by Lead Defense Counsel Andreas O’Shea, Sept. 26, 2007:

D: Now, has Mr. Bikindi ever explained to the members of his group the meaning behind that song, or is it the case that your interpretation of the song comes from yourself?

W: When he taught us that song, everybody who was present could understand the message in that song... We were simply expressing the fact that people were no longer under the monarchical regime during which people had suffered a lot.<sup>25</sup>

Defense expert witness Shimamungu also took a benign view of the song. Examination-in-chief carried out by O’Shea, Oct. 23, 2007:

W: The message that comes out of this [song] is that we need to rejoice because of the independence, because the Rwandan people have been freed from the feudal system—from the monarchical regime and from colonialism. There’s another word that we shouldn’t forget: democracy. So, there’s independence and democracy that have won against the feudal system, the monarchical regime, and colonialism.<sup>26</sup>

During his cross-examination, Lead Prosecutor William Egbe focused on ethnic tensions that existed during the time of the song’s composition. Shimamungu’s testimony is valuable here in that it confounds the notion that denouncement of the monarchy qualifies as anti-Tutsi ideology. Note also his negative characterization of the RPF as a dictatorship. From cross-

---

<sup>25</sup> Witness XVBR, T. 26 September 2007, pp. 42-43.

<sup>26</sup> Expert witness Eugene Shimamungu, T. 23 October 2007, p. 63.

examination conducted on Oct. 25, 2007:

- P: In relation to “Twasezereye,” you did admit yesterday that at the time the song was composed in 1986 and 1987, there were still ethnic problems in Rwanda.
- W: That is not what I said. What I said was that ethnic tension was appeased. There was peace at that moment in time.
- P: Are you saying that in 1986 and 1987 Rwanda had rid itself of all ethnic tensions?
- W: What I said is that ethnic peace had arisen because President Habyarimana had a policy of national unity. One could not refer to ethnicity without being punished. That is what I said. So, ethnic peace existed at the time.
- P: Today in Rwanda, as was the case in the years 1990 to 1994, monarchy is not associated with the two ethnic clans [the Abanyiginya and Abega]; it is associated to the Tutsi ethnic group, correct?
- W: No, that is not true.
- P: Let me put the question in the other way. When monarchy is talked about, is it your testimony that it does not refer to the Tutsi ethnic group; it simply refers to two clans of the Tutsi ethnic groups?
- W: It refers rather to a system, a system that was monopolized by two Tutsi clans.
- P: So when you draw conclusions as to the impact of Mr. Bikindi’s music in the years 1993-1994, your research led you to believe that the ordinary man on the streets, the farmer, does not see in the word “monarchy” an ethnic reference? That is your conclusion?
- W: No, that is not my conclusion. My conclusion is as follows: The monarchical feudal system only comprised a few clans that monopolized that system. I said that there were also...Hutus [who supported the monarchy], notably the one who headed up the monarchist party, the UNAR, between the years 1959 and 1960. So the layman who knows that reference well cannot say that monarchy is entirely connected to the Tutsis.
- P: Let me ask you a question off my notes. The government of President Kagame today comprises fifteen Hutu ministers and fourteen Tutsi ministers. Is this a Hutu regime or a Tutsi regime?
- W: No, it is neither a Hutu nor a Tutsi regime. It is quite simply a dictatorship.
- P: Thank you very much. Let’s move on. That is how you feel? That is how you feel about the regime of President Kagame today, a dictatorial regime, correct?

- W: It is not a feeling; it is an observation, because the elections held in the year 2003 showed that 99% of the votes were attributed to him. So one can draw no further conclusion.
- P: We are talking about “Twasezereye.” When Mr. Bikindi reminds his audience of the bad practices that occurred during the monarchy, he is, in fact, sending a message to that audience, that if the Tutsi return to power, the victims of those bad practices will relive their experiences. That is reasonable, isn’t it?
- W: I believe that yesterday I said that the president of the RPF at the time of the war in 1994 was a Hutu, and the gentleman who became the president of the Republic after taking power was a Hutu.<sup>27</sup> So we cannot say that people thought that it was automatically going to be Tutsis who obtained political posts because there were Hutus that they had placed in prime positions. So one cannot conduct an analysis of the sort. One cannot say that the RPF—even if it was a majority of Tutsis, Hutus did have important political positions. So one cannot conduct an analysis of the sort, it is not possible.
- P: I am going to ask you the same question, but now I am reformulating that question. Would it be unreasonable to say that from the lyrics...the author is understood to be saying that if those who represented the monarchy are allowed to come back to power, the evils of the past will return? Is that unreasonable? Is that an unreasonable meaning that one can make of this message?
- W: What the song “Twasezereye” says is that, of course, there is a possibility of a return of the monarchical regime. That is how one can interpret it.
- P: So, what Mr. Bikindi is therefore doing is to mobilize against that possibility, correct?
- W: No, he is not mobilizing. He is merely expressing his opinions. It is different.
- P: I see no coincidence in the fact that the leaders who are glorified in this song, Kayibanda, Mbonyumutwa, Habyarimana, are all symbols of the Hutu—the Hutu power. There is no coincidence that no Tutsi is mentioned in this song. Do you see a coincidence?
- W: When he is talking of independence and democracy at that moment in time, well, there was no prominent [Tutsi] figure at the time. Had there been one, maybe they would have been cited. These are, however, emblematic figures which led to the

---

<sup>27</sup> Referring here to Pasteur Bizimungu.

independence of the Rwandese republic.<sup>28</sup>

In the following, Bikindi wryly invokes the famous motto, “Never again,” as a way of summarizing his intended message. Questioning led by O’Shea, Oct. 31, 2007:

D: “Twasezereye,” what was the message, if any, which you were trying to portray through that song?

W: The message contained herein is clear in nature and makes reference to three—two or three main issues. The first point being that the song covers the monarchical feudal system. Secondly, the song covers the issue of colonialism. And, thirdly, it speaks of a type of enslavement to which the mass of the Rwandan population was subjugated. And the message on the occasion of the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary was to say “never again.” As regards the three issues that I have just enumerated, the basic message is “never again.”

D: When you use the term “popular masses,” or “*mass populaire*,” who are you envisaging in that expression?

W: When I talk of “popular masses,” it is very clear in my song that I am talking of the three ethnic groups, notably Twa, Hutu and Tutsi, the three ethnic groups comprising Rwandese society.

D: Why did you choose the monarchy and colonialism as the topic for this song?

W: Firstly, and more specifically, this song studies a very specific theme, that is to say, the twenty-fifth anniversary of independence, of the abolition of the feudal system and of *ubuhake*, if I may use that term. So, we are commemorating independence. We are celebrating the abolition of this regime. We are celebrating the abolition of colonialism and also the abolition of *ubuhake*, which we can refer to as slavery.

D: Now, it’s been suggested that by making reference to the monarchy, you are attempting to draw out—or, to draw attention to the bad things that Tutsis have done specifically within Rwanda, and that by doing that, you are attempting to raise up a level of hatred against Tutsis. Can you comment upon that?

W: First and foremost, I must say from your question that monarchism is a system and it does not concern all Tutsi, as you couched it in your question. There are two clans. The Abanyiginya—the clan commonly referred to as Nyiginya clan, but the usual

---

<sup>28</sup> Expert witness Eugene Shimamungu, T. 25 October 2007, pp. 9-11.

name is Abanyiginya. Then there is the Abega clan. So, saying that when one makes reference to that system one is referring to all the Tutsi would be a mistake, because we have learned from history that...Tutsis suffered as much as the Hutu. So, in a nutshell, my song does not condemn the Tutsis in general. It doesn't even attack any Tutsi. It condemns a regime. It refers to a regime or a system which was abolished, a system which, at some point in time, was not liked. That is what my song refers to.

D: It's been suggested that part of the proof of the fact that you wished to basically attack Tutsis in this song is that there is greater reference to the monarchy than there is to colonialism. Can you comment on that?

A. That is not true. That is not true.<sup>29</sup>

The next excerpt consists of Bikindi's explanation of the *icyivugo* section, specifically lines 33-34, "*ingabo ntwara ni igitare itontoma nk'iya bene gahutu*" ("[my] shield is a 'white rock,' loudly moaning like the children of the lowliest Hutu"). This line was targeted by the Prosecution as evidence of anti-Tutsi ideology. Questioning led by O'Shea:

D: Where you make reference to a white shield sounding like that of Hutu children—could you please explain what you had in mind when you were drafting that paragraph?

W: A shield—what I am carrying is a white shield. That is the very embodiment of innocence, nonviolence, tolerance—and that shield moans. Here the verb "to moan," or *itontoma*, is explained by the fact that the one in difficulty is asking for forgiveness and also for help. So, it is some sort of an expression of nonviolence, an expression of innocence which I wanted to set forth here...

D: ...The question is this: Why make reference to Hutu children as opposed to Rwandan children? In your last answer you made reference to *ubuhake*. Could you please explain why it is that the reference is to Hutu children?

W: Because actually, they were those most [oppressed] by the *ubuhake*. They were more [oppressed] by it than other ethnic groups. Obviously—history!<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Simon Bikindi, T. 31 October 2007, pp. 22-23.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 25, 26.

## Commentary from the Trial: “Akabyutso” (“The Awakening”)

### Testimony from Prosecution Witnesses

Along with “Twasazareye,” AJZ was asked to give his interpretation of “Akabyutso.” He focused on the recurring theme of Bikindi’s detestation of “bad Hutu” (*ibihutu*), particularly those “with a short memory.” AJZ contended that this was a reference to Hutu who had forgotten the wrongs done to them by Tutsi and therefore refused to take vengeance. From examination-in-chief led by Egbe, Sept. 27, 2006:

The song about “I hate Hutus with a short memory,” in fact, means that there were Hutus who didn’t espouse the killer ideology and they were fighting against it, so they were taken to be accomplices of the [RPF].<sup>31</sup>

AJY was also asked to elaborate on what Bikindi meant when he sang that he despised Hutu. From cross-examination led by Nderitu, Sept. 28, 2006:

I will just give you the message contained in that song. It is said that, “You Hutus who refuse to kill Tutsis, you Hutus who refuse to kill”—I think you understand. It says, “I detest the Hutus who hate other Hutus,” in other words, Hutus who do not work together with other Hutus. By saying that, I would like to draw your attention particularly to the passage where it is said, “I hate Hutus who refuse to be real Hutus. I hate the Hutus who deny their ethnicity,” in other words, those who refuse to go and help the others to attend in the killings, those who refuse to take revenge.<sup>32</sup>

Witness AEY elaborated on Bikindi’s alleged allusions to Hutu who collaborated with Tutsi. From examination-in-chief conducted by Patrick Gabaake, Oct. 12, 2006:

W: ... in the song he says that he detests Hutus who deny their Hutu identity. He speaks of Kanyarengwe, of Bizimungu and Nsengiyaremye,<sup>33</sup> among others.

---

<sup>31</sup> Witness AJZ, T. 27 September 2006, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Witness AJY, T. 28 September 2006, pp. 30-31.

<sup>33</sup> These men were famous Hutu political figures who either supported or served in the RPF. Col. Alexis Kanyarengwe was the former chairman of the RPF. Pasteur Bizimungu once served under Habyarimana but came



P: When you say that he speaks of them, do you mean that he speaks of them in his song, or are you saying that those are the type of people he is talking about in this—in his song?

W: What I am saying is that Bikindi's songs are full of allusions. He might be talking about you and referring to you and you would not even know. So, he observed that people like Twagiramungu,<sup>34</sup> Bizimungu, and Kanyarengwe were going to collaborate with the Tutsis, and it was at that point that he decided to sing the song titled "*Nanga Abahutu*"...Now, when we asked our parents to explain the song to us, they told us that he was, in fact, referring to those people who had collaborated with the Tutsi.<sup>35</sup>

Following is Expert Witness Karangwa's assessment of the song. From examination-in-chief conducted by Egbe, Feb. 13, 2007:

The main theme is threefold: The first one is one of hatred...The second message is the one that is a rally call to the Hutus to unite, to mobilize...the secret unity. And the third message which, as in "Twasazareye," is the memory of the Hutu.

The hate message is mainly addressed to Hutus and to those he called *Ibyihutur*...And among those Hutus, there are five different types, if we analyze the song: Those who have given away their identity as Hutus in Rwanda following specific circumstances that occurred. People no longer wanted to be Hutu and became Tutsi in order to be able to have employment or education. During the colonial era, there were people who were Hutu and who wanted to be seen as Tutsi. So that is the first category.

The second category is that of Hutu who despise other Hutu.

The third category is the Hutu who are only interested in clientelism and bribery, and it is implied that such bribery comes from the Tutsi, and not from other Hutu. And these people are ready to kill other Hutus.

The fourth category, as stated by the author, are those who, because they are naïve, engage in war on the side of the Tutsi without being aware of the real—what is really at stake, and they are idiots.

---

to support the Arusha Accords and the RPF. He served as Rwanda's first post-genocide president before he was forced to resign. Dismas Nsengiyaremye was Rwanda's moderate Prime Minister from 1992 to 1993.

<sup>34</sup> Faustin Twagiramungu served from 1994 to 1995 as the transitional Prime Minister under the RPF.

<sup>35</sup> Witness AEY, T. 12 October 2006, p. 8.

The fifth category is that of those who do not correct the faulty Hutus by setting them aside and those who do not help the Hutus unite. So if a Hutu makes a mistake, instead of letting him be, it is better to put him back on the right path, and this should be done amongst Hutus, so that unity will prevail...

*Ibyihuture*...are people who were former Hutus and are—and became Tutsis during the era of the monarchy.... So this *Ibyihuture* would become Tutsis; they would abandon their Hutu characters because they had married Tutsi girls and two or three generations afterwards, they were no longer considered as Hutus, but, rather, as *Ibyihuture*... We realise that the title is now complete, “I hate the Hutus who do not hate the Tutsis” or, “who are in contact with the Tutsi.” So this is the title and the first message.<sup>36</sup>

One of the more controversial lines in “Akabytuso” is “*Njyewe nanga Abahutu, ba Bahutu batibukaaa...ngo bibuke rya jambo rivuga ngo: ‘Muhere ruhande, mwise Mpandahande, hariya i Butare, ’rungano!’*” [“Me, I despise Hutu, those Hutu who don’t remember, who don’t remember the slogan that was said over there in Butare: ‘Starting at one side, kill everyone, [even] Mpandahande, ’ old man!]. Asked to explain this, Karangwa stated:

He is using a [saying] that was used during—during the conquest by King Ruganzu...He is trying to remind the Hutus of the evil deeds of the Tutsi against the Hutu sub-chief Mpandahande, and that sentence has become famous, and Mpandahande was the chief of Ruhande, which is a location. So he is appealing to the memory of the Hutus by recalling all these chiefs whose death has been imputed to the Tutsi. And to recall that in a context such as this one is to remind [Hutu] of the evil deeds of the Tutsi against the Hutu.<sup>37</sup>

### **Testimony from Defense Witnesses**

Angeline Mukabanana, Bikindi’s second wife and a Tutsi, relayed what she believed her husband meant. From examination-in-chief conducted by Defense Counsel Momo, Oct. 2, 2007:

In the song “Akabyutso,” the message is “I hate the Hutu.” You should not interpret that literally because he, himself, is Hutu. What he meant was that he hated people who were

---

<sup>36</sup> Expert witness Jean de Dieu Karangwa, T. 13 February 2007, pp. 29-30.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

greedy, people who were not polite and who wanted to trigger a war, people who wanted to kill one another, or people who wanted to engage in conflicts, the origins of which [they] did not know. And in the song, he says that he hates all those people. And he adds that we are lucky that in our country there aren't very many such people in our society.<sup>38</sup>

Mukabana later attested, "He was my husband; I, a Tutsi... If Bikindi had ever dared to kill Tutsis, then there was no way I could forgive him for that... I had never seen him display hatred against anyone."<sup>39</sup>

Antoine Nyetera is a Tutsi prince and one of the few surviving members of the royal family. His kin were ousted from power during the 1959 Revolution, yet he has been an outspoken critic of the RPF. He now lives in Belgium. Considering the malevolent characterization of the monarchy in the songs, his defense of Bikindi is interesting in that he too believed that Bikindi's main purpose was to unite the country against the RPF, not Hutu against Tutsi. From examination-in-chief conducted by Momo, Oct. 5, 2007:

W: ...When part of the population allied with an enemy that was promising heaven and paradise to people, that kind of situation is what is deplored in that song: allying with the enemy, the enemy of yesterday and today. That is what Bikindi condemns in his song. In that song. Bikindi says, "*Nanga Abahutu*," meaning, "I am against Hutus who act in greed with the enemy because of promises, because of amounts of money paid." That is the meaning of the song.

D: Mr. Nyetera, who was that enemy promising paradise, the enemy you're referring to?

W: It is no secret to anyone, when you attack a country you are considered as the enemy.

It is not necessarily because you are coming with mortar and submachine guns.

When you attack the population of a country, you are automatically the enemy.

[Asked for clarification of the enemy's identity, he explains that it was to the RPF].<sup>40</sup>

Apolline Uwimana, Bikindi's first wife and a Hutu, was called to testify on Oct. 8, 2007. Her interpretation was that the song was not so much a call for unity against the RPF but a call for peace among the populace. From examination-in-chief conducted by O'Shea:

---

<sup>38</sup> Witness Angeline Mukabanana, T. 2 October 2007, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Witness Angeline Mukabanana, T. 2 October 2007, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Witness Antoine Nyetera, T. 5 October 2007, p. 14.

W: When Bikindi wrote that song, his intention—his intention was to call on the people to return to peace and security. His intention was to invite members of the population to live in peace with one another. That was the message of the song written by Bikindi, because he loved peace.

D: It's been suggested by others that that song was written in order to incite the killing of Tutsis. In your discussions with Mr. Bikindi, have you seen any indication of anything like that?

W: No, that issue never arose in our discussions. I am not here to defend him because he's my husband. If I say this, it is because it never happened.<sup>41</sup>

The Prosecution alleged that “Akabyutso” corresponded with the “Hutu Ten Commandments,” an anti-Tutsi editorial published in *Kangura* that, to summarize, demanded that Hutu cut off all ties to Tutsi (the editorial will be discussed more in the following chapter). Defense Expert Witness Shimamungu refuted the song's connection to the “Hutu Ten Commandments.” From examination-in-chief conducted on Oct. 8, 2007 by O'Shea:

D: It has also been suggested in the discussion around these songs, and in particular with reference to “Akabyutso”...a foundation for Bikindi's thinking, that Bikindi found himself on the “Ten Commandments” in the magazine *Kangura*. Can you comment upon that please?

W: The comment I can make is that you cannot compare those two texts, given that the “Ten Commandments” published by *Kangura* refers to Hutu and Tutsi. Bikindi's text talks only about Hutu. It talks about Hutu, saying that we should not fall into the chaos which is setting in Rwanda; rather, we should avoid falling into the temptation which would sow disorder in Rwanda. But the text of the “Ten Commandments,” which I have not been able to re-read, but I know it very well because I have analyzed it, actually deals with Hutu-Tutsi relations, and in that connection those two texts are different.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Witness Apolline Uwimana, T. 8 October 2007, p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> Witness Eugene Shimamungu, T. 24 October 2007, pp. 29-30.

During his examination-in-chief, O'Shea asked Bikindi to describe the context in which "Akabyutso" was composed. Testimony delivered on Oct. 31, 2007:

D: Now, what were the events in 1992 and 1993 which inspired you to use the expression, "I hate the Hutu," in your song "Akabyutso"?

W: During that period, especially the period 1992, the months of April, May, June, July, the—Rwanda lived through a renewal of attacks that had never been experienced before. This period of 1992-1993 was a period where many attacks occurred throughout the country; these were bomb attacks, grenade attacks, and attacks even involving rifles. People were killed by rifles, and also there were land mines. And this was really a period where one regularly heard that such-and-such an attack had claimed a certain number of people, or another attacker claimed the life of another person. Such-and-such a person had died and that an unidentified group was responsible. So it was a period of internal disturbance where—that the population itself did not understand. It was a period during which the Rwandan population lived in a feeling of general panic.

D: At the time when these bombs were dropping and grenades were being thrown, who did the population believe, or what was the media saying about who was responsible for those bombs and grenades?

W: Thank you...I would remind you that this was the period of multiparty politics. It is very important for me to remind you of that. It was the time of multiparty politics when people spoke of the death squads...which were not apparent but [existed in the minds of the people], and that these death squads were created by President Habyarimana. This is what is said, but one does not know exactly who is a member of these death squads, and every attack [reported] on the radio and...in the newspapers of the opposition parties is attributed to these death squads. When you read an opposition newspaper, sometimes the programmes aired on the radio would speak of these death squads which existed in the minds of Rwandans. And it poses the question as to whether this death squad existed in reality, or whether it was fictitious. And most of these attacks were attributed to this death squad.

D: So, in your song, when you said, "I hate the Hutu," who were the Hutu that you hated?

A. Habyarimana was a Hutu. Most of those considered as members of those death squads were Hutu. And, at that time, I did not have any other information apart from

what appeared in newspapers, what was broadcast by radio. And, actually, I tend to believe that if those bombs, grenades and mines were laid by Hutu, then I ought to take the risk to request them to put an end to their shameful actions—to my risk, of course. I felt deep down in me that if it were true, then I, myself, also run the risk of being apprehended, but I said that I was an eyewitness to certain attacks.

I'm sorry, I do not intend to dwell at length on this, but behind my office, the window at the rear of my office was facing the motor park. And the attack, which took place in the motor park in Kigali—actually, I was touched by it because when the bomb went off I thought I had died; I thought I was dead myself. The bomb produced a resounding noise. And when I regained consciousness, I realized that the motor park had been destroyed. And when I regained my wits, I took my vehicle and ran towards the motor park to pick up some casualties to take to the hospital. So in connection with those who were responsible for those attacks, I said that if it were true what was being said in the newspapers, then I needed to do something about that. That is why I took the courage to say I hate the Hutu...

D: ...Mr. Bikindi...in “Akabyutso”...it says that you hate those who have shame of their identity as Hutu. Can you please help us understand why you made that statement and what you meant?

W: Thank you, Counsel. Thank you, Your Honours. This sentence is pregnant with meaning. Actually, this sentence cannot be understood without delving into the subsequent text. This single sentence will be meaningless and would not be clearly understood if we do not try to understand the rest of what follows...Actually, it's like an explanation. And why do I consider this an explanation? The song, “Akabyutso,” this song was conceived in the form of a dialogue. When I say that I detest those who are ashamed of their Hutu identity, the person listening to me—or, the person I'm talking with jumps on this idea and asks me what I'm talking about. So I tell him...“Let me tell you, my dear friends, the agony that is in my heart,” and it is from this point that I explain what I mean by these Hutus that I detest, these Hutus that are ashamed of their identity, a Hutu who kills, a Hutu who kills a Hutu, a Hutu who kills a Twa, a Hutu who kills a Tutsi.<sup>43</sup> For me, that is not a Hutu. This Hutu, this corrupt Hutu, who no longer has any understanding or sense of life, who receives one thousand—I'm talking of money here—this Hutu who receives one thousand, and he is sent to go and destroy, and even to go and kill others, and he accepts. So I am

---

<sup>43</sup> Nowhere in “Akabyutso” does Bikindi explicitly criticize those who kill a Tutsi or Twa.

condemning this person; I am saying no true Hutu can do such a thing, no true Hutu can engage in such actions, such terrible actions. I consider him like somebody who no longer has a brain in his head. And I'm saying this because, in actuality, I am somewhat an eyewitness to what was happening. Personally, I witnessed this in the *kubohoza* system which had been set up by the MDR.<sup>44</sup>

D: Thank you, Mr. Bikindi. Now, you've explained that when you talk about the shame of one's identity of being Hutu, you've explained how you mean that those who behave in certain ways are not behaving like a true Hutu. Others have given a different explanation to this verse. Others have attached themselves to the Kinyarwanda word used here, *ibiyihutuure*, and in attaching to that word they have explained that what you meant by this shame of identity of being a Hutu is that you are against mixed marriages between Hutus and Tutsis. That's an assertion which has been made by others about this same verse. Can you please comment on that?

W: Yes. Thank you, Counsel. The comment I would make here is that, actually, these assertions are pure—I don't know what word to use—maybe I should simply say that they are pure lies, or purely fake stories, because nowhere—and even in my personal behaviour, I would not say that the Hutus that I am talking about here...were Hutus that had accepted to marry Tutsi women. If this were the case, then the—they would say I was *ibiyihutuure* because I, myself, am married to a Tutsi. And before this Trial Chamber, I think that it has been observed that...since the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1990, during the entire period of the war, I did not leave my wife; I did not leave Sebanane André; I did not leave any of these artists who were Tutsi...I did not leave any of my Tutsi neighbours. I remained Bikindi, in blood I am born, right up to the time when we fled the country. Please, even while fleeing, I never left the Tutsi; that is a fact. I don't have to prove that. If anybody can make that assertion, tell him that it is a lie, tell him he doesn't know Bikindi...<sup>45</sup>

Bikindi expounded on the controversial line, “*Njyewe nanga umuhutu, umuhutu uhabwa igiceri akica umuntu, kandi akica umuhutu, rungano.*” [“Me, I despise a Hutu, a Hutu who receives a coin to kill a person, and then kills a Hutu, old man.”]. His defense was that he referred to people who are so greedy that for just a small price would even kill their own.

---

<sup>44</sup> MDR was MRND's rival, though many of its members and supporters also participated in the genocide.

<sup>45</sup> Simon Bikindi, T. 31 October 2007, pp. 33-34, 39-42.

W: Somebody may go out onto the street and kill somebody, somebody may go into his or her village and kill somebody who is their fellow citizen, whom he says “hello” to on a daily basis. He might kill somebody he does not know, or he might kill a person that he shares certain things with.

So, stage by stage—and I wish this upon nobody—but if somebody even comes to the point of killing their mother or their father, the meaning of this sentence is the growth of this cruelty or the magnification of this cruelty that reaches a point where it no longer takes into account the fact that an individual is a neighbour or a brother or a sister. You see? ...I'm not saying that they're killing a Hutu instead of killing a Tutsi. No, that is not the meaning that I'm giving to this sentence. Rather, it is the gradual magnification of this cruelty. And I gave the example of the young man who has—who had had his eyes gouged out, the son of Semusambi. A young person who might do this to another young person for no apparent reason, this is what brings me to put some Hutus in this basket. And I think that if we go into depth, this is what this sentence means. It is the magnification of cruelty that comes—that becomes, to my mind, stupid. Stupid cruelty that means that somebody might exterminate their entire family for no reason. I do not know whether you are satisfied with this response, but it is this meaning, especially with reference to the increasing cruelty amongst people—amongst their fellow man.

D: Yes, I think it's clear. The interpretation which has been given on this by others...is that by talking about the killing of Hutus, you are implicitly saying that there's nothing wrong with killing a Tutsi.

W: This is what I have just said, notably that my lyrics, rather than concentrating—or, far from concentrating on this fact—is concentrating on the upsurge of cruelty amongst the Rwandans, this cruelty that makes it possible for somebody to pick up a grenade or throw a bomb into a cabaret without noting who's inside; even your father might be in there. But in view of the fact that you want to destabilize the local authority or, the prefectural authority, you will take a grenade and throw it into a bar without even thinking about what you are doing. It is this mindset, which is unspeakable, that I am referring to in this—in these lyrics.

Now, far from inciting a Hutu to go and kill a Tutsi, or inciting a Twa to go and kill a Hutu or a Tutsi, Counsel, I would say that I am very far-flung from this hatred. Because if I was animated by such a hatred, I would have started off with my wife and my fellow artists who were Tutsis, and I would have also—and also



Sebanane, with whom I spent a lot of time, and the other artists. Now, of course, it depends on who is interpreting.<sup>46</sup>

On the song's alleged relationship to the "Hutu Ten Commandments," Bikindi stated:

W: I believe that these lyrics should be considered as they are without saying that I have referred myself to the "Ten Commandments," of whose existence I was not even aware when composing this song. I explained all the reasons that inspired me to compose this song, and I'm not even a reader of such a magazine, and I am also far from referring to these "Ten Commandments."

What I was saying is that there can be multiple interpretations, and I was taking the example of the book by—*Shake Hands with the Devil*, by Roméo Dallaire, where he says that a singer—and I believe that he is referring to the song that we are studying here—he says that I said that "I detest Hutus who do not know that Tutsis are snakes." So, I was saying a hundred-and-one or a thousand-and-one interpretations can be given for this song, but people can judge for themselves whether they are true or false—people who have any sense, that is.

D: And those who have interpreted your song with a view to giving it a meaning of hatred towards Tutsis, have stated that there are three principle characteristics, or three pillars to your song. The first pillar is hatred, the second pillar is unity of the Hutus, and the third pillar is to emphasize the bad done by Tutsis. Now, if we take that first pillar, hatred, the equation is made between "I hate the Hutus" and that a principle message coming through this song is hatred. Is that what you intended? What would be your comment about that?

W: Far from hatred, and far from any hatred that I might show towards Tutsis, this is far from being the case. My song—I can consider my song as the expression of—of revulsion against a prevailing or lasting situation where people take on a venture without thinking, without thinking about the ill consequences of their repeated acts. So, I could not deem myself to be a parent talking to his child. However, I do consider myself a patriot who loves his country and who sees this country falling into a business. Far from showing this hatred, my song is the type of "spanking" given to a child who at that moment in time is insisting on what he is doing when he should

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 46-47.

have stopped doing it. Now, rather than considering myself a parent with a child, I consider myself to be a person who has responsibility as a patriot and who sees that if the acts perpetrated carry on in the same vein, then the entire Rwandese population will fall into an abyss.

And I say, please, it's like a form of revulsion or revolt. I detest you, because if you do not understand that by killing somebody or doing something else similar, you are actually perpetrating acts which are not worthy of a human being such as yourself. I cannot go and give this person a “spanking.” This person is not my child. Nor can I throw him or her in prison; I do not have the power to do that. And the only weapon that I can use in order to bring that person to reason is my song...

D: The second of the three pillars, which it is said constitute the essence of your song, is the unity of Hutus. Were you intending to preach unity of Hutus in this song?

W: I believe that through my compositions I was very clear—very clear. The unity I sing about, the unity I talk about, the unity I am calling for, is the unity of the three ethnic groups: Hutus, Tutsis and Twas. The rest is just an interpretation. People are attributing things to me that I never had any intention to say.<sup>47</sup>

## **Commentary from the Trial: “Intabaza” (“The Alert”)**

### **Testimony from Prosecution Witnesses**

BGH was a former journalist for ORINFOR (*Office Rwandais d'Information*). Her testimony regarding Bikindi's fame and influence helped the Chamber determine that Bikindi possessed the influence and capacity to incite genocide through speech and song. In the following excerpt, delivered on Oct. 2, 2006, she claimed that *bene Sebahinzi* [“children of the Father of Farmers”], a recurring trope throughout the song, referred to Hutu, and she interpreted this to mean that the song called on Hutu to stop fighting one another and instead fight Tutsi. From examination-in-chief conducted by Ian Morley:

The song...speaks of the descendants of one Sebahinzi, who were killing one another, who were demolishing each other's houses, and they were looting their property. It, in fact, repeats the history of Rwanda, because in history it is said that Rwanda was

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 48-50.

inhabited by three ethnic groups, and the Hutu were the first to occupy the country and they were hunters.<sup>48</sup> Then came the farmers, in other words, Hutus who lived on agriculture, and Tutsis who were cattle raisers. So, for someone who was learning history, when it is said that there were descendants of Sebahinzi, I understood that they were addressing the Hutus who were living in Rwanda and whose members began to kill one another. So, the message is intended for Hutus, inviting them to pool their efforts because their enemy is only the Tutsi, so the Hutus must join their efforts to fight the enemy, which is the Tutsi, and exterminate the enemy. So, briefly, this is what I understood as being the message communicated by that song.<sup>49</sup>

Witness BHH focused on the song's emphasis on *rubanda nyamwinshi*—"the majority people"—arguing that this alluded to Hutu. From examination-in-chief conducted by Egbe, Feb. 20, 2007:

The songs also talk about the Hutu, referring to them as the majority. And then later on *rubanda nyamwinshi*, and there we realize that the author is trapping himself since stirring up the majority of the people against the minority. One has to be naïve not to understand this: the majority against the minority. Who are the minority people in Rwanda? Everybody knows it. So these are the issues. There is another group of people who are added to the list of enemies, those Hutu who are traitors, who are traitors—the Hutus who are traitors who do not support the cause of the majority of the people.<sup>50</sup>

### **Testimony from Defense Witnesses**

Bikindi's second wife, Angeline Mukabanana, argued that *bene Sebahinzi* referred to the general population, regardless of ethnicity, and that the aim of the song was to promote peace and unity. From examination-in-chief conducted by Momo, Oct. 2, 2007:

The song "Intabaza" is a song that is generally referred to as "Bene Sebahinzi." I wanted to tell you, at the very outset—or ask whether some of you read the Bible. Chapter 4 of the Gospel of St. Luke, verse 24, states that, "A prophet is not accepted in his own

---

<sup>48</sup> This is likely a misstatement or mistranslation as it is widely known that the ancestors of the Twa were the first to inhabit the region of present-day Rwanda and were hunters.

<sup>49</sup> Witness BGH, T. 2 October 2006, p. 33.

<sup>50</sup> Witness BHH, T. 20 February 2007, p. 14.

country.” In the song “Intabaza,” if the Rwandans had understood the message conveyed in that song, the killings would not have been committed in 1994. I believe you, yourself, know the message of that song. *Bene Sebahinzi* is the masses, and the masses or members of the general population can kill one another, but there is a remedy to that. If they can love one another and understand that the Hutus, the Tutsi, and the Twa are the same people and that they are obliged to live in peace and unity, that is the only remedy to the problem, and it is the only path towards development. And elections are the main underpinnings of democracy, and if the Twas come to power in democratic elections, everyone should accept to be governed by those Twas. And if another ethnic group comes to power, that should be accepted. It will also enable people to understand that democracy does not come under the barrel of the gun. All Bikindi’s songs were aimed at promoting peace. People shouldn’t try to ascribe another interpretation to those songs.<sup>51</sup>

Expert Witness Shimamungu expounded on the definition of *bene Sebahinzi*. From examination-in-chief carried out by O’Shea, Oct. 24, 2007:

W: Now, the first question that comes to mind—because we see that this song does indeed talk about the children of Sebahinzi throughout the song. And the first question that comes to mind is: Who are the children of Sebahinzi, who is being referred to? ... We appear to find the definition of Sebahinzi in the song itself. “That they come, the children of Sebahinzi, Hutu, Tutsi or Twa.”

Now, despite that definition there, others have claimed that the children of Sebahinzi in the song, refers to Hutu. Is there any way—any reasonable way in which somebody interpreting this text can detract from the [above line]? Is there any possible way of saying—even though it says “children of Sebahinzi, Hutu, Tutsi or Twa”—that actually, the children of Sebahinzi are not Hutu, Tutsi or Twa, but are Hutu?...

P: ...Now, having regard to the plain meaning of those words, but also having regard to the context of the song, the other paragraphs in the text and the historical context, is there any reasonable way that one can read those sentences consistently with an intention to cause ethnic hatred against Tutsis?

W: No, not at all. And let me add that the text of the song is much more understandable

---

<sup>51</sup> Witness Angeline Mukabanana, T. 2 October 2007, pp. 22-23.

than the two others that we analysed. And the—we shouldn't be making interpretations that are different than what the author said, because everything is clear in this poem, in this mythical comedy, except for the beginning of the song.<sup>52</sup>

One of the more troubling lines in “Intabaza” refers to *Impuzamugambi*—“those who share the same goal” (line 130)—which was the name of the youth brigade affiliated with the extremist CDR party. The line in question is as follows:

*Bakaba impuzamugambi kugira ngo inyungu zabo zidahoterwa.*

They should be those who share the same goal [*impuzamugambi*] in order to protect their interests.

Shimamungu provided a more benign explanation for the use of this term, contesting the idea that Bikindi intended to refer to the murderous organization:

P: Now, the word in contention here—oh, yes. The word in contention here is “*impuzamugambi*.” Now, is that a word in common usage in the Kinyarwanda language?

W: Yes, it is a very common word which can be used in Kinyarwanda, but for the fact that, at the time, the term had been adopted by a political party, the CDR...but this could not stop the author or composer from using it without referring to this political party, so I think it is possible.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, Bikindi's defense, delivered on Oct. 31, 2007:

The message of “Intabaza” is manifold. That song has a length of 20 minutes, 33 seconds. But just as for “Akabyutso,” “Intabaza,” “Mbwirabumva,”<sup>54</sup> the common denominator is peace. I urge Rwandans to work for peace, to”—work for the restoration of peace. Now, if I have to go into the details with regard to the song “Intabaza I cannot speak about that song without returning to “Akabyutso,” because for me “Akabyutso” is a revolt; I am revolting against my own people. I am revolting against all those people

---

<sup>52</sup> Expert witness Eugene Shimamungu, T. 24 October 2007, pp. 21, 22.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>54</sup> “Mbwirabumva” [“I speak to those who understand”] was a short piece composed as a sort of coda to “Akabyutso” and “Intabaza.” As with the other songs, it may be streamed online at [www.jasonmccoy.org/bikindi](http://www.jasonmccoy.org/bikindi).

who have lost the very meaning of life. And after noticing that, indeed, throughout the country life has lost its meaning, I say in the song “Intabaza”...that from north to south, from east to west, I have criss-crossed all regions. Those are the main regions which I referred to in this stanza. And I have criss-crossed all those regions and I noticed that members of the population are besides themselves, that the level of insecurity is indescribable. So “Intabaza”—which is an alert call, a call for rescue—I tell all Rwandans that the country is moving towards an abyss, and I said, “Please, stop.” And that is why I say that the message in the song is multifaceted...

...I say it is first necessary to redefine Rwandans, those who inhabit Rwanda. And I clearly state that Rwanda is inhabited by three ethnic groups, that Rwanda is divided into several regions and those various regions are what make up that country. Those three ethnic groups live on Rwandan territory. And I clearly stated, and I think this message is very important that nobody, be him Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa, asked to be born as such Hutu, Twa, or Tutsi, that nobody asked to be born in this or that other place. So, I reopen the conscience of each and everyone by launching this message, thinking that it will get to the target. So at the end of the song—at the end of the song, I propose an ultimate solution, an ultimate solution, because with multiparty politics, which was not able to last months and years—multiparty politics, established on the 10th of June 1991, which was not able to seek a lasting solution to the war—I say, “All Rwandans, I urge you to rise like one man and call for elections. Let the elections be free and fair. Let the elections be free and fair. And in those elections, you are going to vote and empower those you want to be your leaders.” And I warned them. I say, “Dear Rwandans,” as I have defined them at the beginning of the song, “if the person voted is a Hutu, he is a Rwandan. Let us accept that he be our leader. If the person voted is a Twa, he is a Rwandan. Let us accept that he be our leader. If the person voted is a Tutsi, he is a Rwandan. Let us accept that he be our leader. What I cannot condone is for someone to say this person is superior to the other. We are all Rwandans. And under such circumstances, let us call for elections which are the only method of putting an end to this war which has lasted a long time.” Such is the message I convey through the song.<sup>55</sup>

Under cross-examination by Egbe, Bikindi clarified that he intended *bene Sebahinzi* to refer to all Rwandans. He also denied ever meeting with government officials to coordinate a

---

<sup>55</sup> Simon Bikindi, T. 31 October 2007, p. 36

propaganda campaign and incite genocide. He also confirmed that the enemy was the RPF, not Tutsi. From testimony delivered on Nov. 2, 2007:

P: You certainly know, Mr. Bikindi, that since September of the year 1992, Tutsis had been officially defined as the enemy, don't you?

W: Mr. Prosecutor, I owe you all the respect that I owe you; however, to say that I knew for sure, should be based on material facts or documentary facts, because I believe that you are attempting to direct your questioning, and it is very surprising to me that you put this question to me. I shall say that I never took part in defining the enemy. I never took part in any meeting, nor did I have any discussions with anybody at the level of national authorities unless, of course, there is evidence of this, whether it be in document form or otherwise.

P: At the end of 1992, beginning 1993, in your song, "*Bene Sebahinzi*," you referred to this enemy, didn't you?

W: The enemy was well known to us, we did not need to hold a meeting with a view to defining the enemy. The—those who attacked Rwanda from Uganda, the RPF, was the enemy. However, one cannot deem that the RPF is, in fact, all of the Tutsis who lived in Uganda...

...I say *bene Sebahinzi*, whether they be Hutu, Twa or Tutsi, or—whether they be Hutu, Twa or Tutsi—you should refer to that song. I say, "Dear Rwandans, in that we recognise that Rwanda is inhabited by three different ethnic groups and *bene Sebahinzi* comprises Tutsis, Hutus and Twas"—and this song talks clearly of the three ethnic groups, and this is contained in the sentence that comes back regularly to say that they are all *bene Sebahinzi*. And history revealed that 95% of all these people, whether they be Hutus, Tutsis, or Twas, are all farmers...

...If you were to analyse the text closely, it calls for unity, it calls for peace, and it calls for the unity of Hutus, Tutsis and Twas. Thank you for your understanding...<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Simon Bikindi, T. 2 November 2007, pp. 3, 41.

In testimony delivered on Nov. 5, 2007, Bikindi pointed out that Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa alike were oppressed by the monarchy, refuting the accusation that he intended to associate the monarchy with all Tutsi and instead intended to associate the monarchy solely with the RPF.

W: With the exception of the Abanyiginya clan, the Hutus, the Twas and the Tutsis—all of this popular mass that I'm concerned with—were submitted to the atrocities of this regime. So, it would be a very bad interpretation indeed to say that only the Hutus were submitted to these unlaudable acts. It is, in fact, the whole population, and [an earlier witness] told you that he, himself, was on a number of occasions affected. He was not a Hutu; he was a Tutsi.

P: My question is this, Mr. Bikindi, [concerning the line]: “The victory of the *Inkotanyi* is presented as a menace of extermination of the *bene Sebahinzi*, whatever political parties they belong to.”<sup>57</sup> Could there have been another possible interpretation? Wasn't the meaning clear that the *bene Sebahinzi* you were referring to were the Hutus of the opposition parties?

W: Firstly, I would say it is quite simple. The RPF, itself, is—or, comprises Hutus and Tutsis. And as far as I am aware, there is no political party in Rwanda that I know of that is only made up of Hutus. So, it would be, once again, a mistake when speaking of the opposition parties that I only talk of Hutus. You can see this through the MDR party, the PSD, the PL, who on the one hand has Mugenzi, who's Hutu, Lando who's a Tutsi. So all these parties, as far as I'm aware, are made up of all these ethnic groups. So, once again, it would be a mistake to say that when talking of the opposition parties I am only talking of Hutus; I am talking of all the members in the sense that all political parties are comprised—or, comprise the three ethnic groups.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> This refers to line 124: *Nibaze! Bene Sebahinzi bagomba kumenya ko Inkotanyi ziramutse zitsindishije amasasu—uretse ko bidashoboka—amashyaka barimo yose yazima burundu abayarimo bagashirira ku icumu, nk'uko abahinza b'abahutu bashiriye ku icumu, mu gitondo umututsi agacyuza imihigo agira, ati “Harabaye ntihakabe, hapfuye imbwa n'imbeba hasigaye inka n'ingoma!* [May they come! The children of the Father of Farmers must know that if the *Inkotanyi* win with the bullets of guns—even though this is impossible—then all the political parties will disappear forever and their members killed by the spear, just as the Hutu chiefs were killed by the spear, [after which] in the morning a victorious Tutsi boasted, saying “As it was, it will never be again—the dog and rat were killed, replaced by the cow and the drum!”]

<sup>58</sup> Simon Bikindi, T. 5 November, 2007, pp. 8-9.



## CHAPTER 6:

### RADIO AND THE PROPAGANDIZATION OF THE SONGS

MCCOY: Are you angry at RTL M for the way they used your music?

BIKINDI: No, I'm not angry. But neither am I happy. The reason I'm not angry is my songs were not altered; they didn't change them. But the reason I am also angry, the journalists—it is like they put a cloth over my songs with their comments.

MCCOY: So do you think the journalists on RTL M—did they influence the way that people interpreted your songs?

BIKINDI: [In English] Yeah! Yeah! Because if I take McCoy's name—if I take your songs, then I say, "Kill! Kill! McCoy says, 'Kill!'" So obviously McCoy now becomes a killer too. Whoever would want to use my songs for killing, I would be angry with them. If they go to kill, and they use my songs...!!! [In Kinyarwanda] In the court, they asked me, "Why didn't you stop them?" And I said, "I was not there, and so I was not capable of telling the radio to stop playing my songs." I didn't compose them while genocide was being planned. When I composed them, I didn't think about the 1994 genocide.

MCCOY: I guess my last question is, do you have any regrets about...just...do you wish that you had never composed these songs?

BIKINDI: I don't regret it. These songs, to me, they're still good songs. It's a good message. [He thumbs through pages of lyrics]. Ehhh...like on this page, in this song, I mention that "*bene sebahinzi* should know that the country is comprised of five regions, inhabited by Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. No one asks to be born a Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa. So they have to know that they have to live in peace." That is the end. And I mention here that "This relationship should not come about through bullets. You citizens, call for democratic elections. If a Hutu is elected, let us accept him to lead us. If a Tutsi, let us accept him.

If a Twa is elected, let us accept him. Rwanda is for the three of us. There is no one better than the other.” So the conclusion is clear. I can’t have some secret message, because the message is very clear.

Bikindi’s songs were repeatedly aired on the radio station, RTLM (*Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines*). Though some Rwandans had cassette recordings, radio was by far the most common means by which people heard the songs. Not only were they played on RTLM, they were also broadcast on the official government station, Radio Rwanda. In the evening hours, RTLM broadcast on FM 106, but in the morning, when Radio Rwanda was off the air, RTLM used the same frequency, FM 94, and so no matter when audiences tuned in, they could be treated to Bikindi’s music. “Intabaza” and “Akabyutso” were each broadcast upwards of a dozen times a day.<sup>1</sup> Considering that “Intabaza” is over twenty minutes long and “Akabyutso” seventeen minutes, these two songs alone would have demanded a significant amount of airtime, though broadcasters often did not air them in their entirety but only their favorite snippets.<sup>2</sup>

While there is little dispute that many residents in Kigali and other urban areas tuned in to RTLM, there is argument among scholars over whether it enjoyed such a ubiquitous presence in the countryside. Contradictory conclusions stem from conflicting responses on the part of informants. Charles Mironko, for example, conducted interviews with peasant farmers who had been imprisoned for committing genocide. Most of his informants, unable to afford radios, denied having listened to RTLM, and though they admitted that they were aware of its message, they denied that it influenced them to kill. Instead, they said that they were coerced into killing by local political and military authorities, threatened with severe punishment or execution if they did not take up arms. They were also told that they were fighting in self-defense against the RPF, not massacring harmless innocents, and so whether out of fear of local authorities or of the RPF, they soon learned that they had better kill or be killed.<sup>3</sup> Mironko acknowledges that this sense of obedience, passivity, and victimhood “pervades the perpetrators’ narratives and finds

---

<sup>1</sup> This based on RTLM transcripts and personal conversations with Rwandans who remember hearing the songs on the radio.

<sup>2</sup> Several RTLM transcripts indicate that Bikindi’s songs were not played in their entirety.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Mironko, “The Effects of RTLM’s Rhetoric of Ethnic Hatred in Rural Rwanda,” in Alan Thompson, ed., *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide* (London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007), pp. 125-135. See also Linda Kirschke, *Broadcasting Genocide: Censorship, Propaganda & State-sponsored Violence in Rwanda 1990-1994* (London: Article 19, 1996).

expression in a well-known proverb: ‘In a war between elephants, it’s the grass that gets trampled. We are the grass’.”<sup>4</sup> Darryl Li also conducted interviews among rural prison inmates, but the responses he heard drew him to the opposite conclusion.<sup>5</sup> Quoting one Hutu inmate, “It’s a lie if a farmer says he didn’t listen to RTLM.”<sup>6</sup>

When it first began broadcasting, RTLM’s signal was limited to Kigali and surrounding areas, but by 1994, it could be heard more or less nationwide. According to Chrétien’s statistical analysis, 58.7% of the urban population and 27.3% of the rural population owned radios.<sup>7</sup> Those who did not would find ways to tune in; they listened at the homes of friends and relatives, on buses and taxis, and in bars. Every one of this dissertation’s participants who was old enough to remember the genocide remembered listening to RTLM and hearing Bikindi’s songs over the air.

The first part of this chapter will outline the founding, organization, and purposes of RTLM, focusing on how its discourse gradually evolved from rhetorical attacks specifically against the RPF and the Arusha Accords to attacks aimed more generally at all Tutsi. This is in contrast to much scholarship on RTLM that focuses only on anti-Tutsi statements without acknowledging that, at first, the tone and content of RTLM was fairly reasonable. This is one reason why many people took it seriously. Next, I pivot to arguments concerning RTLM’s effectiveness in inciting genocide. I engage in a theoretical discussion of how propaganda in general incited the genocide. While there are multiple causal linkages between propaganda and the genocide, my theorization focuses on the crafting of a mytho-historical narrative of Hutu victimhood that shaped Hutu’s perceptions of their experiences in a way that gave rise to adversarial collective identities. This narrative, which is similarly articulated in Bikindi’s songs, had the effect of demonizing Tutsi by associating them with the monarchy, the Burundian Tutsi regime, and the RPF, even if this was not Bikindi’s intent.

## **From Radio Rwanda to RTLM**

At first, Radio Rwanda was the nation’s only station. The Habyarimana regime wielded tight control over the media in order to ensure that content was both morally tasteful and

---

<sup>4</sup> Mironko 2007, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup> Darryl Li, “Echoes of Violence: Considerations on Radio and Genocide,” in Alan Thompson, ed., *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide* (London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007), pp. 90-109.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Des Forges 1999, p. 62.

supportive of the government.<sup>8</sup> Many rural Rwandans were unable to read and write,<sup>9</sup> and so radio was the primary means for them to acquire news. Given the lack of alternative sources of information, they had little reason to suspect the veracity of what they heard, and so it played an important role in influencing people's beliefs, attitudes, and behavior.

### **Radio Rwanda vs. Radio Muhabura**

Following its failed invasion in October 1990, the RPF regrouped and established a stronghold in the Virungas, a volcanic chain lying along the Rwandan-Ugandan-Congolese border. There, the RPF set up its own radio station, Radio Muhabura.<sup>10</sup> Its signal was strong enough to be picked up throughout northwestern Rwanda, but Rwandan citizens who were caught listening to it could be punished. Nevertheless, many Rwandans secretly tuned in, because it provided an alternative source of information about RPF activity, and it was also entertaining. The station broadcast propaganda consisting of exaggerated news reports informing listeners that most Rwandans welcomed the RPF as liberators. These reports were punctuated by songs by pro-RPF singers such as Kamaliza and Cecile Kayirebwa. Of the many themes found throughout their songs, one of the more preponderant was praise of Rwanda as a sort of Canaan-like paradise where exiles were destined to return. In line with RPF orthodoxy, Radio Muhabura downplayed the existence of ethnicity, claiming that it was a colonial fabrication, and that, therefore, all Rwandans should live together in peace, even as the RPF was waging a terrorizing war against Rwanda in which tens of thousands of innocents were killed and up to a million were displaced from their homes.

Anti-Tutsi propaganda in Rwanda gradually grew more virulent after the RPF's invasion, and Radio Rwanda was occasionally used to spread such propaganda. On March 3, 1992, for example, broadcasters falsely reported on a communiqué from a human rights group in Nairobi claiming that Tutsi were planning to kill Hutu in Bugesera, a region just south of Kigali. Local officials used this report to incite violence.<sup>11</sup> In response, FAR soldiers, *Interahamwe* members,

---

<sup>8</sup> Des Forges, "Call to Genocide: Radio in Rwanda, 1994," in Alan Thompason, ed., *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide* (London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007), p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> Des Forges (1999) puts the literacy rate at 66%, Higirot (2007) puts the literacy rate in 1991 at 56%. Des Forges (1999) claims that by 1994, it rose to 66%. These statistics do not differentiate between urban and rural populations but are an average of the entire population. The rate was likely significantly higher in urban areas than in rural areas.

<sup>10</sup> Muhabura is the name of one of highest volcanoes and is located just within the Rwandan border.

<sup>11</sup> Des Forges 2007, pp. 42-43.

and a number of Hutu civilians embarked on a violent rampage, killing hundreds of Tutsi—one of several small-scale reprisal massacres that foreshadowed the genocide.

Radio thus proved to be an effective means of instilling political ideology and spurring action against perceived political enemies. Radio Rwanda's offerings, though, were rather bland and formal, as were Radio Muhabura's. Its reports, delivered in a robotic drone, lacked warmth and personality. Moreover, following the advent of multi-partyism, as weakly enacted as it was, Habyarimana allowed representatives from oppositional parties to air their opinions on the station. In April 1992, Ferdinand Nahimana, the director of *Office Rwandais d'Information* (ORINFOR), which oversaw Radio Rwanda, was booted from his position so that a member of an opposition party could take over in accordance with the new power-sharing agreement. Once Nahimana left, Radio Rwanda's reporting became more evenhanded.

### **The Founding and Format of RTL**

The MRND's monopoly on power was swiftly crumbling throughout the early 1990s. The infiltration of Radio Muhabura in the northwest and the admission of alternative voices on Radio Rwanda signaled the MRND's dwindling status. Nahimana and others in the media who supported the MRND and its extremist offshoot, CDR, realized the need for a new ideological forum, one that would rhetorically overwhelm their media competition and allow the MRND and CDR to regain the upper hand. After the RPF broke the cease-fire in February 1993, these media personnel began working in earnest to meet this need, and on July 8, 1993, RTL aired its first broadcast.

The differences between RTL and the other two stations could not have been more stark. Based on Western talk radio, RTL's broadcasts consisted mostly of highly animated monologues and lively conversations among the station's personalities and their guests. The broadcasters were known for their charisma, often manifest in crude humor. For example, Noël Hitimana, notorious for being drunk on air, characterized the station's purpose as so: "People say... 'if you're going to fart...it should stink!' The best thing to do is to produce a really foul smell."<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Hege Løvdal Gulseth. *The Use of Propaganda in the Rwandan Genocide: A Study of Radio-Télévision Libre de Mille Collines (RTL)* (M.A. thesis, University of Oslo, 2004), p. 57.

Like Western talk radio, RTLM invited listeners to call in and request songs and comment on current events. RTLM journalists even took to the streets to interview people. In a broadcast on March 19, 1994, RTLM's Editor-in-Chief, Gaspard Gahigi, praised the new format:

We have a radio here; even a peasant who wants to say something can come, and we will give him the floor. Then, other peasants will be able to hear what peasants think. Personally, I think what complicates things is that ordinary citizens have no forum where they can speak. Normally, for ordinary citizens to speak, they speak through elections, and elections are impossible. So, in fact, ordinary citizens have been deprived of a say, but RTLM is there; we will give them the floor.<sup>13</sup>

RTLM became the locus of a virtual community that brought together listeners from throughout the land to speak with one another. People in one part of the country could, in an immediate way that had heretofore been unknown, share their views with people in other parts, and not only their views, but their anxiety, fear, and anger. RTLM thus engendered a sense of *communitas*<sup>14</sup> among much of its target audience. During a time of social and political chaos and collapse, the call-in format broke through longstanding class and regional barriers, if only to a limited degree, to cultivate a sense of unity founded in a common experience of insecurity and victimhood. Jean-Marie Higiroy, the moderate director of ORINFOR and Radio Rwanda in 1994, feared the impact of the new station. He described RTLM's novelty as follows:

These broadcasts were like a conversation among Rwandans who knew each other well and were relaxing over some banana beer or a bottle of Primus in a bar. It was a conversation without a moderator and without any requirements as to the truth of what was said. The people who were there recounted what they had seen or heard during the day. The exchanges covered everything: rumors circulating on the hills, news from the national radio, conflicts among local political bosses...It was all in fun. Some people left

---

<sup>13</sup> Mironko 1997, p. 126

<sup>14</sup> "*Communitas*" was a term promoted by Victor Turner to describe experiences of informal, intimate, and egalitarian fellowship among a group of people. *Communitas* is fostered by social opportunities in which people feel as if they are "standing outside of" the normative structures of their society. The concept appears in much of Turner's work. See especially *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Aldine Transaction, Reprint Edition, 1969/1995).

the bar, others came in, the conversation went on and stopped if it got too late, and the next day it took up again after work.<sup>15</sup>

On-air conversations were interspersed with music, and not only the music of Bikindi (though his was among the most popular) but also music by other African pop artists and, significantly, by many Western pop artists and classical composers. The inclusion of Western music was one of the factors that eventually made RTLM so effective in instilling anti-Tutsi ideology and spurring genocidal killing. By symbolically fusing its rhetoric with the cultural hegemonic trappings of the West, it mitigated the extremity of its message and normalized the actions for which it called.<sup>16</sup> RTLM even hired a *muzungu* (“white person”), the Belgian Georges Ruggiu, who had just arrived in Rwanda when the station was founded. A strong supporter of Habyarimana, the President took a liking to him and ordered RTLM to give him a position as a broadcaster.

### **RTLM as Voice of the People or Voice of the Government?**

Among its audience, RTLM was a revelation—fresh, modern, and seemingly independent-minded. In self-aggrandizing fashion, its broadcasters vowed that, unlike Radio Muhabura and Radio Rwanda, the latter now compromised by partisan enemies and their supposed lies, RTLM offered a fair and balanced analysis of events. It told the truth. In an open letter to curry investors, Joseph Désiré Ruhigira, a retired military officer, wrote, “It has proven necessary and urgent to set up an organ which can not only present opposing viewpoints...but also serve in the fight for democracy and the defense of republicanism.”<sup>17</sup> The most popular broadcaster, Habimana Kantano, known for his brash comical style, said on November 24, 1993, “[The RPF] will hide the truth from you and RTLM will reveal it, even if it were to be in trouble because of that. That is our unique assignment.”<sup>18</sup> Other comparable statements were commonly made.

RTLM’s anti-establishment nature, however, was a façade. The station enjoyed the full cooperation and support of the MRND and CDR. Prunier characterizes RTLM as “the brainchild

---

<sup>15</sup> Des Forges 1999, p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> McCoy 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Kirschke 1996, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> RTLM Tape 0039, 24 November 1993.

of the CDR intellectuals.”<sup>19</sup> Joseph Serugendo, Head of Technical Services for ORINFOR, provided free technical service even though ORINFOR was a publically funded government entity. The station received free electricity, using power routed from the nearby residential compound of the President. Of the eight or so employees, most had previously worked for other government media services and continued to be beholden to the MRND and CDR. In all, there were 1,137 shareholders. Of those, 800 only owned one share, including Bikindi, at a cost of 5,000 Rwandan francs (less than ten dollars), but of the nine chief shareholders, those owning fifty or more shares, each were members of the MRND or CDR. President Habyarimana, in fact, owned the most shares of all.

### **The Legitimization of RTLM as a Source of Information and Analysis**

The anti-Tutsi content of RTLM’s broadcasts, at least during the time between its inception and the genocide, has been exaggerated in much of the literature on the genocide. Most of the taped recordings were destroyed when the RPF shelled the station in July 1994, but when perusing the transcripts of the remaining tapes, one finds that RTLM made few antagonistic references to Tutsi before the genocide. Its broadcasts consisted mainly of denouncing the RPF and the Arusha Accords while building up morale in the war against the RPF. Though Hitimana could occasionally be juvenile and Kantano a braggart and a hothead, the level of discourse was often quite respectable. Many of the points brought up by RTLM’s broadcasters were legitimate. For instance, the RPF was not negotiating in good faith in Arusha (not that the MRND was either). It did have a Zionist-like zeal to take over the country. It did break a cease-fire agreement. Its soldiers had murdered thousands of innocent Rwandans. The problem is that RTLM never reported honestly on the wrongs committed by the MRND and CDR leadership and the Rwandan military. Its accusations only pointed in one direction. Massacres of Tutsi and Hutu supportive of the Arusha Accords were swept under the carpet or misrepresented as battles between armed forces. The *Interahamwe* was exalted as a brave and honorable force that fought only the RPF in order to protect Rwandans.

On October 21, 1993, Melchior Ndadaye, the first democratically elected and first Hutu president of Burundi, was assassinated by Tutsi soldiers after only three months in office. Following his slaying, RTLM’s remarks began to grow more invective and paranoid. Regarding

---

<sup>19</sup> Prunier 1995, p. 88.



the assassination, for example, RTLM reported that Ndadaye had been castrated, an obvious allusion to practices carried out under the Tutsi-dominated monarchy. Ndadaye, however, was only stabbed in the chest with a bayonet. By falsely expounding on the manner of his death, RTLM drew symbolic comparisons between his Tutsi assassins and the monarchy, a commonly employed tactic that would cast suspicion on all Tutsi.<sup>20</sup>

Des Forges writes that from Ndadaye's assassination onward:

RTLM repeatedly and forcefully underlined many of the themes developed for years by the extremist written press, including the inherent differences between Hutu and Tutsi, the foreign origin of Tutsi and, hence, their lack of rights to claim to be Rwandan, the disproportionate share of wealth and power held by Tutsi and the horrors of past Tutsi rule. It continually stressed the need to be alert to Tutsi plots and possible attacks and demanded that Hutu prepare to "defend" themselves against the Tutsi threat.<sup>21</sup>

Not only that, RTLM also denounced Hutu politicians who supported the Arusha Accords and were amenable to RPF representation in the government. Broadcasters specifically mentioned the names of such political figures as Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, calling them enemies of the nation. Many of those identified as traitors by RTLM were killed within the first hours of the genocide, including the Prime Minister.

Yet, even following Ndadaye's assassination, the discourse on RTLM was often still quite tempered. Gahigi especially seemed to prefer a more refined tone. On December 12, 1993, he led a debate on the existence of ethnicity and the character of ethnic relations in Rwanda.<sup>22</sup> The debate brought up important, relevant issues regarding the cause of ethnic division and the proper path towards reconciliation, issues that resonate throughout Bikindi's songs as well. The four other participants included Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, Chairman of RTLM's Executive Committee; Vincent Ravi Rwabukwizi, a famed journalist supportive of the Arusha Accords; Charles Nkurunziza, Secretary General of the Government; and Marie-Claire Mbonampeka Mukamugema, the wife of the Minister of Justice. In the following excerpt, Barayagwiza has just countered Rwabukwizi's assertion that ethnicity is no longer socially relevant:

---

<sup>20</sup> Taylor 1999, pp. 137-39.

<sup>21</sup> Des Forges 2007, p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> RTLM Tape 0101, 12 December 1997.

Let me take my own example, for I was born of a Hutu; my father is a Hutu, my grandfather is a Hutu, my great-grandfather is a Hutu and all my mother's parents are Hutu. I can go up the genealogy of my family back to about the ninth generation. They are Hutu. They brought me up as a Hutu; I grew up in a Hutu culture. I was born before the 1959 Revolution; my father did forced labor... My mother used to weed in the fields of the Tutsi who were in power. My grandfather paid tribute money. I saw all those things, and when I asked them why they would go to cultivate for other people, weed other people's fields while our gardens were not well-maintained, they would tell me, "That is how things are; we must do this for the Tutsi." The Tutsi had to be brought up knowing that he was the chief, that the Hutu child was under his authority.

Even in the schools where we went to study—I personally walked for ten kilometers from my home, in the Busasamana region—each one of us had to carry what to eat, and we would be allowed time to eat at about midday. No Hutu would share his meal with a Tutsi; that was forbidden. It was inculcated in the Tutsi never to eat with Hutu, and we were told to fear the Tutsi. It was not because we did not want to eat with them, more so when they brought delicious food—potatoes baked in palm oil—while for us we brought boiled maize! How we wished to eat with them [\*laughs\*], but all in vain, because it was forbidden.

Barayagwiza's testimony certainly carries dangerous undertones. He generalizes about the character of Tutsi, dismissing those many Tutsi who were not wealthy and had little influence. But what he shares from his own experience was a fact of life for many Hutu who grew up under the monarchy. Compared to Tutsi in general, Hutu *were* relegated to the lower tiers of society and politics. Under the colonial-monarchial partnership, Tutsi were favored while many Hutu were forced to submit to an almost slave-like existence. Asked by Gahigi to comment on the existence of a distinct Hutu and Tutsi culture, Rwabukwizi responded:

No, I cannot deny the existence of those cultures when Barayagwiza is already a concrete example. Hutu culture, Hutu education, and Tutsi education do indeed exist. They do not only exist among the Hutu, but also among the Tutsi. Some Tutsi families tell their children that "those are Hutus; do not eat with them; do not drink the water they give you,

because they might poison you; they are very dirty; they do this and that... ” This type of education exists and it is deplorable...

... [Where I am from, we] were brought up...in the conviction that the Hutu and Tutsi notions were mere book theories that meant nothing in the Rwandan society. That is what I was saying; it is the problem that is eroding our society and even our country.

There were other areas of disagreement between the two, but their debate was nonetheless both respectful and nuanced. In the end, they agreed that there were longstanding problems between Hutu and Tutsi. Barayagwiza’s solution was for representatives to “hold a roundtable conference to discuss and come up with a common understanding on the basic guidelines conclusive to peaceful cohabitation.” Rwabukwizi indicated that the historical divisions could be overcome only by tossing off ethnicity altogether and regarding it as no longer relevant in modern Rwanda, a view shared by the RPF. Siding with Barayagwiza, Madam Mukamugema added:

[Ethnicity is] embedded in the culture, because the parents pass on the education to their children, but without any adversarial intentions. [Rwabukwizi] feels uneasy when he is told he is a Hutu and that another person is a Tutsi. He thinks that that is already the beginning of a conflict between the two groups. There should be no conflict between the two, but each individual must know both his ethnic group and his clan. And, as I said, when they come to the problem of power-sharing and the issue of ethnicity comes up, they should not brush it aside. On the contrary, they should accept it as such and even take it into consideration.

That last sentence could suggest that Mukamugema affirmed the ideology of *rubanda nyamwinshi*, the ideology that holds that Hutu should monopolize power since they comprise the majority of the population. Barayagwiza followed up, though, to state that the reason ethnicity should be acknowledged is not in order for Hutu to dominate the political sphere, but so that there is transparency in the government that allows people to observe whether political factions are favoring one ethnic group over another:

The only problem we have now is that this mentality is pitting us against each other because some people are trying to monopolize power. I said earlier that there are some people who deny that ethnic groups exist. Some others are even claiming that the ethnic groups have disappeared! All those people have one objective: to distract our attention while secretly they are trying to monopolize power...

Gahigi then interjected:

...that people want to conceal the ethnic problem so that the others do not know that they are looking for power... go ahead, Barayagwiza.

Barayagwiza continued:

Yes! Notable among them are the RPF people who are asking everybody to admit that the ethnic groups do not exist. And when one raises the issue, they say that such a person is “unpatriotic, an enemy of peace, whose aim is to divide the country into two camps.” However, it looks like right from the beginning of our discussion, we have proven that the ethnic groups do exist, that the ethnic problem does exist, but that today it is being linked to—by the way, it is not only today; this dates back a long time ago; it is associated with the quest for power.

The RPF claim that they are representing the Tutsis, but they deny that the Tutsis are in the minority. They are 9% of the population. The Hutus make up 80%! So, their conclusion is: “If we accepted that we are Tutsis and accepted the rules of democracy, and went to the polls, the Hutus will always have the upper hand and we shall never rule.” Look at what happened in Burundi: they also thought like that. Those who staged the *coup d'état* thought in the same way. Their mentality is like that of the *inyenzi* [“cockroaches,” referring here to the RPF], whose only target is power, yet they know very well that today, it is unacceptable to attain power without going through the democratic process...[\*inaudible\*]...They wonder: “How shall we go about acceding to power?” And they add: “The best way is to refute the existence of ethnic groups, so that when we are in power, nobody will say that it is a single ethnic group that is in power.” That is the problem we are facing now.

Gahigi then brought the debate to its fruition:

Yes, I think we have discussed this power struggle among the ethnic groups. First of all, all throughout the history of Rwanda, the Tutsis have always fought for this power. Charles talked of this struggle with regard to the Abega and the Abanyiginya. Later on, the Hutus woke up; I think he also talked about that. They woke up and staged the 1959 Revolution, saying: “We are also able to rule.” Then the conflict started from then, until this date. And Barayagwiza said that “the [RPF] are pretending that it is not an ethnic problem; and yet what is happening is that one ethnic group is intent on monopolizing power.”

I find the above conversation to be one of the more noteworthy sections in the large body of RTLM transcripts. Today, Rwandans continue to negotiate the social and political relevance of ethnicity, struggling even with whether ethnicity should be acknowledged or not, and whether the RPF is attempting to do away with it in order to mask ethnic favoritism on its part. It is a debate I came across several times throughout field research, though it usually takes place only in hushed quarters. As for the fates of two of the debate opponents: Barayagwiza was sentenced by the ICTR to thirty-five years in prison but died of liver failure in 2010. Rwabukwizi was shot dead in his front yard by FAR soldiers within the first week of the genocide.

Bikindi’s songs resonate with the views of Barayagwiza and some of the other panel members. In fact, during the latter half of the exchange, one of Bikindi’s songs, “Tuzakomeza Kururwanirira” (“We shall keep on fighting for our country”), was aired in the background. The following excerpt from “Intabaza” illustrates how Bikindi’s songs aligned with the views claiming that ethnicity should be acknowledged but should not determine political status:

**(SPOKEN DIALOGUE BETWEEN MUTABAZI AND BIRYABAYOBOKE) (11’23’):**

(105) **B:** *Nibaze! Bene Sebahinzi bagomba kumenya ko uru Rwanda rugizwe n’uturere twinshi, kandi ko utwo turerere aritwo turugira u Rwanda rugari rutuwe n’abanyarwanda.*

May they come! The children of the Father of Farmers must know that Rwanda is composed of several regions that make it the “Great Rwanda” inhabited by the Rwandan people.

(106) **M:** *Rwose!*

Indeed!

(107) **B:** *Bene Sebahinzi bagomba kumenya kandi ko abo banyarwanda batuye u Rwanda barimo amoko atatu: Gahutu, Gatwa na Gatutsi.*

The children of the Father of Farmers must know also that the Rwandans who inhabit Rwanda are comprised of three ethnic groups (*amoko*): Hutu, Twa, and Tutsi.

(108) *Ibyo ntibihinduka rwose.*

All those things cannot be changed.

(109) **M:** *Ibyo ntibihinduka .*

Those things cannot be changed.

(110) **B:** *Twese tugomba kwemera ko nta wasabye kuvuka ari umuhutu, umutwa cyangwa umututsi.*

All of us must realize that no one asked to be born a Hutu, Twa, or Tutsi.

(111) **M:** *None se?*

And so?

(112) **B:** *Bityo tukemera ko nta wusumba undi.*

Therefore, we must accept that no one is superior to another.

(113) *Tukemera ko nta wugomba kuryamira undi kandi ko inyungu za rubanda-nyamwinshi arizo zigomba gushyirwa imbere!*

We must accept that no one may oppress another and that priority must be given to the benefits of the majority people!

(114) **M:** *Rwose!*

Indeed!

The above debate also exemplifies the sort of content that tends to be ignored in scholarly analyses of RTLM. Too often, scholars take a line here and there where a broadcaster utters something truly despicable, and then uses these decontextualized lines to show how awful and destructive the station was. In the end, RTLM's broadcasters did seek to foment genocide, but when analyses focus on only a few lines, it misrepresents what listeners often heard and does a disservice to a better understanding of RTLM's effectiveness. Even during the genocide, vitriolic comments against Tutsi were usually couched in more high-minded rhetoric. The free-ranging, spirited nature of broadcasts won over an enthusiastic audience, but it was the high-minded context that legitimized the more extremist statements. If the broadcasters had done nothing but spend all their time shouting, "Tutsi are evil and should be killed!" then RTLM would not have had the power it did to influence thought, feeling, and behavior. The genocide

needed intellectual thrust, a rational motive, and RTLM's broadcasters, in conjunction with numerous journalists and politicians, provided that.

### **From Respectable Critique to Outright Hatred**

Once the genocide commenced, remarks calling for the genocide of Tutsi became far more pronounced. This leads to questions as to whether RTLM was leading the charge against Tutsi, or whether it was more the case that it was responding in either approval or disapproval of on-the-ground contingencies. Likely it was some combination of both. Sometime between April 6 and 8, just when Habyarimana was killed and genocide began to be carried out en masse, Hitimana delivered a caustic threat to anyone sympathetic to the RPF and called for his listeners to hunt down Tutsi and Hutu sympathizers (*ibyitso*, meant here as "accomplices"):

They will be struck by misfortune, they will be struck by misfortune, they will indeed be struck by misfortune! And you have clearly heard that those who desired it, those who desired and provoked it, are themselves being struck by misfortune, they themselves are being struck by misfortune. Kanyarengwe [Chairman of the RPF], a Hutu, has just died, Pasteur Bizimungu [a former MRND official who joined the RPF], a Hutu, has just died.<sup>23</sup> Whatever made them go and sign a blood pact with those who will exterminate us? What prompted them to do so? Whatever prompted them to do that? Aren't they [the RPF] the ones who have just killed them? Aren't they responsible for killing them? However, they themselves are being struck by misfortune at this moment, at this very minute, at this hour, at this moment that I am talking to you! You, the people living in Rugunga, those living over there in Kanogo, those living in Kanogo, in fact, those living in Mburabuturo, look in the woods of Mburabuturo, look carefully, see whether there are no cockroaches inside. Look carefully, check, see whether there are no cockroaches inside...<sup>24</sup>

The following demonstrates the extremes to which RTLM's rhetoric could descend (date of broadcast and identity of broadcaster unspecified):

---

<sup>23</sup> These men had not died; rather, Kantano was predicting their deaths because they were Hutu who had allied with the RPF.

<sup>24</sup> RTLM Tape 0122, 6-8 April 1994.

These people are a dirty race. We have to exterminate them. We must get rid of them. This is the only solution. These cockroaches who called me, where did they go? They surely must be exterminated. Let's sing: [\*singing\*] Let us rejoice, friends! The cockroaches have been exterminated! Let us rejoice, friends! God is never wrong! [\*continues singing\*]<sup>25</sup>

As with Ndadaye's assassins, RTLM continued to exaggerate and mischaracterize the actions of the RPF in gruesome detail in order to instill fear in its audience. The manner in which RPF killings were described by the broadcasters was, in fact, imitated by the most extreme *génocidaires* when they tortured and killed Tutsi. Chrétien cites a June 14, 1994 broadcast:

...[The RPF] cruelly kills mankind...They kill by dissecting...By extracting various organs from the body...for example, by taking the heart, the liver, the stomach...[the RPF] eats men.<sup>26</sup>

RTLM also used its call-in format to coordinate attacks. Listeners would call in to inform other listeners where Tutsi were hiding. The broadcasters would then extol any listeners in the area to seek out these Tutsi and kill them. Sixbert Musangamfura, a well-known journalist and Kagame's head of civilian intelligence in the early 1990s, testified to Reporters Without Borders:

I listened to [RTLM] constantly because every time RTLM alluded to someone, you were sure to see the *Interahamwe* head out shortly afterwards. Also, people who were prudent absolutely needed to listen to this station in case they were mentioned. [If this happened], you knew you had to change your address that day.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Accessed on 20 October 2012 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeVa6U9yLCc>.

<sup>26</sup> Chrétien 1995, p. 162; translated and cited by Kirschke 1996, p. 112.

<sup>27</sup> Kirschke 1996, p. 56.



## Arguments Concerning the Effectiveness of RTLM in Inciting Genocide

Scholarship conducted in the immediate aftermath of the genocide tends to assume that RTLM played a major role in inciting the genocide. Chrétien's 1995 analysis provided the iconic image of *Interahamwe* members walking about with *panga* in one hand and radio in the other pressed up against their ear. His analysis assumes that the ideology of the *génocidaires* was directly shaped by RTLM, including Bikindi's songs, and that they were all but taking their orders from the broadcasters. Other genocide scholars have characterized the role of the radio in similar fashion.

More recently, several scholars have questioned the efficacy of the radio in inciting genocide. Richard Carver acknowledges that RTLM disseminated a hateful message but denies any linear causal link between the radio and the genocide. In a sneering tone, he stated in a 1996 speech delivered at the Freedom of Expression Institute in Johannesburg:

So did the RTLM incite genocide? If we are talking about what happened after 6 April, then the term "incitement" seems scarcely adequate. RTLM did not incite genocide so much as organize it. But considering the period before 6 April—the time when genocide might have been prevented—things are much less clear.

In most legal definitions of incitement it is not necessary that the words spoken were the actual proximate cause of the actions committed—or even that the actions actually took place. The requirement would be simply that there was the necessary intent and the likelihood that the actions could be caused. But it seems to me in the Rwandan case that a fundamental question must be answered. Do we think that RTLM was a cause of the genocide? Almost everything written on the role of the RTLM says essentially the following: RTLM broadcast hate propaganda; there was a genocide; therefore the one caused the other. If we were talking about almost any other issue—violence on television, pornography or whatever—those arguing in favour of a ban would attempt to demonstrate at least a cursory link between the broadcast and the action. There is now abundant research to suggest that it is impossible to draw a linear causal link between what people see or hear in the media and how they behave. But because it is a genocide we abandon our critical faculties.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup>Richard Carver, "Shooting the Messenger: the Media, Ethnicity, and Political Violence in Africa." Speech delivered at the Annual General Meeting of the Freedom of Expression Institute, Johannesburg, South Africa, 23 May 1996. He elaborates on his argument in "Neutralising the Voices of Hate: Broadcasting and Genocide," in ed.

As discussed in the opening of this chapter, Mironko found little evidence, based on interviews with genocide convicts, that the radio had much impact in rural areas. Scott Straus's research is based on oral surveys conducted with around two hundred genocide convicts, and based on their responses, he came to similar conclusions. Very few responded that the radio or other means of propaganda played any role in their actions. Such methodologies, though, are problematic. As shown in the overview of Bikindi's trial, some convicts have motive to cast blame on others and to conceal their own beliefs, motives, and actions. Most people are also not going to admit that they believe what they believe and do what they do because they are following what they were told on the radio or television. People prefer to think of themselves as independent rational actors making informed choices. To admit to being brainwashed is humiliating. Writing in the early 1960s, the famous French theologian and philosopher, Jacques Ellul, wrote a seminal work on the purposes, tactics, and effects of propaganda. He too problematized such analyses of propaganda based only on surveys or brief interviews, writing, "Let us note here...how badly equipped opinion surveys are to gauge propaganda...Simply to ask an individual if he believes this or that, or if he has this or that idea, gives absolutely no indication of what behavior he will adopt or what action he will take."<sup>29</sup>

Darryl Li correctly argues that to understand what impact, if any, RTLM had in inciting genocide, analysis needs to be more audience-centered, moving beyond what was uttered by broadcasters to focus on what listeners subjectively received and how they responded to the broadcasts. He states:

RTLM's role in the genocide can be elucidated through three aspects: ideologically, it played on existing dominant discourses in Rwandan public life for the purposes of encouraging listeners to participate in the killings; performatively, the station's animateurs skillfully exploited the possibilities of the medium to create a dynamic relationship with and among listeners, and, finally, RTLM helped the Rwandan state

---

Firoze Manji and Patrick Burnett, ed., *African Voices on Development and Social Justice: Editorials from Pambazuka News* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2004), pp. 69-73.

<sup>29</sup> Ellul, Jacques. *Propaganda: the Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc [Vintage Books Edition], 1965/1973), p. 25.

appropriate one of the most innocuous aspects of everyday life [the radio] in the service of genocide.<sup>30</sup>

The three points outlined by Li are certainly worthy of consideration, but they still do not get at the fundamental question of how RTLM affected its listeners. His analysis, valuable as it is, ultimately remains in the broadcasting booth. Without more transparency, self-reflection, and forthrightness on the part of *génocidaires*, I am not sure how this issue can be adequately addressed. Ultimately, researchers are left to speculate. David Yanagizawa-Drott, meanwhile, conducted an extensive statistical analysis relating the number of genocide victims to RTLM's coverage. He found that in villages that had full coverage compared to those that had none, there was a 65% to 77% increase in the number of victims.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Workings of Propaganda**

One of the problems with arguments claiming that RTLM did little to influence Hutu to kill is that they misconstrue the way in which propaganda works. For one thing, propaganda only needs a small receptive audience, a handful of true believers, to be effective. A small group of politically powerful, enraged, armed individuals can quickly and easily subdue a large, complacent, and fearful population into obedience, preventing any resistance from organizing. Most *génocidaires* indeed probably were motivated by coercion and threats made by local political and military bosses or by militants who were true believers in the cause. Straus reports that 64.1% of his survey informants indicated they were motivated by “intra-Hutu coercion” and another 22% by “war-related fear and combativeness.”

Also, rarely is the purpose of propaganda to persuade its audience to come to beliefs opposite of those they had before. Most *génocidaires* obviously did not listen to RTLM and think, “Ah, Tutsi are evil; I did not realize this; let's go kill them!” Eric Hoffer writes:

The truth seems to be that propaganda on its own cannot force its way into unwilling minds; neither can it inculcate something wholly new; nor can it keep people persuaded once they have ceased to believe. It penetrates only into minds already open, and rather

---

<sup>30</sup> Li 2007, pp. 90-91.

<sup>31</sup> David Yanagizawa-Drott, *Propaganda and Conflict: Theory and Evidence from the Rwandan Genocide* (Harvard Kennedy School, 2010). Available at: [www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/dyanagi/Research/RwandaDYD.pdf](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/dyanagi/Research/RwandaDYD.pdf).

than instill opinion, it articulates and justifies opinions already present in the minds of its recipients. The gifted propagandist brings to a boil ideas and passions already simmering in the minds of his hearers. He echoes their innermost feelings. Where opinion is not coerced, people can be made to believe only in what they already “know.”

Propaganda by itself succeeds mainly with the frustrated. Their throbbing fears, hopes, and passions crowd at the portals of their senses and get between them and the outside world. They cannot see but what they have already imagined, and it is the music of their own souls they hear in the impassioned words of the propagandist. Indeed, it is easier for the frustrated to detect in their own imaginings and hear the echo of their own musings in impassioned double-talk and sonorous refrains than in precise words joined together with faultless logic...Propaganda thus serves more to justify ourselves than to convince others.<sup>32</sup>

The power of RTLTM was not in its ability to persuade people to commit genocide who otherwise would have never considered it; it was in its ability to arouse anger, fear, and hatred in those who were already suspicious of Tutsi and saw them as a threat to their own prosperity, well-being, and/or social and political advancement.

Ellul observed that for propaganda to be at its most effective, it “must be total,”<sup>33</sup> meaning that it must exploit all mediated forms of communication. RTLTM was just one component of a hydra-headed propaganda campaign. There were the many political rallies and speeches where MRND and CDR officials speechified to the evils of the old monarchy, the Tutsi regime in Burundi, the RPF, and by association, all Tutsi. There were the dozens of Hutu Power news journals, most notably *Kangura*, that had been publishing for years before the advent of RTLTM. In a December 1990 issue, *Kangura*'s editor, Hassan Ngeze, published the notorious “Hutu Ten Commandments”:

1. Every Hutu should know that a Tutsi woman, whoever she is, works for the interest of her Tutsi ethnic group. As a result, we shall consider a traitor any Hutu who marries a Tutsi woman, befriends a Tutsi woman, or employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or a concubine.

---

<sup>32</sup> Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers [First Perennial Modern Classics Edition], 1951/2010), pp. 105-7

<sup>33</sup> Ellul 1965, p. 9.

2. Every Hutu should know that our Hutu daughters are more suitable and conscientious in their role as woman, wife, and mother of the family. Are they not beautiful, good secretaries and more honest?
3. Hutu women, be vigilant and try to bring your husbands, brothers, and sons back to reason.
4. Every Hutu should know that every Tutsi is dishonest in business. His only aim is the supremacy of his ethnic group. As a result, any Hutu who does the following is a traitor: makes a partnership with Tutsi in business, invests his money or the government's money in a Tutsi enterprise, lends or borrows money from a Tutsi, gives favours to Tutsi in business (obtaining import licenses, bank loans, construction sites, public markets, etc.).
5. All strategic positions, political, administrative, economic, military and security should be entrusted only to Hutu.
6. The education sector (school pupils, students, teachers) must be majority Hutu.
7. The Rwandan Armed Forces should be exclusively Hutu. The experience of the October 1990 war has taught us a lesson. No member of the military shall marry a Tutsi.
8. The Hutu should stop having mercy on the Tutsi.
9. The Hutu, wherever they are, must have unity and solidarity and be concerned with the fate of their Hutu brothers. The Hutu inside and outside Rwanda must constantly look for friends and allies for the Hutu cause, starting with their Hutu brothers. They must constantly counteract Tutsi propaganda. The Hutu must be firm and vigilant against their common Tutsi enemy.
10. The Social Revolution of 1959, the Referendum of 1961, and the Hutu Ideology, must be taught to every Hutu at every level. Every Hutu must spread this ideology widely. Any Hutu who persecutes his brother Hutu for having read, spread, and taught this ideology is a traitor.<sup>34</sup>

Few Rwandans, though, were aware of Ngeze's loathsome editorial. Straus identifies only 2.8% of his informants who had ever heard of it.<sup>35</sup> Likely, *Kangura* was aimed more at well-educated, extremist elites—those who, despite their small numbers, played a major role in guiding or coercing others to commit genocide. As for *Kangura*, it was, like RTLM, just one seed among many.

---

<sup>34</sup> Cited in John A. Berry and Carol Pott Berry (eds.), *Genocide in Rwanda: A Collective Memory* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1999), pp. 113–115.

<sup>35</sup> Straus 2006, p. 130.

Ellul also writes that, in order for propaganda to succeed, its target audience must be conditioned by pre-propaganda, described as “propaganda that is sociological in character, slow, general, seeking to create a climate, an atmosphere of favorable preliminary attitudes... which, without direct or noticeable aggression, is limited to creating ambiguities... and spreading images, apparently without purpose.”<sup>36</sup> Examples of pre-propaganda were prevalent throughout the decades before the genocide. There were the ethnic quota policies that posited Tutsi as second-class citizens. There were stereotypical views of Tutsi as selfish, snobbish, and devious, and Hutu as dim-witted that had that long circulated among the population. These stereotypes were codified in proverbs (*imigani y'imigenurano*) such as the following:

*Akari mu nda y'umututsi umuhutu ntakamenya.*

What is in the belly of a Tutsi a Hutu does not know.

*Umututsi umukura ihwa akagusembura ngo murwane.*

You pull a thorn from a Tutsi's body, and he incites you to fight.

*Umututsi aguhisha ko yakwanze ukamuhisha ko wabimenye.*

A Tutsi hides [the fact] that he hates you; you hide [the fact] that you know it.

*Umututsi umuvura imisuha akakwendera umugore.*

You cure a Tutsi of a disease of his testicles, and he sleeps with your wife.

*Vuna umwanzi si vuna umututsi.*

Breaking [the bones of] an enemy is not breaking [the bones of] a Tutsi.

(Meaning, that it is very difficult to finish off a Tutsi)

*Inkunguzi y'umuhutu yivuga mu batutsi.*

A Hutu who wants to attract fate [i.e., death or misfortune] boasts before Tutsis.

*Ubwenge bw'umuhutu buheza inyuma y'itama.*

The intelligence of Hutu ends just behind the cheek.

---

<sup>36</sup> Ellul 1965, p. 15.

*Umuhutu yabonye urupfu ruhise ati, garuka undarire, rugarutse rumumarira abana.*

A Hutu saw death passing by him and said to come back to be my night watchman. When death came back, it took all his children.

I learned of these proverbs from Jeanette and Augustin, who shared them with me at my request. When I asked them how old they were, the couple admitted that they did not know but had heard them from their elders. Considering that Jeanette and Augustin are probably in their early fifties, this would put the origins of these proverbs in the colonial-monarchical era at the latest. They may well be much older than that.

Stereotypical views of Hutu and Tutsi did not emerge in a vacuum; they evolved in response to external circumstances. Hutu who had grown up under the scourging whip of the Tutsi monarchy or who fled to Rwanda from Burundi when Hutu were being massacred there shared their experiences with their peers and with the younger generations. Jean Hatzfeld, a French journalist who conducted in-depth interviews with genocide convicts, describes one such informant who was twenty-six-years-old at the time King Rudahigwa died. Hatzfeld writes, “He was quite familiar with life under the monarchy, and before the genocide he played the role of an embittered elder among his group of friends, preserving a kind of rancid memory of the bad times.”<sup>37</sup>

Despite the pervasiveness of the propaganda campaign in the early 1990s, especially in 1993 and 1994, and the marked existence of pre-propaganda manifest in laws and common discourse, only a minority of Hutu, likely around 10%, participated in the genocide.<sup>38</sup> This is a testament to the fact that, for the most part, ordinary Hutu and Tutsi co-existed peacefully. Based on their everyday experiences, most Hutu refused to believe that their Tutsi neighbors were the devils they were made out to be.<sup>39</sup> As Jeanette and Augustin told me, “We had many Tutsi friends...some were killed during genocide...we never had any problem with Tutsi.” This is why, at first, many of the *génocidaires* had to be coerced into killing, because anti-Tutsi rhetoric simply did not match reality. Threats and intimidation were necessary to overcome their cognitive dissonance. I believe anti-Tutsi propaganda was thus aimed at the following

---

<sup>37</sup> Hatzfeld 2003 [2005], p. 28

<sup>38</sup> See Straus 2004, discussed on p. 95.

<sup>39</sup> The claim by the RPF that three million Hutu participated in the genocide is absurd and has been dismantled by a number of objective statistical analyses; see Chapter 1, fn. 27.

audiences: Hutu political and military elites; common soldiers; *Interahamwe* and other youth brigades; Hutu refugees from Burundi; Hutu in northern Rwanda who had been displaced from their homes by the RPF attacks; and any other Hutu who were predisposed towards hating Tutsi and might be willing to attack them.

Propaganda was also aimed, though, at those who had to be coerced into killing. At first, many of *génocidaires* felt shocked and ashamed by what they did. Propaganda assuaged their by guilt by rationalizing their actions, valorizing them, and involving them in “the greater struggle.” Hoffer writes that, “In the case of the coerced... violence can beget fanaticism... the coerced convert is often as fanatical in his adherence to the new faith as the persuaded convert, and sometimes even more so.”<sup>40</sup> This aligns with Hatzfeld’s findings among his informants, several of whom indicated that, at first, they did not want to kill, but once they did, they got a taste for it and began to kill with more relish.

### **A Narrative of Victimhood and Victory**

Several genocide scholars have pointed out that the motivations for participating in the genocide were multi-determined. However, in integrating the statements made on RTLM and in political speeches, news journals, and Bikindi’s lyrics, as well as anti-Tutsi attitudes implicated in laws and everyday discourse, a narrative of Hutu victimization at the hands of Tutsi becomes prominent. It is the narrative of victimhood and victory expressed in Bikindi’s songs that I believe made them especially powerful as genocidal propaganda, even if listeners could not understand every word or decipher every metaphor and allusional reference, and again, even if this was not Bikindi’s intent. On the importance of narrativity to incite mass violence, Hoffer writes:

Dying and killing seem easy when they are part of a ritual, ceremonial, dramatic performance or game. There is need for some kind of make-believe in order to face death unflinchingly. To our real, naked selves there is not a thing on earth or in heaven worth dying for. It is only when we see ourselves as actors in a staged (and therefore unreal) performance that death loses its frightfulness and finality and becomes an act of make-believe and a theatrical gesture. It is one of the main tasks of a real leader to mask the

---

<sup>40</sup> Hoffer 1951, p. 107.



grim reality of dying and killing by evoking in his followers the illusion that they are participating in a grandiose spectacle, a solemn or light-hearted dramatic performance.<sup>41</sup>

Narrativity, the perception of life as a dramatic performance, is one of the most powerful resources at the disposal of propagandists. The necessary material for narrative propaganda already exists in the negative historical experiences of its audience and their ancestors. Propagandists do not have to create new ideas and try to instill them; they merely need to accentuate those negative experiences and frame them in a narrative construct in such a way as to glorify their audience and cast blame on others. Ellul broadly delineates two forms of propaganda: propaganda of agitation and integration.<sup>42</sup> The former primarily uses the rhetoric of victimhood and demonization to arouse hatred in its audience of a certain category of people, now defined as their enemy. The latter uses the rhetoric of victory and superiority to construct a sense of shared identity *vis-à-vis* this other category of people. Narrativity achieves both agitation and integration.

Jonathan Lonsdale, an Africanist historian who specializes in ethnic conflict in Kenya, draws upon similar dynamics of agitation and integration to conceptualize the construction of ethnicity and how it may be deployed for political ends. He articulates two dialectical forces in play, which he terms “political tribalism” and “moral ethnicity.” Moral ethnicity, Lonsdale states, is “a process of ‘ourselves-ing’,” and political tribalism is “one of ‘othering’.”<sup>43</sup> He goes on to elaborate, “Moral ethnicity arises out of internal discourses of social responsibility.”<sup>44</sup> It connects to a “sense of societal renegotiation of what one ‘ought or ought not to do or believe’ in relation to kin and neighbors, patrons and clients.”<sup>45</sup> “Political tribalism,” in contrast, “determines how ‘we’ behave in relation to ‘others’ in the arena of a multi-ethnic state.”<sup>46</sup> It is “the obverse side of moral ethnicity, [governing] external relations with other perceived ethnic groups, now visualized as bounded constituencies or ‘tribes’.”<sup>47</sup> Moral ethnicity appears to develop from the ground up through the everyday lived experiences of virtuous expectations and

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 66-67.

<sup>42</sup> Ellul 1965, pp. 70-79.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Lonsdale. “Moral and Political Arguments in Kenya.” In *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004), p. 76.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

reciprocal obligations as understood by a particular social group. Political tribalism, on the other hand, is a top-down imposition, a contrivance of social factioning by political elites for the purposes of consolidating power. Critical, though, is that both the integrative and factioning effects of these processes are usually concealed. Political tribalism often depends upon moral ethnicity in order to gain traction and become an effective tool for bolstering power. Moral ethnicity often develops as a result of politically tribalizing efforts.

Narrative rhetoric is one of the more powerful ways of both concealing and connecting the processes of moral ethnicity and political tribalism; that is, of integrating a group of people by producing antagonistic feelings towards another group, but doing so covertly and thus more effectively. Lonsdale, in fact, defines ethnicity as “a community that mythifies diverse pasts into a common history, [in order to] face up to the present.”<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, ethnicity is not only a matter of heredity or shared cultural practices; it is a matter of a shared story that binds a group of people together and situates them in a particular way within the world.

There is broad consensus among many identity theorists that narrativity plays a role in the development of identity.<sup>49</sup> Oliver Sacks summarizes this view as follows:

We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative—whose continuity, whose sense, *is* our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives, a ‘narrative’, and this narrative *is* us, our identities. If we wish to know about a man, we ask ‘what is his story—his real, inmost story?’—for each of us *is* a biography, a story. Each of us *is* a singular narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us—through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions; and, not least, our discourse, our spoken narrations. Biologically, physiologically, we are not so different from each other; historically, as narratives—we are each of us unique. [emphasis his]<sup>50</sup>

Underlying the narrative identity thesis is the assumption that people require a sense of causality in order to function in life, and that narrativity meets this need. People construct self-narratives that place past and present experiences and anticipated future experiences in causal

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>49</sup> For specific examples of scholars promoting the narrative identity thesis, see Bruner 1987 and Dennett 1988. Taylor 1989 and Schechtman 1997, though more wide-ranging in their theorization of identity, still allude to the self as “an unfolding story” or drama.

<sup>50</sup> Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales* (New York: Touchstone [First Touchstone Edition], 1998): 110-11.

relationship to one another. Doing so renders life coherent, enabling people to make sense of themselves and their circumstances. Not only does it make sense of the past, it also gives people a sense that they can predict future outcomes, and therefore narrativity provides some sense of control and security. Theorists who hold some version of the narrative identity thesis may admit that people are not always consciously aware of their life narratives, but such theorists often follow this up with the insistence that people ought to be, arguing that an awareness of and an ability to articulate one's life narrative is necessary for the self-understanding and positive self-development required to lead a fully realized and more meaningful life

In a polemic article railing against the narrative identity thesis, Galen Strawson<sup>51</sup> counters two assumptions on the part of many identity theorists "that all normal non-pathological human beings are naturally narrative and also that narrativity is crucial to a good life."<sup>52</sup> He argues that these assumptions "hinder human self-understanding, close down important avenues of thought, impoverish our grasp of ethical possibilities, needlessly and wrongly distress those who do not fit their model, and are potentially destructive in psychotherapeutic contexts."<sup>53</sup> According to his view, for many people identity is a more synchronic, episodic phenomenon, not based on some grand narrative, but instead unfolding over time based on how people relate and respond to each present moment. For sure, people may occasionally reminisce or observe traditions that consciously connect them to a historical continuum, but in terms of day-by-day, moment-by-moment living, this is not usually the case. People mostly go about their lives, not really thinking about any sort of self-narrative at all. Even as people are cognizant of their past, they do not usually impose some grand narrative scheme upon it. They view their past as a series of episodes, with the present experienced as just another episode. These episodes play some determinative role in how people will respond to present circumstances (e.g., "I was bit by a dog as a child, and now I'm afraid of dogs"), but these episodes are not all intrinsically and causally related. Strawson does not refute that narrativity may play a role in the development of identity. He acknowledges that narrative modes of self-understanding and self-representation may even be common, but that this is not the result of some natural cognitive impulse in human beings.

Strawson's critique of the narrative identity thesis bears important implications for analyzing the use and efficacy of narrative discourse in propaganda. First, if people are not

---

<sup>51</sup> Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity," in *Ratio (new series)* XVII (4 December 2004), pp. 428-452.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 429.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

naturally inclined towards narrative modes of self-understanding and self-representation, and yet this is still a common phenomenon, then it follows that an external agent—a politician, priest, psychotherapist, or propagandist—may be necessary to introduce a narrative scheme and encourage a person or a group of people to see their life as a story. Second, if narrative modes of self-understanding and self-representation are indeed common, this is perhaps because narrativity is so capable of providing that sense of coherence, order, and predictability that humans crave.<sup>54</sup> Narrativity may be especially compelling as a mode of self-understanding and self-representation during times of crisis, disorder, and unpredictability as was the case in Rwanda in the early 1990s. Narrativity also often tends to be invoked among people groups who are or have been historically marginalized or oppressed. Liisa Malkki discovered this when conducting field research among Burundian Hutu refugees in Tanzania.<sup>55</sup> Those who had successfully integrated into urban society, who had landed jobs and were able to live more or less complacent lives, showed little interest in their history as Hutu. In contrast, Hutu still living in the squalid, dangerous conditions of the refugee camps displayed an obsession with their past, constructing elaborate “mythico-histories,” as Malkki calls them, that underscored their disenfranchisement at the hands of Tutsi and destined their return to their homeland. This was a dynamic similar to that of Tutsi exiles living in Uganda who would one day form the RPF. Following from this, the third point is that narrativity is powerful because it plays to the ego; people are usually the central protagonists of their story, either as hero or victim. As such, narrativity may confer certain psychological advantages, a finding that has given rise to a whole school of psychotherapy based on clients constructing empowering self-narratives.<sup>56</sup> In the best of circumstances, self-narrativity may help people develop self-respect and inner strength as they come to realize what they have lived through and survived. But self-narrativity can also lead to self-pity, a sense of victimhood, egotism, and demonization of others.

This leads to the fourth point, one based on Strawson’s critique of the assumption that “narrativity is crucial to a good life.” A significant problem with narrativity as a foundation for identity formation is its totally self-referent and self-involved quality. The self-narrating person or group of people is always at the center of their story, and this tends to devalue the experiences

---

<sup>54</sup> For a far-ranging treatise on this phenomenon, see Thomas Gilovich, *How We Know What isn’t So: the Fallibility of Human Reason in Everyday Life* (Free Press, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> Malkki 1995.

<sup>56</sup> See Michael White and David Epston, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (New York: W. W. Northon & Co., 1990) and Michael White, *Maps of Narrative Practice* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007).

and perspectives of others. Integral to narrativity is what Paul Ricoeur termed “emplotment,”<sup>57</sup> the process by which various events are imagined into a coherent story. Through emplotment, time and place are transformed into a setting, people are transformed into characters, and their interactions with one another and with the environment are transformed into a plot. There is an inherent tendency in the process of emplotment to assign people to the roles of protagonists and antagonists and to conceive of a plot that justifies punishment and/or elimination of the latter. Strawson insightfully observes that on a collective level, narrative-driven identity is a characteristic feature of what he calls “revenge cultures.” Understood as the result of collective narrativizing, ethnic identity too carries the danger of being exclusionary and chauvinistic in that it collectively constitutes its members as the protagonist of a narrative *vis-à-vis* other competing ethnic groups.

Of the many factors underlying the Rwandan genocide, one was a culture of revenge that came to unify a powerful, vocal minority of the Hutu population. This developed around a metanarrative<sup>58</sup> or mytho-historical narrative in which Hutu were cast as the longtime sufferers of Tutsi oppression, that Hutu had finally won their freedom from Tutsi by killing them or chasing them out of Rwanda, but that Tutsi, through the RPF, were scheming to reclaim power. To be a Hutu, then, meant to believe one’s self a victim and to believe that Tutsi were the victimizers. Mamdani regards the identities of Hutu and Tutsi ultimately as political identities. He gets to the substance of this when he writes:

If it is the struggle for power that explains the motivation of those who crafted the genocide, then it is the combined fear of a return to servitude and of reprisals thereafter that energized the foot soldiers of the genocide. The irony is that—whether in the Church, in hospitals, or in human rights groups, as in fields and homes—the perpetrators of the genocide saw themselves as the true victims of an *ongoing political drama*, victims of yesterday who may yet be victims again. That moral certainty explains the easy transition from yesterday’s victims to killers the morning after.<sup>59</sup> [emphasis mine]

---

<sup>57</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Vol. I*, transl. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>58</sup> “Metanarrative” is defined by John Stephens and Robyn McCallum as “a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience.” See *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarrative in Children’s Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Mamdani 2001, p. 233.

The narrative of Hutu victimhood espoused in the early 1990s was also a narrative of victory. This is another powerful feature of narrative-based propaganda, for without hope, people are less prone to action. Writing during the early stages of the Cold War, Hoffer predicted that:

If the Communists win Europe and a large part of the world, it will not be because they know how to stir up discontent or how to infect people with hatred, but because they know how to preach hope.<sup>60</sup>

Bikindi's songs present a narrative of victimhood and victory. It may not have been his intent to cast all Hutu in the roles of protagonist and all Tutsi as antagonist. Indeed, many listeners resisted this impugning of roles, or if they accepted some version of it, they did not view all Tutsi as a threat. But heard against the backdrop of anti-Tutsi narrative discourse prevalent on the radio, in newspapers, and in speeches given by political elites, it is easy to see why many interpreted his songs as expressions of Hutu solidarity in the face of Tutsi adversaries.

---

<sup>60</sup> Hoffer 1951, p. 9.

**CHAPTER 7:**  
**MUSIC, REMEMBRANCE, SELF-NARRATIVITY, AND HEALING  
AMONG FIVE GENOCIDE SURVIVORS**

*Akabi gasekwa nkakeza.*  
(“The bad is laughed at as the good.”)

—Kinyarwanda proverb

Conflicting views over Bikindi and his music are embedded in broader social tensions that persist along the lines of ethnicity, relationship to state power, and people’s own experiences of the genocide and its aftermath. Given the causality of the genocide and the social and political problems that have developed in its aftermath, this is not surprising. What I did find surprising during field research was a passionate desire on the part of some participants to once again listen to, engage with, and own Bikindi’s music, a desire that cut across ethnicity, political views, and experiences of the genocide and its aftermath. Due to the strong indexical linkages between the songs and the genocide, I expected that hearing them again would stir up painful memories and uncomfortable feelings for many listeners. This was sometimes the case, but in other cases, participants reacted to the songs with a mixture of curiosity, laughter, amazement, wonder, and even joy.

So far this dissertation has mainly focused on the discursive responses to Bikindi’s music. I now turn to the phenomenological experience of listening in which various cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses are emphasized. Perhaps more than discursive responses, the phenomenological experience of listening should have an important bearing on assessing the moral and ethical implications of Bikindi’s music. After all, what is more important: what a person thinks about the songs, or how the songs actually affect a person?

This chapter presents four case studies involving three individual participants and one couple, each of whom claimed to somehow benefit from listening to, engaging with, and owning Bikindi’s songs. In the first case, a middle-aged pastor and genocide survivor named Julius is overcome with nostalgia upon once again confronting the songs. They also provoke feelings of celebration as they cause him to reflect upon his survival. The second case involves a former politician named Pierre who witnessed the gruesome murder of his fiancée and was himself

imprisoned, maimed, and psychologically tortured. His re-encounter with Bikindi's music invokes memories that instigate a process of self-narrativity in which he recounts and shares what he endured, a potentially potent form of therapy for people who have experienced traumatic events. Paired with this, the third case study involves a young man named Innocent who, as a child, was orphaned during the genocide, witnessed numerous killings including those of fellow children, and also barely survived. For Innocent, the mere opportunity to once again listen to Bikindi's music also provided an opportunity for self-narrativity, but unlike Pierre, he insisted on telling his story before listening. For Pierre, the songs acted as a catalyst for the work of memory and self-narrativity, but for Innocent, listening to them after telling his story provided catharsis, bringing some sensorial reality of his testimony to the fore of his consciousness. Finally, the fourth case study focuses on Jeanette and Augustin, my dear friends and former refugees, now U.S. citizens, who fled Rwanda out of fear of persecution by the RPF. Though they had been in possession of the songs for years, they had rarely troubled to listen to them. The discussions and collaborative analysis we engaged in over the course of three years also brought them some measure of healing. As Jeanette would explain, it helped them realize that it was not "so hard to go back to 1994." In all four case studies, engaging with Bikindi's songs also provided further understanding of the causality of the genocide and with this, further comprehension of their own experiences and situations.

### **Case Study 1: Julius**

As soon as he hit the play button on my iPod, Julius began to laugh, and not just any laugh, but a chattering outburst that ricocheted off the concrete walls of the guesthouse's living room like machine gun fire. His eyes bulged from their sockets, his jaw was locked in a grimace, and he slowly nodded back and forth in astonishment as he continued to laugh. He was in a state of near hysteria.

"Pastor?" I began hesitantly, for this was not at all the reaction I expected from my normally mild-mannered friend. "Pastor, why are you laughing?"

After taking a moment to collect himself, he replied breathlessly, "Ahhh! Because this music—it takes me back to 1994!"

"You mean...back to the war? The genocide?"

"Yes, back to 1994!"



“But Pastor, that was a nightmare. How can you be laughing like this?”

He calmed down some and replied, “Yes, it’s true, but I was, you know, a young man then. I had just been married. I was in love. This music reminds me of that time, the time of my youth.”

Julius had not heard Bikindi’s songs in the fourteen years since the genocide, not until I shared them with him during that otherwise quiet morning as we sat around the breakfast table. It was late May 2008, about a week after I had arrived in Rwanda for the first time. Julius was the first Tutsi survivor of the genocide with whom I had the opportunity to share Bikindi’s songs. He had arrived the evening before to teach for a week at the Bible school that was affiliated with the guesthouse. Upon meeting him, I sensed a keen intellect and a scholarly disposition. Fluent in English and French, he spent much of what little money he made on books, especially books related to African history. He was probably in his mid-forties to early-fifties, a serious man, but relaxed and easily approachable. We quickly became friends.

That first morning, after we sat down for breakfast and blessed the meal, I described my research to him. His eyes lit up. I asked him if he would be interested in listening to Bikindi’s songs. “Please,” he said, “I would very much like to hear Bikindi’s music.”

“Are you sure it won’t disturb you?”

“No, no, it’s no problem. Please, let me listen.”

I cued up “Intabaza” on my iPod and handed it over to him. “Here, just press this button when you’re ready.”

He slipped the earphones into his ears, hit play, and immediately began to laugh.

Even Roberta, the young woman who managed the guest house, was taken aback. “Pastor!” she exclaimed in mock fright, “What is the matter with you?! I think this Bikindi is making you somehow craaaazy!!!”

He just sighed and kept on listening and laughing.

I was not sure exactly what reaction I expected, but this was certainly not it. I suppose I expected his response to be rather glum or perhaps angry. I even worried that listening to Bikindi’s songs could trigger some sort of post-traumatic episode—as I said, he was the first genocide survivor with whom I shared the songs. Obviously, though, this was not the case. I wondered if perhaps he had not really suffered that terrible an ordeal during the genocide, but I would soon learn that this was not the case either.

After breakfast, and after he had collected himself, Julius asked if he could borrow my iPod so that he could keep listening to Bikindi's songs. "And so that I can keep remembering," he said.

"Of course," I told him, "just, when the batteries die, let me know so that I can recharge it for you."

Throughout the next four days, except for when he was teaching, sleeping, and praying, Pastor Julius never parted with my iPod, not even during meals. He woke up with it. He went to bed with it. Throughout the day as I studied Kinyarwanda, I watched him sitting around the living room, always listening. Sometimes, he would pace back and forth; other times, he would aimlessly stroll about the backyard, but he was always listening. Occasionally, he would burst into laughter again.

At intermittent times, I interrupted him to ask why he enjoyed listening to Bikindi's songs so much. I had trouble accepting the fact that for Julius, Bikindi's music was not inextricably associated with whatever trauma he had once experienced. To be more accurate, I had trouble accepting that while the music may have been linked to such an awful event, it was perhaps more strongly linked to happier times, memories, feelings, and ideas. Here are some of the reasons Julius provided as to why he loved listening to Bikindi's songs:

"This is the music of my youth. We all loved to listen to Bikindi's music back then, to dance to it."

"This is the great music of Rwanda. The older people, we like this kind of music. Younger people don't listen to this music anymore."

"This is the music of my country."

"It is my history." (He repeated this one a lot).

"It's like this, you see. Earlier today I was having some trouble finding Bikindi's songs on this device. I was searching through the songs on it, and I saw that you had a song by Donna Summer [the 1975 hit disco single, 'Love to Love You, Baby']. When I was in secondary school, we listened to this song all the time and danced to it. We really liked it. When I listen to Bikindi, it's like the same kind of feeling."

One afternoon, a few days later, I asked him to tell me about what he went through during the genocide.

“[My wife and I] hid ourselves in a field of sorghum. Later, we went to a house of a Christian. So, we went into the house, and we hid there for three days. But after the third day my wife was discovered. They took her to a mountain, to a side of a mountain. But among the killers there were two sides. One group was a friend to my father. Others just wanted to kill her. So, there was an argument. So, that group that wanted to kill her went to find other people further away, and the friendly group stayed and left her alone.”

“Where were you during this time?” I asked.

“I stayed in that house where we were hidden. And later I joined my wife. And meanwhile, we had left our children with some friends from our church. So, for about four or five days we could not join them.”

“So, when your wife was taken, how did you deal with that? What did you do?”

“I don’t know if it was because of trauma or whatever—I fell asleep.”

“You fell asleep?”

Julius laughed softly. “I don’t know. Okay, I was tired and the circumstances were hard. I don’t know if it was just tiredness, but I felt in my heart that God would fulfill his promise [that we would survive].”

“So, you felt a sense of peace about it?”

“Yes, I fell asleep, and later I left the room and went into a field of sorghum outside, and I spent there about five hours until the coming of dark. But because we had spent like four days outside running in the forest and whatever, I was tired. I had not all my senses.”

Julius had indeed endured great torment during the genocide. His family had to go into hiding. He and his wife were separated from their children. His wife was eventually discovered and taken away by a gang of *Interahamwe* to be killed in excruciating manner, and only by sheer luck or the grace of God did she survive. That Julius says he fell asleep when she was taken away, knowing that she was to be killed, is not an extraordinary claim. During such events, exhaustion combined with feelings of terror, helplessness, confusion, and grief can be so overwhelming that it is not uncommon for people experiencing such trauma to psychologically detach, both at the time of the event’s occurrence as well as when they relate the ordeal to others years after the fact. As Julius said, “I had not all my senses.” His numbed description of how he responded to seeing his wife dragged off to be murdered was similar to others that I would

encounter throughout my time in Rwanda. Psychiatrist and trauma scholar Judith Herman labels this phenomenon “constriction” and refers to it as a sort of emotional anesthesia:

Sometimes situations of inescapable danger may evoke not only terror and rage but also, paradoxically, a state of detached calm, in which terror, rage, and pain dissolve. Events continue to register in awareness, but it is as though these events have been disconnected from their ordinary meaning... This altered state of consciousness might be regarded as one of nature’s small mercies, a protection against unbearable pain.<sup>1</sup>

### **Nostalgia for a Nightmare?**

Despite the terror that Julius experienced during the genocide, listening to Bikindi’s songs brought him joy. He told me that throughout the genocide he heard Bikindi’s songs regularly on the radio. Listening to them fourteen years later, they reminded him of what he went through, but instead of invoking painful memories and feelings, they brought him in touch with the wonder of his and his family’s survival. At one point, when I asked him why he enjoyed listening to Bikindi’s songs, he stated, “When I listen, I just praise God that I survived.” As a memento of what he endured, Bikindi’s songs caused him to celebrate; they were a trophy signifying the triumph of his and his family’s very existence. But more than their connection to Julius’s experience of the genocide, Bikindi’s songs were strongly associated with his youthful past in general, lifting him off into a flight of nostalgic reflection.

Nostalgia is commonly conceived of as a longing to return to one’s past. With this conceptualization, much recent sociological and anthropological research approaches nostalgia as an implied critique of present circumstances to which the nostalgic reacts by idealizing the past and wishing to return to it. Many of these conceptualizations of nostalgia build upon Fred Davis’ theory of nostalgia, outlined in his book, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (1979). Davis sees nostalgia as a discourse that results mainly from social upheaval and uncertainty. According to this notion, nostalgia is contingent upon a negative perception of the present in relation to an imaginatively idealized past. In this vein, William Cunningham

---

<sup>1</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: the Aftermath of Recovery—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992/1997), pp. 42-43.

Bissell offers a fascinating study of the emergence of nostalgia for the colonial era among residents of Zanzibar. He writes:

Nostalgia is shaped by specific cultural concerns and struggles...But nostalgia also operates with a crucial difference: rather than evoking commonality and continuity, it works as a mode of social memory by emphasizing distance and disjuncture, utilizing these diacritics of modernity as a means of critically framing the present.”<sup>2</sup>

Surely, though, Julius had no desire to return to time of the genocide. Though distance and disjuncture are requisite for nostalgic experience, there is little reason to assume that Julius’s nostalgia represented a critique of the present; at least, he never indicated that he was unhappy with his present life. Is it even proper, then, to regard his reaction to Bikindi’s songs as a case of nostalgia? His comparison of listening to Bikindi to listening to Donna Summer is informative. Julius indicated that the sensations he had while listening to Bikindi were the same as he had while listening to Donna Summer. Both experiences brought to the fore of his consciousness a conglomeration of memories of a time long gone: of friends, loved ones, pleasant settings, and happy events. Beyond merely invoking these memories, listening to Bikindi also brought about the blissful, carefree feelings that Julius attributed to his youth. Whether or not he was idealizing his youth is beside the point; what matters is that listening to Bikindi’s songs gave him the sensation of these positive feelings “all over again,” but this should not be taken to indicate that he was less satisfied with his present.

Certainly, nostalgia does not always entail positive feelings. It can just as often entail feelings of sadness and loss; bittersweetness is commonly associated with nostalgia. Specific emotions, though, are not what define nostalgia. Nostalgia may be bittersweet or not, it may idealize the past or not, and it may implicate the present or not. It may be that scholarly disagreement over the character and implications of nostalgia is due to the term being uniformly applied to what are, in fact, different cognitive and emotional phenomena. What does unify the diverse experiences of nostalgia, however, is that in all cases there is the *desire* to reminisce. The reasons for this desire may vary, but it is in investigating the personal benefits behind this

---

<sup>2</sup> William Cunningham Bissell, “Engaging Colonial Nostalgia,” in *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 20, no. 2 (May 2005), p. 216.

desire that nostalgia, as a locus of scholarly critique, bears its most meaningful theoretical applicability.

### **Nostalgia as Self-Resurrection**

The “work of memory,” as Ricoeur referred to it,<sup>3</sup> is a process integral to the formation of people’s identities and the meaning they make of their worlds. Memory determines how people make sense of their present circumstances and environments, how they ascribe meaning to people, objects, and events, and what choices they will make for their futures.<sup>4</sup> A child knows not to touch the fire because he remembers getting burned. He knows that he is his father’s son and is loved because he remembers the ways in which this older man has protected and cared for him. But memories are always fading, and as a result of the dissolution of those memories there is a slow but gradual loss of identity. The horror of Alzheimer’s disease is that in extinguishing the patient’s memories, it results in the termination of the patient’s sense of identity long before the death of her body. She no longer remembers who her husband is or where she is from or how to behave in public—in short, she no longer remembers who she is.

Therefore, the resurrection of memory is often accompanied by surprise, wonder, and joy, because it entails, in part, the resurrection of one’s past self and thus renews the meaning of one’s life. Memories, though, rarely depict the past with total clarity and accuracy. They are mental constructions made in the present, contingent upon all matter of present needs, desires, and physical limitations, but there is still this ontological sensation of resurrection. One cannot become young again and fully relive life, and this is why nostalgia is often accompanied by bittersweetness, even profound sadness. While the present self is reunited with the past self, the past self remains a ghost, but to the nostalgic, it is better than nothing at all.

While social upheaval, uncertainty, and a longing for an earlier, seemingly better time may certainly play a part in provoking nostalgia, the problem with such studies is that they assume that nostalgia must be attached to a past social situation believed to be better than the present one. In contrast, Julius’s experience with Bikindi’s songs reveals that people may

---

<sup>3</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, transl. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> This closely reflects Herbert Blumer’s symbolic interactionist theory of identity, the basic thesis of which is that identity is dynamically constructed according to the symbolic meaning that people impute to all ‘objects’ (including other people, events, feelings, etc.) within their conscious purview. See Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969).

indulge in nostalgia, not as a longing for the past in implicit protest of a less favorable present, but rather, for nostalgia's sake itself. To put it another way, people indulge in nostalgia because there is something deeply, profoundly satisfying about it, no matter their present circumstances. If there is a longing for anything, it is to bring more coherence and continuity into their present lives as they partially recover their past.

Beginning to bridge this conceptual gap between nostalgia as a sense of longing for the past in reaction to negative feelings about the present versus nostalgia as a mode of self-understanding is Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001). She first describes nostalgia as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed...a sentiment of loss and displacement, but also a romance with one's own fantasy."<sup>5</sup> It is this "romance with one's own fantasy" that I believe gets to the heart of Julius's experience, more so than the "sentiment of loss and displacement." Boym outlines two types of nostalgia which she terms "restorative nostalgia" and "reflective nostalgia." The former has to do with a desire to recover the past and implement aspects of it into the future. She views this desire as tied more to larger communal discourses, particularly as it concerns national memory. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, is "a meditation on history and the passage of time."<sup>6</sup> To Boym, this type of nostalgia is something more personally oriented. Similarly, two other scholars whose understanding of nostalgia more closely articulates Julius's experience are those of Janelle L. Wilson and Andreea Deciu Ritivoi's. In Wilson's *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (2005), Wilson still defines nostalgia according to a sense of longing, but unlike Davis, Bissell, and others, she views this longing as possessing the potential to reflexively facilitate the continuity of identity. Though temporal disjuncture is a precondition of nostalgia, nostalgia is the experience of bridging that disjuncture and reconnecting with the past self. Similarly, in *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity*, Ritivoi sees nostalgia as "a defense mechanism designed to maintain a stable identity by providing continuity among various stages in a person's life."<sup>7</sup> In this, Ritivoi affirms my own view, especially as he writes, "Although concentrated on the past, nostalgia does

---

<sup>5</sup>Svetlana Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: BasicBooks, 2001, p. xiii

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> Andreea Deciu Ritivoi. *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002, p. 9

not reject the present...but tries instead to place it in a larger meaningful context, the context of a person's life."<sup>8</sup>

### **Music as a Catalyst for Nostalgia**

Potent in facilitating nostalgia and the ontological sense of resurrection by which it is characterized are material or sensorial objects such as photographs, souvenirs, letters, scents, and music. Bissell writes that “nostalgia requires an object world to seize on—buildings, fashion, images, and the ephemera of everyday life.”<sup>9</sup> Sherry Turkle observes that objects may be both “companions to our emotional lives” and “provocations to thought.” She goes on to contemplate, “We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with”.<sup>10</sup> Scholars studying this “object world” of nostalgia, especially nostalgia as a collective phenomenon, often focus on the commodified symbols of nostalgia within the public sphere. For example, Geremie Barme presents a study of the emergence of nostalgia in 1990s Shanghai for the era of Mao's Cultural Revolution, citing the proliferation of trinkets bearing Mao's image as displayed by Shanghai residents. Still, he persists in the view that nostalgia entails dissatisfaction with the present, asserting that nostalgia “develops usually in the face of present fears, disquiet about the state of affairs, and uncertainty about the future.”<sup>11</sup> Several musicologists have focused on the power ability of music to facilitate nostalgia, though most of them also conceive of nostalgia as a longing for the past that implies a critique of the present.<sup>12</sup> David Shumway, looking at American films from the 1980s and 1990s that incorporate popular music from an earlier era, goes so far as to remark that “...music is the most important ingredient in the production of the affect of nostalgia or the recollection of such affective experience in the viewer.”<sup>13</sup> He then argues that “nostalgia by definition involves the idealization of a lost time or place.”<sup>14</sup> Gage Averill's theoretical analysis of barbershop quartets conceives of barbershop performance as a nostalgic space where “privileged, white, middle-class, middle-aged men push back against the

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> Bissell 2005: 221.

<sup>10</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Barme, Geremie. *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Averill 2003, Emoff 2002, Toner 2005, Sant Cassa 2000, Shelemay 1998, and Yano 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Shumway, David R. “Rock ‘n’ Roll Soundtracks and the Production of Nostalgia,” in *Cinema Journal*, vol. 38, no. 2 (Winter 1999), p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 42.



intrusion of their cultural milieu by the historically marginalized and morally complex.”<sup>15</sup> Kay Kaufman Shelemay, in her study of the relationship between memory, identity formation, and the performance of *pizmonim* within Syrian Jewish immigrant communities in New York, defines nostalgia simply as “a wish to return to an idealized past.”<sup>16</sup>

The more time that passes before a person has an opportunity to have a sensorial experience with a past object, then the more power that object has to provoke nostalgia. Like a strong odor that eventually loses its potency the longer a person continuously smells it, songs lose their ability to provoke a nostalgic response as a person continuously listens to them. This is because new memory associations with the songs are continuously formed and updated. The meaning imputed to the songs by the listener continues to morph in relation to the changing circumstances of the listener’s life. But if for some reason that person loses the opportunity to listen any longer, the memory associations become frozen at that point in time. If, once again, the person gets a chance to listen after a significant amount of time has passed, the songs invoke memories of that former time with all the more cognitive and emotional force.

I believe this is why listening to Bikindi’s music was such a powerful experience for Julius. Bikindi’s music was engrained into the sociocultural tableau in which Julius’ identity developed as a younger man. He said of the songs, “It is my history.” One could interpret this statement as reflective of a more collective national or cultural identity. He also said at one point, “This is the great music of Rwanda. The older people, we like this kind of music. Younger people don’t listen to this music anymore.” In this, he expressed a certain generational affiliation that can be a significant component of a person’s identity. Beyond these broader collective associations, however, I think there was something more personal and individuated behind Julius’ nostalgic response. He said that he and his friends used to listen and dance to Bikindi. Bikindi (along with, apparently, Donna Summer) comprised much of the soundtrack to his social life as a young man. Bikindi’s music thus became intertwined with Julius’ memories of his friends, including the woman who would become his wife, and to countless uniquely personal experiences. Sure, Bikindi’s music played a role in constructing a national, cultural,

---

<sup>15</sup> Gage Averill, *Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of American Barbershop Harmony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). On p. 9, he writes, “The barbershop revival was born from the confluence of conservative reactions to changes in the physical, social, and cultural landscape of America. It was a quest to reconstruct a space of privilege for white American middle-class males based on nostalgia for unchallenged and exclusive sociability and camaraderie located in the adolescent memories of middle-ages men.”

<sup>16</sup> Kay Kauffman Shelemay, *Let Jasmine Rain Down: Song and Remembrance among Syrian Jews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 215.

and generational identity, and this is also partly the reason for Julius' nostalgic response, but it was in accompanying Julius' uniquely personal experiences as a young man that Bikindi's songs possessed the capability of provoking a nostalgic response, all the more so because Julius had been prevented from listening to them for fourteen years. With the breakout of war, genocide, and the eventual attempt by the RPF to erase Bikindi's music from Rwanda, he lost the opportunity to listen to the songs, and with that, he lost a small part of his life. The opportunity to listen again allowed Julius to partially revive and recover that life.

The day that Julius left to return to Kigali, he asked me if he could have a recording of Bikindi's songs. I tried to explain to him that because of the proprietary nature of Apple products, I could not get the songs off the iPod and burned onto a CD. I was also wary of the ethics regarding intellectual property and of sharing music regarded by the government to be pro-genocide propaganda. Julius looked crestfallen and dubious at my explanation.

"Okay," I finally relented. Who was I to withhold something that held such great meaning for him, much more so than it did for me? It only seemed cruel to deny him that. "My wife is coming in about five weeks. I'll ask her to make a CD and bring it, and we'll find a way to get it to you."

"Ah, yes, please, that would be very, very wonderful," he replied.

When I returned to Rwanda the following year, I contacted Julius. I wanted to find out how his experience of listening to Bikindi's songs had changed, if he had shared the songs with others, what their reactions were, and so forth. He was overjoyed to hear from me again, as I would soon learn why. We met one Sunday morning at a hotel in the heart of Kigali. As we sat down at a picnic table in the inner courtyard, I asked him, "So, do you still listen to Bikindi's songs?"

He sighed. "Noooo...you see, I don't have them anymore. My cousin was visiting from Uganda, and she stole them! I was playing it for her and some other people..."

"Yeah? How did they respond?"

"...Ah, they were very interested in it." (When I gave him the CD the year before, Julius said only half-jokingly that he could charge people a lot of money to come to his house and listen to the songs). "Yeah, so, the last day, she hid it and took it with her back to Uganda."

He asked if I could give him another recording. I agreed and gave him one, for which he was most grateful.

“Don’t lose it this time!”

“No, no, I will never lose this one.”

## **Case Study 2: Pierre**

The next two case studies involve the relationship between listening to Bikindi’s songs, self-narrativity, and healing. Because they deal with similar issues, rather than analyze the two cases independently, both will first be presented. This will then be followed by a single analysis that makes note of similar and contrasting dynamics between the two.

Pierre had once been elected to a high position of authority in the Butare region, though at the time I met him in June 2009, he was enjoying a break from politics. He was a friend of Francis’s, and like Francis, he was a strong supporter of Kagame and the RPF. When Francis told him about my research, Pierre was happy to meet with me and share his views. As is customary, we met one evening at a restaurant where I offered to buy him dinner. That night, the restaurant was nearly empty, and so we had no trouble finding a quiet corner where we could speak in private. After some small talk, he invited me to ask him my questions regarding his views of Bikindi and his songs. I told him that, if he was willing, I would like him to first listen. Pierre was surprised to find that I had acquired the songs and responded that, yes, he was very interested in listening. Like Julius, he had not had an opportunity to hear them and engage with them in any depth since the genocide. I handed the earphones to him and pressed play on my iPod. Pierre did not exhibit as outwardly dramatic a response as Julius did, but he listened intently, staring straight ahead with a look of deep concentration. He would chuckle here and there, snort derisively in other places, shake his head and sigh. At certain points, he asked me to pause the song so that he could share his interpretations. When he concluded listening, we discussed his views of Bikindi. Like every Tutsi and RPF supporter with whom I had shared the songs, Pierre had no doubt that Bikindi was calling for genocide and deserved to be in prison. Eventually, however, the conversation began to center more on Pierre’s own biography and what he experienced in the time leading up to and during the genocide. Worried that he was getting off topic, he stopped himself, but I urged him to go on, that I was interested in his story because it would help me to better appreciate the influence of the songs. Pierre preferred that he not be recorded, and so what follows is based on notes that I took during our meeting.

His story began in 1971, just shortly before the lesser genocide of 1972-73. Kayibanda's vigilante committees were purging Tutsi from schools and all sectors of employment. Pierre was in primary school at the time. He claimed that his teachers discriminated against Tutsi, mocking them and denying them the same privileges as Hutu students. Even though Pierre received the highest exam scores, he was forced to repeat his sixth year because the teachers did not want him to advance to secondary school and taking up a slot that could be given to a Hutu. Pierre was told to "forget about succeeding." He eventually enrolled in seminary, because it was the only educational institution that was open to Tutsi, but he had little desire to go into the priesthood. In 1982, he used fifty thousand Rwandan francs (about a hundred dollars) to bribe officials at a university to admit him. He continued to academically excel and was offered a scholarship to study water reclamation technology in Japan, but the Rwandan government denied him a passport. Furious about this, Pierre began frequenting the bars where he would loudly complain about the government. When the RPF invaded in 1990, MRND authorities thus accused him of being an accomplice of the RPF. He was sent to prison in Gitarama where he found himself surrounded by other political dissidents. When the Arusha negotiations commenced in July 1992, he was released and obtained a mid-level bureaucratic position with the Department of Public Works, but his experience in prison inspired Pierre to become more politically active and an outspoken critic of the MRND.

Pierre's house was in Gikongoro, and he usually worked there and in Kigali, but when the genocide began, he was staying at a training center in Gitarama. In the hours after President Habyarimana was killed, nearly all political opponents in Kigali were assassinated. Pierre is sure that if he had been in Kigali, he likewise would have been killed. He then discovered that government authorities had come to search his house in Gikongoro. Realizing what was happening in Rwanda and that it was only a matter of time before he was discovered, he fled to Butare where relative calm still endured. About two weeks into the genocide, government and military officials descended on the town and began organizing massacres. Pierre and his fiancée hid in a beanfield. They remained lying on the soil overnight as they heard the screams of victims echoing throughout the hills. The next day they were discovered by a gang of *Interahamwe*. They pinned Pierre to the ground, sliced apart his Achilles tendons, and beat him

with *panga* and spiked clubs called *ubuhiri*<sup>17</sup> till he was too weak to offer any resistance. He was then forced him to watch as they murdered his fiancée.

Pierre lost consciousness, and believing him to be dead, the killers moved on. The Rwandan Red Cross later found him and dropped him off at a local hospital. It was entirely staffed by Rwandans who either supported the genocide or were too afraid to resist it. *Interahamwe* would periodically come by the hospital and, rather than kill all the Tutsi patients, they asked the doctors which ones were to be discharged. The patients who had sufficiently healed were then taken away to be killed so that, ironically, the worse one's condition, the better chance he or she had of living. Pierre was in critical condition and unable to walk, and so he was left alone.

Throughout his stay at the hospital, he heard RTLM blaring from the front desk, including Bikindi's songs. At one point, a staffer said to him, "You know who Bikindi is singing about; he is singing about you!" The broadcasters—Pierre especially remembered Kantano—announced lists of names of prominent people who had not yet been killed. Pierre heard his own name from time to time, but fortunately, no one recognized him at the hospital.

Pierre interrupted himself as he came to this part of his story to tell me that he was only summarizing, because it was too painful to talk about it in greater detail. He informed me that of all his family, only he and one sister survived. His father, mother, four siblings, and all his uncles, aunts, and cousins were killed, as were most of his friends and co-workers. He said that talking about the genocide was like "talking about it as if it were happening in front of me." As he said this, he was stone-faced, and it was impossible to infer what emotions, if any, he was experiencing. I asked him if wanted to continue, and he affirmed that he did.

Eventually, *Interahamwe* members came by the hospital and rounded up all those who were able to walk, leaving only Pierre, an elderly man, and an orphaned boy in the ward. The doctors and staff soon abandoned the hospital, telling Pierre to go find his own medication. Pierre was suffering from dysentery and dehydration and was nearly delirious. He crawled about the floor, begging the elderly man and the young boy to kill him, but they refused and soon left as well. He then crawled to another ward and found several patients who were severely injured. Pierre stayed with them until the RPF arrived in Butare and secured the area.

---

<sup>17</sup> *Ubuhi* was a rough-hewn club, often just a tree branch, the thicker end of which is crowned by a nest of nails.

Pierre told me that he had rarely told his story in such detail before, certainly never to a foreigner. I asked him how it made him feel. He thought for a moment and then replied that he felt relieved to tell it, that it was like “a kind of therapy.” “It is good to remember,” he said, nodding his head. He then asked for a recording of Bikindi’s songs so that he could “remember again.” Not only did he want to remember, but since the genocide, he had married and had children, and so he wanted to play Bikindi’s songs for them so that they could “learn their history,” as he put it. As we parted ways, he thanked me for the opportunity to listen to Bikindi’s songs and to share his story, again saying, seemingly as much to himself as to me, “It is good to remember.”

### **Case Study 3: Innocent**

I met Innocent one afternoon in June 2009 through a mutual friend, Moses. When I first saw him, he was sweeping the inner courtyard of a small, one-story cinderblock motel located along Butare’s main road. At twenty-nine years, he was a young man and looked even younger still. He was small in stature and wore an untucked, khaki button-down work shirt that looked two sizes too big paired with denim trousers that looked two sizes too short. His clothes were dirty and torn, and his feet were shod with old rubber sandals. He clearly owned little else in life.

I had asked Moses to help me locate people who would feel comfortable listening to Bikindi’s music and sharing their thoughts. He told me that I should meet a “somehow very special guy I know.” Innocent was quiet-natured, but curious and inquisitive. As soon as we met, he began to ask me all sorts of questions about America and my research. Besides Kinyarwanda and French, it turned out that he also spoke a few words of Spanish, German, and English, all of which he picked up by eavesdropping on the conversations of foreign guests at the motel’s restaurant. We took a quick liking to one another and agreed to meet later in the evening at a secluded café.

Upon arriving at the café, Moses requested the servers to bring one of the plastic tables and some chairs out to the back veranda so that we could have some privacy. Like most nights in Rwanda, the air was crisp and chilly. Innocent had no jacket, but a plateful of hot, starchy food and a bottle of lukewarm beer seemed to make him comfortable enough. I explained to him my research project, and that, if he was willing, I would like to play Bikindi’s songs for him and

have him share his thoughts and reactions. After my meeting with Pierre, I was also interested to know about his experience of the genocide. Innocent seemed eager to share, but unlike Pierre, he insisted that he share his story first before listening to the songs. He wanted me to know what he went through before he told me what he thought of the music. He spoke slowly and in an intensely quiet, hushed tone.

His mother had died when he was very young, and he was left in the care of his father. They lived in a nearby village, and his father was very poor. Given that there was so little to sustain him in the village, Innocent spent much of his boyhood in town begging and stealing. He often stayed with a wealthy, elderly woman who took street children into her home to care for them.

About three months before President Habyarimana's plane was shot down, Innocent noticed that the political discourse he heard in public speeches and on the radio was growing more heated and divisive. He told me that it was at this time that "Bikindi became a star, he began singing, everyone was listening, the government supported him, and RTLTM gave him a big job."<sup>18</sup> When Habyarimana was killed, the broadcasters advised everyone to stay indoors because the RPF was attacking. Three days later, RTLTM informed people that it was safe to come out, but then "the big people," as Innocent described them—politicians, prominent business owners, professors, and journalists—"they began to 'get' them." Innocent said that after these elites were murdered, "they" then began to go after the "small people" as well.

"There was training of the young guys," he said, "and then it was those young guys that began killing the small people—the poor. It was like they were soldiers, but in the village, it was just the young guys, with spears and things. Then, you see, where I stayed it was a village near the town, but I was also a street boy in the town. So the guys in town, they didn't know that I was Tutsi.

"One time, I was alone, a car pulled up, it had a handsome boy in it, and they pulled me in, and they beat me and let me go. After I was beat, I didn't feel good about things. I went back to my home [in the village], and when I reached there, my dad told me, 'Please don't stay here. I don't want them to kill us. In the town, they don't know you. Go back to the town'."

Innocent never saw his father again.

---

<sup>18</sup> Bikindi had been a star long before this time, and RTLTM never gave him a job.

“When I went back [to town] and when I reached the university, there was a roadblock, and they asked for my identity card. But I explained to them, ‘I don’t have one, because I am fourteen, and the identity cards are issued at sixteen.’ But then some guys saw me and said, ‘Ah, that young boy, we know him because he used to stay at [the wealthy woman’s] place.’ They said, ‘Just sit down,’ but for me, I didn’t know what was going on. They took me down the hill. There were many other people there. They made them lie down, as if to sleep. Then they beat, they beat, they beat them!”

“Then, for me, I began to say, ‘Oh, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, help me, help me, help me!’ And they said, ‘You...guy! Do you know why they killed Jesus?’ And I said, ‘I don’t know.’ And after, I said, ‘Oh, Mother Mary, help me!’ They didn’t explain to me why Jesus was killed. Then after, they had me between a lady and an old man. And they killed them. Then, after they killed them, they saw soldiers from UNAMIR<sup>19</sup> coming, and when those *Interahamwe* saw the enemy, they took the young ones away, so they would not show the enemy how they killed the young. They took us to a place behind the university. They started to kill the young.”

Innocent tilted his forehead down and brushed his finger back and forth across his brow. “You see there,” said Moses, and I saw that Innocent’s forehead was heavily pockmarked with scars from the beatings he took.

“So how did they kill them?” I asked.

“They used bayonets; they used knives, spears.”

“Why did the children not try to run away?”

“They were tired. You see so many men, maybe twenty-five, thirty, fifty. So, you see, for those killers, they were really many, and they have guns. If you run, then *BA-BA-BA-BA!!!* They take the dogs to chase you down. There is no escape.

“Then, when we were in the forest, after they killed the kids, they told me to remove the shoes. So I removed my shoes, and they said, ‘No, not the shoes—that one’.”

Innocent pointed to his pants.

“So I removed my pants. As I began to remove my pants, there was some money in my back pocket. And they saw that it was about seven thousand francs (about fourteen dollars). And then—that was a lot of money then—they took it and said, ‘We kill you, or we let you go.’ I said, ‘Do what you want, just kill me or let me go.’ I was not afraid to die.”

---

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda



“You were just fourteen years old?” I asked.

“Yeah. So, they said, ‘Okay, we don’t kill you, but just don’t go to town.’ But I knew if I went back home [to the village], they would kill me there, because they knew who I was.”

“So why did they let you go?”

The question seemed to catch Innocent off guard. He paused and faltered as he tried to reason why he was allowed to live. Finally, he blurted out, “They killed, they killed, they killed, but they left me alone only! You know, the genocide—if you have some money, you pay, they let you go. But sometimes you pay to not kill you badly, to just shoot you. Sometimes, they just play games with you. Maybe it was just Jesus who saved me. They said, ‘I know even after two hours, you will be dead.’ Some things are just not understandable.

“Then after, when they let me go, I was just struggling through the forest. And then after like five minutes, I met with three old people; they seemed like gentle people. They said, ‘Why? Why you look like this?’ I explained. They just laughed. Then, just struggling in the forest, I found one woman and a man and a kid. And I thought, ‘Maybe they are just struggling like me.’ Then we found a hospital. It’s just there.” He pointed down the street. “There were many, many, many people there—blood—it was like five o’clock. Then, I found the son of the old woman [who often took care of Innocent and the other street children], who was a doctor. He said, ‘Ah, come, come, come here!’ He took care of my injuries.”

“What sort of injuries did you have?”

“Before they kill you, you know, they torture you. They stab you a little, beat you. They used *ubuhiri*. The guy [one of the *Interahamwe* members who killed the children], he said, ‘Now you go down’.”

Innocent made a bending motion with his hand, palm facing the ground, as if forcing a child to bend over. He again tilted his forehead down to point out his scars, and then he unbuttoned his shirt. Like his head, his chest and shoulders were studded with small, glistening welts.

“Yeah, you see, that’s what they did,” Moses said, stating the obvious.

Innocent went on to explain that the doctor sent him off to find his mother and bring some food back to the hospital. When Innocent left the hospital, he was again assaulted.

“When I came from the hospital, when I reached some place near, about three hundred meters from the hospital, I found another group of *Interahamwe*. They stopped me, because I

was bloody. They asked me, ‘What’s going on?’ I lied to them. I told them, ‘I was just riding my bicycle, and I fell down.’ And they asked me, ‘Ah! Where is your identity card?’

“You see, there was this big guy in town. His name was Mahinga. He’s still alive. He is the one that has the big hotel in town. I told them I am the grandson of Mahinga. I don’t know how I thought to lie to them like that, but they let me go. When I reached town, I saw that everything was down, everything was destroyed. Dead people everywhere. Then I tried to enter the Eden Garden [a local bar and restaurant]. They knew me there so they let me sleep there. And when I moved around town, I noticed just blood everywhere.

“I then returned to the old lady who took care of me. That lady, she told me, ‘Just, please, if you come here, they will kill me and you here, but come here anyway.’ But that lady, she was like a witch somehow. She had many things, like food and money. And when the *Interahamwe* came, she just gave them some food and money, and they left. And also, she had a baby and a little girl, some small children.”

“So she protected you and the children?”

“Mm-hmm. One day, the *Interahamwe* came and wanted to kill us, and they asked, where is the money? They wanted one hundred thousand francs, but the lady only had ninety thousand. They refused. They wanted one hundred thousand. So that man, Mahinga..”

“...The rich man?”

“Yes, the rich man. His son, he was a very nice guy; he didn’t even kill anyone during the genocide. And so I went to the son, and said, ‘Please, they want to kill us, they want one hundred thousand, but we have ninety only, but please, if you have ten, you can protect us. We can complete the one hundred. So the son of Mahinga gave me that ten thousand. And then during *gacaca*, when they accused the son of Mahinga—for me, I was the only one who testified that he was innocent, and so they let him go free, and now he is in the university.”

“Is he a professor?” I asked.

“No, he’s a student in law. And so he saved my life during the war, and now I saved his life. For other people, they still accuse the son of Mahinga because he is a Hutu, and because of that they say he killed, and I say to them, no, he did not.

“So, next day, the *Interahamwe* came, and everything was finished. No more money. So they took us out. For everyone in the town, they would take them to a place nearby here. It’s where everybody in the town was killed. If they wanted to kill you, they take you there. They

beat you, then they take you there. When we reached there, we were with a mother and a baby and one other girl. She was very, very, very beautiful. And the *Interhamwe* that took us there, the leader of the group knew that beautiful girl. And he said, ‘Hey, hey, hey...,’ and the girl said to the captain, ‘this group is going to kill us.’ ‘Okay,’ the captain said, ‘the ones who are with that girl, just separate them and let them go.’ And so we returned to the old woman’s place.

“So, for me, I was just a street boy. People just looked at me like I was street boy; they ignored me. So, everyday, I went out and found something to eat for me and the old woman’s family. Some days they beat me, but I got away. I struggled to help this family, just to find them something to eat. I would run away. I would jump to here, they would find me; I would jump to there, they would find me. I just struggled to escape them and get something to eat.”

Moses interjected, “Why didn’t they kill you all when they returned?”

Innocent exclaimed, “It was just like a miracle from God! Some days they beat us, some days they tried to rape the lady, but she told them that her husband had died of AIDs, so they were afraid to rape her.”

“But she did not really have AIDs?” I asked.

“No, she did not. So, that is how we got by. Some days they beat us, they wanted to rape, but we just struggled in that life. Can you imagine? That bar...” Innocent pointed down the road. “...The boss of that bar, Mahinga, he was still working during the war. He was making profit.”

“Was he Hutu or Tutsi?”

“No, Hutu. A big Hutu! So when people came from killing, they would go there to relax and take a beer.”

“Where is Mahinga now?”

“He is still alive. He is a BIG guy; he walks like this.” Innocent made a lumbering motion.

“Also, I was born in a prison, because around 1974, my father and mother were accused of working with the RPF.<sup>20</sup> The day of my birth, my mother was in the prison. So, after Habyarimana liberated some, my mother took me away to Burundi, but she died in the war there. My father brought me back to Rwanda.

---

<sup>20</sup> The RPF did not formally organize until over ten years later, but other Tutsi exile organizations had started to develop.

“So when they wanted to rape that lady, they just beat her so much. Then, after they went, it was me who helped her to the toilet, because she was really bruised. In the morning, they moved everywhere, but in the evening, they would return. They would drink. Then they would come by our place. They were tired, drunk, they would take off the doors, the windows. It was like we had already died; they didn’t care. It was May or June. It was near the end of the war. Then, when they came back from killing, they would even kill each other. It was like, ‘If I want this from you, then I will take it,’ and so they would fight and kill each other over things.

“At that month exactly, at the end of May, in June, when they really enjoyed killing, Bikindi was a big star in the bars. When they come into bars, they would listen to him. They would play it loud. Even if they come and the volume is down, they say, ‘Hey, can you play it loud?!’ It was a big moment to be listening to Bikindi.

“At this time, the *Inkotanyi*<sup>21</sup> was near, at Gitarama, at Nyanza. The *Interahamwe* were really, really tired. So confused. Many using drugs. So when the RPF came, they ran. It was a bad moment for them, yeah!

“At the beginning of June, because the *Interahamwe* was confused, the people in the house with me started to go out and find something to eat. And when they started to hear that the *Inkotanyi* was near, they began to feel that they would be saved. But it was like the beginning of another war. The *Interahamwe* began to move their guns. They took them somewhere that was not visible. It was like a rain of gunfire. They started feeling hopeful.

“There were some Tutsi who were hiding in the roof of our house. When they started to go out of the house—because of the gunfire, when they went out, they got killed.

“For me, now, these are really the people who died, people who I will never forget, the people who were together with me. They thought they would be saved, but they got shot. They thought, ‘Life now begins, a new life begins,’ but when they went out, they got shot. And I will never forget them. They thought they could go out, and the war would be finished, but they got shot. And I will never forget them. They were my friends. People who ask us survivors, ‘What happened during the genocide?’ All those people, maybe they need to ask God, ‘Why all of this?’ Also, today, they should tell God, ‘No war, anymore.’

---

<sup>21</sup> Recall that this was a nickname given to RPF forces (see p. 130, fn. 50). Enthusiastic members and supporters of the RPF continue to use the term as a self-moniker.

“So, [the RPF] took the survivors to *Hotel Faucon*. And they went to fight at Gikongoro. All the Hutu ran away. But the Hutu who didn’t kill stayed here with Tutsi. And a few days later, they declared that now there was peace. Everything is finished. Now is the beginning of another life. We started to wash ourselves. Some had guitars and began to play. We drank beer. It was in those days that I learned to drink!”

### **Innocent Listens to Bikindi’s Songs**

It took two evenings for Innocent to relate his story of survival to his satisfaction. When he finished, he asked to listen to Bikindi’s songs. As Innocent said, the songs were often heard in the town’s bars. Innocent used to slink around the outside of the bars, eavesdropping on the patron’s conversations as they drank in order to pick up any useful information. There was “this one song,” he explained, that the men would often ask the bartender to play on the stereo, and some of the men would then sing along to parts of it. That was the only song Innocent told me he remembered.

I cued up “Intabaza,” because so far that seemed to be the song that elicited the strongest reactions. Innocent listened for a few moments, but the song did not seem to have any effect on him. He began providing a general summary of the lyrics, one that did not differ in any significant way from others I had received. Finally, he removed the earphones and shook his head. “No, it’s not the one.”

I then cued up “Akabyutso.” Innocent slipped the earphones back into his ears, and again I hit the play button. As soon as he heard the first strums of Bikindi’s *inanga*, Innocent’s eyes widened and his body stiffened, and when Bikindi began singing, Innocent grew very excited. He began jabbing my iPod with his forefinger and exclaimed, in English, “THIS IS THE MUSIC OF GENOCIDE! This song, they used to play it every day; they used to play it during the genocide.” He then began singing along, “*Mbwirabumvaaa...yeeee...!*”

When he finished listening, I asked Innocent, “So, when you listen to this song today, do you feel anything?”

He responded, “Now, as I hear this song, I go back—the memories of that day come back. It makes me really hate Bikindi. Someone like Bikindi, who has been created by God, who has been given the knowledge to save the people, to give them a good message. But later, he changed, and he gives them a message like this. It hurts me so much. This song was really

about waking up the Hutu. In the bars, they used it, to give them the energy, to make them stand up and do ‘their work.’ Because when the government ordered people to kill Tutsi, here in Butare they refused at first. So Bikindi composed this song. Because here in Butare we said, ‘We have married each other, we have given each other our cows. How can we kill our friends, our neighbors?’ So the song says, ‘*Mbwirabumva*’ [‘I speak to those who understand’].”

I then told Innocent that the song had been composed a year before the genocide. Both Innocent and Moses were surprised by this. “For sure?!” Moses exclaimed.

Innocent then countered, “Yeah, it’s before the genocide, but not really *before* ‘before.’ It was during the war. Some places in the country, they listened immediately, and they started to kill. But here in Butare, they were more resistant. So he composed that song to try to mobilize such people. Even before the genocide, they were killing, but it was during the genocide that they began to kill before the eyes of everyone. For me, this song is enough to see who Bikindi really was. I don’t even need to listen to other songs. This song is enough to know. Because I heard it in the bars. This song is really, really very dangerous.”

Innocent nevertheless asked to listen to the other songs. As he listened, he chuckled at certain passages and would ask me to pause the iPod so that he could contemplate the lyrics and Bikindi’s intent. But he kept returning to “Akabyutso,” the song that he remembered hearing in the bars.

He ruminated, “Bikindi—when someone really loved his music, they paid him to support his talents. But he would make something that was really hard for them to understand, and that’s why they lost the war! Bikindi was very clever. ‘To say the truth does not ruin friendship.’ [a Kinyarwanda proverb uttered in “*Akabyutso*”]. Some songs he composed because he was ordered by the government. But he was an artist, so he tried to compose songs that would warn them. I am inspired by this conversation! Maybe Bikindi had the desire to kill, and he was waiting for the government to give him permission. So he used the music as his gun. The music was his weapon.”

Moses then wondered aloud, “Maybe Bikindi refused, but the government pushed him.”

Innocent followed up, “He was a very, very clever man. In his songs, he tried not to show the Tutsi that they would be killed, because if they really knew it, they might run away.”

When Innocent first listened to “Akabyutso,” after sharing in great detail over the course of two nights what he experienced during the genocide, it brought a visceral reality to the

memories that he had shared. He said that the song made him “go back.” He even said that listening to it “hurt him very much” and made him hate Bikindi, but after we spent some time discussing the song and the other two, Innocent became engrossed, listening over and over in order to try to understand their lyrics and how they may have incited people to kill. The songs gave Innocent an opportunity to better understand the genocide.

As the evening wound to a close, Innocent expressed the wish that he had the means to listen to Bikindi’s music again whenever he wanted but that he was too poor to afford a CD player or iPod. We agreed to give a recording to Moses so that Innocent could visit him and listen again as he desired. Innocent then grew very quiet. After a moment, he looked up at me and said, “Ahhh...Jason, I am going to sleep so well tonight, like I have not slept in a long time. I feel such peace now.”

“So it’s good to tell your story then? Why is it good? Why does it feel good to tell your story?” I asked.

He thought for a moment, then answered, “Because we just keep some things, many things in our hearts. Sometimes you cannot find someone who will believe you when I tell my story. So if you meet someone who you feel you are now capable of telling your story to, it means that you ‘move,’ you ‘move’ those things away. It was just hurting me somewhere. So if you find someone to tell about...” He trailed off into silence.

We rose from the table and said our good-byes. Innocent then wrapped his arms tightly around me. “Thank you, thank you, my brother,” he said over and over. He then strolled off down the dirt road towards the motel where he worked and lived, and as he disappeared into the darkness, I heard him humming to himself.

“It’s amazing,” said Moses. “He told me that he has never told anyone of his story before, not even me. Here in Rwanda, we don’t talk about these things very often.”

Innocent had, in fact, been called upon to testify at genocide trials, but any testimony that he delivered was for a utilitarian purpose; it was to serve the state, not his own psychological well-being. As a former street boy and poor motel custodian, he was all but invisible to elite society. No one had ever asked him to share his story out of curiosity and concern, giving him all the time and freedom he needed to tell it his way.

## Trauma, Self-Narrativity, and Healing

The scholarly literature on trauma is replete with argumentative discussion of the therapeutic efficacy of self-narrativity for people who have experienced traumatic events. Before delving into this, let me first clarify that I am in no position to diagnose Pierre and Innocent as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or any other psychopathological condition as a result of what that they experienced. People who endure traumatic events will deal with them in their own individual ways, and just because someone endured a traumatic event does not invariably mean that they will continue to be traumatized, certainly not in the modern clinical understanding of that term. Neither Pierre nor Innocent gave any indication that they suffered from nightmares,<sup>22</sup> flashbacks, depression, addiction, or other symptoms commonly associated with PTSD. To conclude that they suffered from PTSD would require far more time, a more personal relationship, and a more controlled environment than I was afforded, as well as formal training and experience. Therefore, I employ the term “post-genocide distress” as a less laden and more specifically situated term than “post-traumatic stress disorder.” The only claim I make here is that listening to and engaging with the songs and telling their stories seemed to psychologically benefit Pierre and Innocent, bringing some small measure of peace and relief. This would suggest that both men did suffer at least some level of distress as a result of what they witnessed and endured.

### Defining and Conceptualizing Trauma

There is a lack of consensus among trauma scholars over what constitutes trauma, how it affects people beyond its initial occurrence, and how its troubling aftereffects should best be treated. In the wake of the Holocaust and the Vietnam War, scholarly interest in trauma became more pronounced, but until the 1990s, trauma was vaguely understood as “an event outside the range of human experience”<sup>23</sup>—a definition that would conceivably encompass a wide variety of disparate experiences. A few scholars, for instance, have provided feminist-oriented critiques of this conceptualization by pointing out that it ignores the everyday trauma of women and children in abusive and exploitative relationships for whom rape, molestation, and other forms of sexual

---

<sup>22</sup> Innocent suggested that he did suffer from sleep problems when he stated that “I will sleep so well tonight, like I have not slept in a long time.”

<sup>23</sup> Laura S. Brown, “Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma,” in Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations of Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 100.



violence have, in fact, become ordinary experiences.<sup>24</sup> When trauma is willfully induced by human perpetrators, such as in the case of genocide, it may take on a different character than trauma caused by accidents or natural disasters. The former carries with it profound moral questions regarding the nature of humanity that can, in some cases, inhibit the development of intimate, trusting social relationships. Trauma that results from mass atrocity may differ from trauma caused by one or a few perpetrators within an isolated context, such as rape or other forms of assault. In the case of mass atrocity, the distress of victims is often shared by other members of the community, but in isolated cases of rape or assault, the victim may have difficulty finding common solace. A sudden deformity due to injury or a diagnosis of terminal disease can sometimes engender another sort of trauma, depending on the individual's coping abilities. Children and adults also tend to respond to traumatic events in different ways, children often being more resilient. There is also the matter as to how cultural background will affect the way in which trauma is conceptualized and dealt with. Post-traumatic symptoms will also change over time, usually becoming less acute in the days and weeks following the traumatic event, while leaving a psychological imprint that can remain for years.

Another reason for the lack of consensus concerning an understanding of trauma and its aftermath is that trauma is embedded in memory, and memory itself is mystifying. It is noteworthy that most research describes memory through the use of metaphor, often described in terms of storage, retrieval, recall, recollection, going back, recovery, uncovering, unlocking, and so forth—all terms that attempt to make the work of memory more apprehendable by placing it within a temporal and/or spatial framework. The question is whether such metaphors obscure as much as they illuminate. As will be seen below, most research on trauma follows this same trend, describing it, for example, as “unclaimed experience” or “the inability to bear witness to oneself.” Research on trauma and memory is thus often locked in a battle over poetics as much as it is over theoretical substance. Meanwhile, neuroscientific research can uncover the biological processes of memory and point out why memory becomes impaired due to injury or disease, but it does little to explain the sociological and existential significance of memory.

Three characteristics unite the disparate experiences and descriptions collectively referred to as trauma. One, these experiences involve an overwhelming degree of physical and/or

---

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Brown 1995; J. Herman 1992/1997; and Lynne Layton, “Trauma, Gender Identity and Sexuality: Discourses in Fragmentation,” in *American Imago*, vol. 52, no. 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 107-25.

psychological suffering, the extent to which is subjectively qualified. Two, inherent in trauma is an experience of almost complete powerlessness. And three, due to the overwhelming level of suffering and powerlessness, the experience of trauma is often surreal; while victims may be aware of what is happening to them, they may not be able to fully comprehend it. Their inability to make sense of the event, in addition to the terror and pain they are experiencing, can cause them to cognitively and emotionally detach in the moment. This detachment is a necessary coping mechanism, but it can later extend to other areas of a victim's life such that their ability to connect with others and their world at large is inhibited. Music therapist and trauma scholar Julie P. Sutton writes:

Reports of survivors and witnesses frequently detail a sense of disbelief and numbness in response to what they have seen and experienced. The result is that what one had previously held safe is no longer reliably so. One's perception of the world changes irrevocably. Garland (1998) has noted that trauma causes a kind of wound that renders useless the protective filtering processes through which we have come to feel safe in the world. I believe this is a useful context within which to think about trauma... Trauma does not occur due to the external factor of a single event. Trauma is enmeshed in an internal process of an attempt to assimilate how the event has irrevocably affected the individual.<sup>25</sup>

The traumatic episode may not necessarily be out of the ordinary for the victim, but even as it may be persistent or occur at regular intervals, the victim maintains a sense that something is not right, that "this" is not supposed to happen, that there is some vaguely objective "ordinary life" in which people are supposedly free of such awful happenings—and yet, it *is* happening. In its aftermath, the traumatic experience tends to endure and intrude upon the mind as a tangled mess of disconcerting memories, sensations, and emotions until the person is eventually able to integrate it into one's larger life narrative, that is, to realize life beyond the trauma.

Cathy Caruth characterizes trauma as "unclaimed experience."<sup>26</sup> Anne Whitehead explains this to mean that during the traumatic ordeal, "...the present was never present, not

---

<sup>25</sup> Julie P. Sutton, *Music, Music Therapy and Trauma: International Perspectives* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002), p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

because it did not happen, but because its happening exceeded the individual's capacity for registration or understanding. If it has not been fully present, it cannot become past; it cannot even attain a presence in recall." Caruth theorizes that this inability to "claim" the traumatic experience because of its overwhelming nature results in a "collapse of understanding."<sup>27</sup>

Whitehead again elaborates on this, stating:

Trauma carries the force of a literality which renders it resistant to narrative structures and linear temporalities. Insufficiently grasped at the time of its occurrence, trauma does not lie in the possession of the individual, to be recounted at will, but rather acts as a haunting or possessive influence which not only insistently and intrusively returns but is, moreover, experienced for the first time only in its belated repetition.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Need to Tell in the Aftermath of Genocide**

Dori Laub, a psychiatrist, scholar, and Jewish survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, states that the great consequence of genocide is that it prevents the victim from "bearing witness to oneself." Reflecting on his own experience, he writes:

The perpetrators, in their attempt to rationalize the unprecedented scope of the destructiveness, brutally imposed upon their victims a delusional ideology whose grandiose coercive pressure totally excluded and eliminated the possibility of an unviolated, unencumbered, and thus sane, point of reference in the witness. What I feel is therefore crucial to emphasize is the following: it was not only the reality of the situation and the lack of responsiveness of bystanders or the world that accounts for the fact that history was taking place with no witness: it was also the very circumstance of *being inside the event* that made unthinkable the very notion that a witness could exist, that is, someone who could step outside of the coercively totalitarian and dehumanizing frame of reference in which the event was taking place, and provide an independent frame of reference through which the event could be observed. One might say that there was, thus, historically no witness to the Holocaust, either from outside or from inside the event... The historical reality of the Holocaust became... a reality that extinguished philosophically the very possibility of address, the possibility of

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 5.

appealing, or of turning to, another. But when one cannot turn to a “you” one cannot say “thou” even to oneself. The Holocaust created in this way a world in which one could not bear witness to oneself. The Nazi system turned out therefore to be foolproof, not only in the sense that there were in theory no outside witnesses but also in the sense that it convinced its victims, the potential witnesses from the inside, that what was affirmed about their ‘otherness’ and their inhumanity was correct and that their experiences were no longer communicable even to themselves, and therefore, perhaps never took place. This loss of the capacity to be a witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one’s history is abolished, one’s identity ceases to exist as well.<sup>29</sup>

The goal of genocide is not just to annihilate a group of people, but to annihilate any sense of themselves as fully human, to strip them of any self-awareness and self-worth so that they cease to exist even before their bodies are finally destroyed. To accomplish this, any sense of power, control, agency, or autonomy required for a sense of selfhood must be obliterated. This total loss of control, in fact, may eventually lead to the loss of the will to survive. Both Innocent and Pierre expressed this in their testimonials, Innocent telling his attackers, “Do what you want, just kill me or let me go,” and Pierre pleading with the old man and the young boy in the hospital to kill him. Perhaps their “choice” to submit to death was a final, desperate way of maintaining some sense of control.

Though neither Pierre nor Innocent explicitly indicated that they were still traumatized, they both desired to tell their stories and listen to Bikindi’s songs, and by the time they finished, some positive transformation had occurred. One way to interpret this transformation is that narrativizing their experiences helped them, at least partially, to reconstitute this episode of their life in way that rendered it more coherent and comprehensible than it was before. It brought the past into the safe and secure confines of the present so that they could re-experience it in a way that was no longer so overwhelming. In doing so, it diminished the power of the past to negatively impact the present. Critical is that it was *their* choice to remember the past—no one forced them to tell their stories—and as such, it provided them a sense that they were ultimately in possession of the past rather the past in possession of them.

---

<sup>29</sup> Dori Laub, “Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle,” in Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 66-67.

Expressing a view that similar to Laub's, Philosopher Susan J. Brison, herself a survivor of a brutal rape, writes on the therapeutic benefits of self-narrativity:

The undoing of the self in trauma involves a radical disruption of memory, a severing of past from present, and, typically, an inability to envision a future. And yet trauma survivors often eventually find ways to reconstruct themselves and carry on with reconfigured lives. Working through, or remastering, traumatic memory (in the case of human-inflicted trauma) involves a shift from being the object or medium of someone else's (the perpetrator's) speech (or other expressive behavior) to being the subject of one's own. The act of bearing witness to the trauma facilitates this shift, not only by transforming traumatic memory into a narrative that can then be worked into the survivor's sense of self and view of the world, but also by reintegrating the survivor into the community, reestablishing connections essential to selfhood.<sup>30</sup>

Self-narrativity can help people comprehend past traumatic events and integrate them into their larger life narratives. Self-narrativity can thus also be empowering, restoring that sense of agency over the traumatic event that was eradicated within the event as it took place. Brison addresses a concern among some trauma scholars that testifying to the trauma that one endured may potentially perpetuate a sense of victimhood. She insists that self-narrativity affirms one's own resiliency and provides hope by bringing to the forefront of consciousness the fact that the trauma occurred in the past and that the person was able to survive it:

... We must come forward and report that evil had been done us. Doing so does not turn us—or others—into victims. It may be that the most debilitating postmemories are those instilled by silence. It is only by remembering and narrating the past—telling our stories and listening to others'—that we can participate in an ongoing, active construction of a narrative of liberation, not one that confines us to a limiting past, but one that forms a background from which a freely imagined—and desired—future can emerge.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of Self* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 68.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

Laub interviewed hundreds of fellow survivors for the *Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies* at Yale University. He relates the following:

One woman survivor made the statement, “We wanted to survive so as to live one day after Hitler, in order to be able to tell our story.” In listening to testimonies, and in working with survivors and their children, I came to believe the opposite to be equally true. The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus come to *know* one’s story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life.<sup>32</sup>

Laub laments, however, that “no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion [to tell]. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought, memory, and speech*” [emphasis his].<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, like Brison, Laub insists that “it is essential for this narrative that *could not be articulated* to be *told, to be transmitted, to be heard*” [emphasis his].<sup>34</sup> He remarks that telling one’s story resists what he refers to as a “tyranny of silence”:

Survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed “external evil,” which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion. The “not telling” of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor’s daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor’s conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events.<sup>35</sup>

Countering this, historian Dominick LaCapra is wary of the therapeutic efficacy of self-narrativity. He denies any possibility of a total comprehension of the traumatic event and its

---

<sup>32</sup> Laub 1995, p. 63.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 64.

integration into the present. All that can be done, according to his view, is to address the symptoms of post-traumatic distress as they impinge upon a survivor's present life:

...Working through trauma does not imply the possibility of attaining total integration of the self, including the retrospective feat of putting together seamlessly (for example, through a harmonizing or fetishistic narrative) the riven experience of the past trauma. Any such retrospective "suturing" would itself be phantasmatic or illusory...Hence, at least as I am using the term, working-through does not mean total redemption of the past or healing its traumatic wounds. Indeed there is a sense in which, while we may work on its symptoms, trauma, once it occurs, is a cause that we cannot directly change or heal.<sup>36</sup>

LaCapra argues that one of the most effective ways to mitigate post-traumatic distress is for survivors of trauma to actively work to alter the social, economic, and political conditions that instigated such traumatic events. In this, he sees some utility for self-narrativity in its potential to raise societal awareness of what occurred and the reasons as to why it did:

Narrative at best helps one not to change the past through a dubious rewriting of history but to work through posttraumatic symptoms in the present in a manner that opens possible futures....Particularly by bearing witness and giving testimony, narrative may help performatively to create openings in existence that did not exist before.<sup>37</sup>

From my perspective, however, LaCapra misreads Caruth, Laub, Brison, and others who see therapeutic value in the process of self-narrativity. Instead of fully comprehending and integrating the traumatic experience, which very well may be impossible (What would full comprehension even entail? Is anything fully comprehensible?), the therapeutic benefits of self-narrativity are found in the mere possibility of comprehending and integrating a little more of what was once believed and felt to be totally incomprehensible. Partial understanding is better than no understanding, but more critically, it is the process of trying to understand, or more precisely, of interpreting one's past for oneself that yields a restorative benefit. The purpose of self-narrativity is to reclaim the past for one's own self. Accepting the impossibility of total

---

<sup>36</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 118-19.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-22.

comprehension and integration, one can still render the traumatic past positively meaningful in the present. As Caruth writes, “The impossibility of a comprehensible story...does not necessarily mean the denial of a transmissible truth.” Even acknowledging the incomprehensibility of the event can be a way of rendering it more comprehensible. The French film director and producer, Claude Lanzmann, who produced the famous Holocaust documentary, *Shoah*, stated:

It is enough to formulate the question in simplistic terms—Why have the Jews been killed?—for the question to reveal right away its obscenity. There is an absolute obscenity in the very project of understanding. Not to understand was my iron law during all the eleven years of the production of *Shoah*. I clung to this refusal of understanding as the only possible ethical and at the same time the only possible operative attitude. This blindness was for me the vital condition of creation. Blindness has to be understood here as the purest mode of looking, of the gaze, the only way to not turn away from a reality which is literally blinding...

“Heir ist kein Warum”: Primo Levi narrates how the word “Auschwitz” was taught to him by an SS guard: “Here there is no why,” Primo Levi was abruptly told upon his arrival at the camp. This law is equally valid for whoever undertakes the responsibility of such a transmission [a transmission like that which is undertaken by *Shoah*]. Because the act of transmitting is the only thing that matters, and no intelligibility, that is to say no true knowledge, pre-exists the process of transmission.<sup>38</sup>

Lanzmann’s words recall parts of the testimonials presented in this chapter in which events did not seem to make sense, where the actions of perpetrators and victims did not seem rational, neither to me nor to the person narrating them: Julius falling asleep after his wife was taken away to be murdered, or the *Interahamwe* arriving at the hospital where Pierre had taken refuge and killing only those who could walk. I am reminded especially of Innocent’s story when the *Interahamwe* released him after finding seven thousand francs in his back pocket. When I asked him why they let him go, he struggled for an answer, finally exclaiming:

---

<sup>38</sup> Claude Lanzmann, “The Obscenity of Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann,” in Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 204.



They killed, they killed, they killed, but they left me alone only! You know, the genocide—if you have some money, you pay, they let you go. But sometimes you pay to not kill you badly, to just shoot you. Sometimes, they just play games with you. Maybe it was just Jesus who saved me. They said, “I know even after two hours, you will be dead.” Some things are just not understandable.

To summarize, the therapeutic efficacy of self-narrativity is not its ability to render a total comprehension and integration of the traumatic event; this is impossible. It also does not lie only in the opportunity to gain a little better comprehension compared to before, as helpful as this may be. Ultimately, the benefit of self-narrativity lies in the process itself in how it allows the survivor of trauma to relive the event in safety and impute one’s own meaning to the event, thus restoring a sense of agency over it. As Laub writes:

What ultimately matters in all processes of witnessing, spasmodic and continuous, conscious and unconscious, is not simply the information, the establishment of facts, but the experience itself of *living through* testimony, of giving testimony.

The testimony is, therefore, the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness: reconstitutes the internal “thou,” and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself.

In my experience, repossessing one’s life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change, which one has to actually pass through, in order to continue and complete the process of survival after liberation. The event must be reclaimed because even if successfully repressed, it nevertheless invariably plays a decisive role in who one comes to be, and in how one comes to live one’s life.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Need for a Listener**

Inherent in the therapeutic process of self-narrativity is the necessity of another to bear witness to the testimonial. Laub explained that one of the consequences of the Holocaust is that in its overwhelming terror, pain, and dehumanization, it incapacitated the ability of victims to fully register what was actually happening to them. It prevented them from bearing witness to

---

<sup>39</sup> Laub 1995, p. 70.

their own torment. Laub insists that a third party is thus often necessary to first be the witness bearer:

[The endeavor to tell] make[s] up for the survivors' need for witnesses, as well as for the historical lack of witnessing, by setting the stage for a reliving, a reoccurrence of the event, in the presence of a witness. In fact, the listener (or the interviewer) becomes the Holocaust witness *before* the narrator does.

To a certain extent, the interviewer-listener takes on the responsibility for bearing witness that previously the narrator felt he bore alone, and therefore could not carry out. It is the encounter and coming together between the survivor and the listener, which makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing. This joint responsibility is the source of the reemerging truth...The testimony constitutes in this way a conceptual breakthrough, as well as a historical event in its own right, a historical recovery which I tend to think of as a "historical retroaction."<sup>40</sup>

Self-narrativity may be more efficacious when the interviewer-listener has no personal stake in the claims of the survivor. It needs to be someone who can be empathetic without coming to self-identify with the survivor's narrative. This is critical because part of the therapeutic benefit for trauma survivors in telling their story is in having another validate their personal interpretation of the events and the emotions that arise during the telling. In one sense, survivors, as they narrate their story, enter into a sort of trial court; in fact, they are testifying to massive psychological crimes committed against them. In a court of law, neither the prosecutor nor defense lawyer can honestly validate a plaintiff's testimony because of the personal interest each side has in the outcome of the case; only an impartial judge can do that. In a way, the listener becomes that judge.

Pierre said several times, "It is good to remember." If it was good to remember, then why did he not do it more often? What prevented him from doing so? As Innocent left, Moses remarked that, "Here in Rwanda, we don't talk about these things very often." Why not, if telling his story felt so good?

Part of the reason may be the difficulty in locating among fellow Rwandans an impartial witness. The politics of the genocide and its aftermath affect nearly every Rwandan, and each

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

has a vested material and psychological interest in how this history—*their* history—is conceived and represented. The RPF exerts extreme top-down pressure upon the citizenry to speak of the genocide in a certain way, and there are potentially steep consequences for those who veer from the politically correct narrative. Rwandans, therefore, are not free to honestly voice their memories in public. Genocide survivors can share their stories with one another—as long as those stories do not implicate the RPF or contradict the official narrative. In addition to the issue of political correctness, there are other things they must concern themselves with that inhibit greater therapeutic efficacy, namely how their story will affect the psychological state of fellow survivors who may be listening and how bringing up the genocide will impact efforts to peacefully co-exist.<sup>41</sup> Susanne Buckley-Zistel’s extensive ethnography on this issue focuses on the discomfort, mistrust, and resentment that persists among many Rwandans in the present social context in which victims’ relatives are forced to live side-by-side with killers and

---

<sup>41</sup> On a much smaller scale, I experienced something of this myself. On the day after I arrived in Rwanda in 2010, a good American friend there was killed in a car accident. Her husband was the pastor of my parent’s church in the U.S., and the couple also worked as part-time missionaries in Rwanda and had set up the initial logistics and contacts that made my research possible. We all lived together at the guesthouse during the times when our visits to Rwanda coincided; in fact, I was the last person to take a photograph of my friend just before she hopped into the fateful Toyota SUV. It was only two days before she and her husband were to return to their home and family in the U.S. Francis, a former orphan who regarded the couple as adopted parents, was driving them to Kigali and nodded off. It was only for a few seconds, but when he opened his eyes, there was an oncoming minibus. He frantically swerved to avoid it, causing the vehicle to overturn. My friend was tossed about inside the vehicle before being flung through the passenger window and slamming her head on the asphalt. She was in a coma for three days before finally succumbing to her injuries. Waiting in the hospital, knowing she would die soon, preparing for the funeral, tending to the needs of her devastated husband—the accompanying shock, sadness, and terror I felt were so immense that the experience was surreal. I returned home the next week, forestalling my research goals until the next year. Every day for several months, memories of the event continued to trouble me. I would close my eyes and “see” the smashed-up SUV, the blood we found on the roadside after we rushed to the scene of the accident, or my friend’s body in the coffin, hardly recognizable anymore. As these memories came unbidden, I would grow numb. I had trouble focusing on tasks at hand and I increasingly isolated myself from others. I recounted the event several times to friends and family members, but it did not seem to help. I worried about everything from boring them to displaying too much emotion in front of them to what they would think of me or whether I would bring them down. One problem was that I tried to put the focus on the devastation of the husband rather than on my own emotions, because to do otherwise seemed self-indulgent. In other words, even in telling the story to others, I denied *my* story. I eventually chose to see a grief counselor. After several visits, the intrusive memories finally began to cease, and I began to put the whole awful ordeal behind me. In counseling, I could relate *my* story to someone else without any concern as to the effect it would have on them or the way that they would perceive me. In a way, the counselor was almost invisible to me, and yet it was still necessary that she be present to acknowledge what I had gone through; this somehow allowed me to acknowledge it as well. This is not to say that everyone who has experienced some level of trauma needs to take the same path I did to recover but rather to point out that it was not until this experience that I began to understand Caruth’s notion of trauma as “unclaimed experience” and how self-narrativity, when performed within the proper context, can empower people paradoxically to both detach from the traumatic experience and regain possession of it.

accomplices.<sup>42</sup> False accusations are not uncommon given this atmosphere, and revenge killings, though far rarer now than in the latter 1990s, are still carried out. Many Rwandans live in fear of one another, but at the same time, they also depend on one other, especially in rural areas, to economically survive.

During the month of April, though, the genocide is commemorated, and people are encouraged to share their stories and participate in mass rituals of mourning. Carolyn J. Dean, who conducted research on similar commemorations of the Holocaust, argues that such state-sponsored commemorations have the effect of trivializing, commercializing, and rendering indifferent the remembrance of victims and the grief of survivors.<sup>43</sup> In fact, Rwandans often repress their own, unique experiences of the genocide and refuse to speak of the broader political and ethnic problems from which it resulted, because they live in fear of stirring up further trouble within their communities. Better to remain silent than pick at old wounds. Buckley-Zistel refers to this method of coping as “chosen amnesia”:

History and memory had a devastating impact on Rwandan politics in the past, and people are acutely aware of this. In order to escape the grip of the past, they eclipse it. This is not a denial of what happened, however, but a deliberate coping mechanism. Only through remembering what to forget, or *chosen amnesia*, are rural Rwandans able to cope with their present social milieu, their day-to-day life in the proximity of “killers” who, truly or falsely, participated in the genocide, or “traitors,” who denounced the wrong people...

...Regarding the dynamics that led to the genocide, *chosen amnesia*, the deliberate forgetting of the circumstances, prevents my local interviewees from accepting the cleavages which mark Rwandan society. From an ontological perspective, the stories people choose, or eclipse, in reference to their past prevent a sense of closure and fixed boundaries between “us” and “them.”<sup>44</sup>

Concerned with the larger social consequences of this “chosen amnesia,” Buckley-Zistel observes that it is taboo to publicly acknowledge the presence of ethnic tension and its long,

---

<sup>42</sup> Susanne Buckley-Zistel, “Remembering to Forget: Chosen Amnesia as a Strategy for Local Coexistence in Post-Genocide Rwanda.” In *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 76, no. 2 (2006), pp. 131-50.

<sup>43</sup> Carolyn J. Dean, *The Fragility of Empathy after the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Buckley-Zistel 2006, p. 146

insidious history in Rwanda; indeed, it is currently taboo to acknowledge that ethnicity itself even exists. She argues that the refusal to address the reality of ethnic cleavage in Rwanda, its causality, and the devastating impact it has had on people's lives leaves open the door for ethnic-related violence in the future, possibly again on a massive scale. For over a decade, President Kagame and the RPF have successfully maintained relative stability throughout the nation, but they have done so through repressive measures that hinder the development of a mutual trust that would transcend ethnicity and result in real social healing. Many Rwandans continue to fear one another and the government. This fear prevents them from doing the difficult work of memory necessary to address and overcome deep-seated resentment. According to Buckley-Zistel, "Many Rwandans with whom I discussed the reconciliation process thought that this lack of change constitutes a time-bomb. If, for whatever reasons, the current government is replaced by a dictatorship that chooses, once more in the history of Rwanda, to incite ethnic hatred, the message will again fall on fertile ground."<sup>45</sup>

My position as an impartial witness perhaps allowed Innocent and Pierre to enjoy a freedom normally denied by current social and political circumstances so that they were finally able to articulate not just what they went through during the genocide but also the broader political, social, and cultural causality and ramifications of the genocide. Innocent could speak of how the son of Mahinga had been falsely accused because he was a Hutu, and how Innocent was able to defend him, the subtext being that he had the power to defend an accused Hutu because he is a Tutsi survivor of the genocide. Well before Pierre spoke of the genocide, he discussed his experiences of discrimination at the hands of Hutu teachers and school administrators. Here, the subtext was that ethnic division was not just a product of early 1990s propaganda but had long existed as a social fact in Rwanda. Self-narrativity with an impartial witness allowed Innocent and Pierre to acknowledge these uncomfortable truths, resonating as they did throughout their own autobiographies.

### **The Role of Bikindi's Songs in Therapeutic Self-Narrativity**

The above discussion only scratches the surface of what traumatic experience and its aftermath entails and the role that self-narrativity may have in helping survivors recover, but hopefully it is enough to provide some basis for discussing the more germane issue of how

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

Bikindi's songs facilitated and enhanced whatever therapeutic processes occurred for Innocent and Pierre. As discussed to some extent in relation to the nostalgic reaction that Julius had when he re-encountered the songs, the songs acted as a repository of memories of the genocide. Pierre and Innocent both heard the songs many times throughout their ordeals. As they listened to them again, they were reconnected with the genocidal context in which they had previously heard them. The songs thus helped them to remember and recount other things that they experienced at the time.

Beyond the capacity the songs had to invoke memories, the songs also became, in their own right, a kind of testament of the genocide. Leslie Morris has written extensively on the "sound of memory" in relation to the Holocaust.<sup>46</sup> She argues that sonic "images" of the Holocaust—for example, Hitler's voice or Klezmer music—constitute another sort of text that can potentially supplant language with all its limitations as a way of conveying experiences of the Holocaust.<sup>47</sup> She critiques the trope of "unspeakability" that is so often conferred upon the Holocaust, arguing that where words may be inadequate, we can turn to other types of text—the visual and the aural—as a way of better representing and comprehending what took place:

In many respects, the charge of unspeakability is *the* sound heard within critical studies on the Holocaust; it is not, however, the sound of the evocation of Jewish memory in Germany. It is a sound that has been repeated compulsively, a paradoxical linguistic formulation that the Holocaust lies beyond language and the speakable. Not only is there a surfeit of visual images of the Holocaust, there is as well a surfeit of signification (and sound) about the Holocaust... We are perhaps enjoined to listen more closely to the very tones that constitute the "unspeakability" that is uttered, again and again, a litany about the impossibility of speech that closes back on itself as sound that articulates the impossibility of sound, or language, after the Shoah.<sup>48</sup>

It is impossible to convey through words alone what it was to endure the Rwandan genocide. I believe this was partly the reason Innocent became both excited and somewhat

---

<sup>46</sup> Leslie Morris, "The Sound of Memory." In *The German Quarterly*, vol. 74, no. 4, Sites of Memory (Autumn 2001), pp. 368-78.

<sup>47</sup> In a similar vein, Ernst van Alphen notes the "semiotic incapacity" of language to convey what happened during the Holocaust. See "Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, and Trauma." In *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. 24-38.

<sup>48</sup> Morris 2001, p. 371.

agitated when he listened to “Akabyutso” at the conclusion of his testimonial, the first time since he began sharing his story that he displayed much outward emotion. In a way, his testimony had not yet ended, but instead, the sound of the song, apart from the lexical meaning of its lyrics, picked up his narrative where words finally failed him. The song, in turn, provided a way for Moses and me to also bear witness to Innocent’s experiences in a way that went beyond verbal discourse. The same can be said of Pierre’s experience of sharing.

It is critical then to emphasize not just the discursive elements of Bikindi’s songs or how they serve as a repository of memories, but also their sensorial quality and what they symbolize as sound entities. Steven Feld proposes an analysis of musical phenomena that focuses on how music mediates epistemology, what he dubs “acoustemology.”<sup>49</sup> This analytical approach emphasizes “the primacy of sound [itself] as a modality of knowing and being in the world.”

To summarize, Bikindi’s music allowed survivors to partially re-experience what they went through by putting them in sensorial contact with an actual remnant of their experience of the genocide. Unlike memories, hazy and ephemeral as they are, the music was something that they could tangibly latch onto. And unlike the genocide in its overwhelming, incomprehensible totality, this was something small, just music, limited in time and space in the form of a recording.

#### **Case Study 4: Jeanette and Augustin**

I conclude this chapter with remarks that my friend Jeanette shared regarding the therapeutic benefits that she and her husband experienced in engaging with Bikindi’s songs. Her thoughts reflect much of the above discussion in that the songs served as a catalyst for remembrance, reflection, comprehension, and healing. The songs also encouraged them to confront a painful past that they had tried to bury. By uncovering that past, they were able to discover that it was no longer as painful as they feared. This realization restored a sense of power over that past; it helped put the past *in the past*. The difference is that the couple, rather than specifically targeted during the genocide, was targeted by the RPF. Jeanette, Augustin, and their children fled to the U.S. in order to escape persecution under the new regime. Both had worked in the educational field and were able to attain a moderately prosperous middle class

---

<sup>49</sup> Steven Feld, “Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style, or ‘Lift-Up-Over-Sounding’: Getting Into the Kaluli Groove,” in *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 20 (1988): 74-113.

existence. Sometime in the early 2000s, Augustin was presented with an opportunity to work short-term in the U.S. Augustin's brother-in-law who was high-ranking military officer drove him to the airport, and on the way, he warned Augustin that there were RPF affiliates who wanted him dead, and that if he returned to Rwanda, his life would be in danger.<sup>50</sup> Augustin flew to the U.S., conducted his work, which took about three weeks, then confronted the excruciating choice of what to do. The night before he was to fly back to Rwanda, he stayed awake in his hotel room, paralyzed with fear and indecision. Finally, he called Jeanette and told her of his situation, that he could not return, and that she needed to take their children and flee the country. With no money and no job, Augustin was homeless for two year. He spent his time wandering the city and sleeping and eating at shelters. The U.S. government refused to grant him refugee status because it did not believe at the time that Hutu could be in danger in Rwanda. Eventually, he was granted work authorization papers, and he was able to receive federal aid in the form of housing and financial assistance, a paltry amount but enough to get him off the streets. Meanwhile, Jeanette and the children went and stayed with friends and family living in other parts of Africa. They were classified as refugees (it was easier to be classified as a refugee in Africa, because governments were more fully aware of the antagonistic situation many Hutu faced in Rwanda). With her refugee status verified, the family was finally reunited in the U.S. after being separated for six years.

Augustin is still not sure what he did to merit any hostility. Though he and his family are Hutu, like most Hutu, they did not participate in the genocide. Jeanette describes their experience during the genocide as one of chaos, confusion, and fear, a time when no one knew what was happening or what to do. Though it was mostly Tutsi who were targeted, many Hutu were being killed as well, especially those who were more wealthy or who refused to kill or act as accomplices. The chaotic and lawless climate of the genocide presented gainful opportunities for murderous thieves as much as it did for ideological extremists. The couple also heard the reports of innocent Hutu being killed by RPF soldiers as they advanced from the north. Jeanette and Augustin lived in the southern part of country, but it seemed to be only a matter of time before the invasion would reach them, and then what would happen? So though they may not

---

<sup>50</sup> Augustin's brother-in-law was most likely murdered in 2003. He disappeared, and inquiring as to his whereabouts, officials told Jeanette that he had fled to the Congo. He has since never been found.



have been targeted, they fled and hid, taking refuge in various neighbors' houses. As such, Jeanette and Augustin should also be considered survivors of the genocide.

The RPF promised peace and an end to ethnic discrimination, but Jeanette and Augustin began to notice that the new government's actions did not always line up with its idealistic rhetoric. Discrimination and violence continued, if not quite at the same levels as in the early 1990s, only now it was Hutu who were under suspicion. A few years later, Augustin served on a hiring committee that had to decide between two candidates, one a Tutsi and the other a Hutu. The committee put heavy pressure on Augustin to support the Tutsi, but Augustin refused because he thought the Hutu was more qualified. Augustin wonders whether some of his colleagues began to spread rumors that Augustin harbored divisionist ideology, a serious crime in Rwanda.

Shortly before I moved out of state, I visited one last time with Jeanette and Augustin. For over three years, we had regularly met and discussed Bikindi's music and the social, cultural, and political dynamics in Rwanda. Near the end of our final visit, I asked them if they had learned anything about themselves as a result of our many conversations. Augustin was mostly quiet as Jeanette responded.

She began, "When you said that you wanted to work on Bikindi and his music, I said, 'Music? If it is only music, yeah, it will be good. Sure, study Rwandan music! Bikindi, *inanga*, *iningiri*, and maybe—yeah, that is possible! But me, I know nothing about music.' And then I said to Augustin, 'Maybe he wants something else, because if it was only music—yeah, that's a good subject, because Bikindi makes good music; you have *inanga*, you have everything in Bikindi's music.' But then I thought, 'Ahhh...maybe he wants something else.' And he said, 'What? What else?' And I said, 'No, he cannot do only music.'

"When we had listened to the songs, we didn't pay attention...The words, the meaning, and trying to put together everything—no, we didn't do that. But after you came to us, when we recalled the music, it is at that time we said, 'Ahhhh...hmmm...things are *so strong*. Each person—a musician, psychologist, politician—each person can find something to say about the songs.' Then it became very interesting for us to work on the songs.

"And somehow it helped us to understand 1994, the situation in 1994. In the way, like when Bikindi says, 'Yeah, Hutu, you are fighting against yourself, you are fighting against yourself!' We said, 'Yeah, that is true, because we have many parties, many parties composed

mostly of Hutu, and they were fighting, one against another. We have one party, then two parties, and then you have two parts of MRND, two parts of MDR [a rival of MRND].’

“And it also helped us somehow to go back, to go back to 1994. You know, it’s not easy to go back in 1994. *It is too hard.*”

I asked Jeanette, “What do you mean it’s too hard?”

She reflected. “Ahhh...It was very painful for everybody, and for me, I didn’t want to remember those things. I tried to do *everything* to forget, to put it away somewhere. I don’t want to think back.”

“It’s too terrible?” I said.

“Yeah. But listening to the songs, I say, oh, you know, now I can understand *WHAT HAPPENED!*...*what happened.*”

Her voice began to quiver as she continued to reflect. “If the same situation ever returned—maybe people would act exactly the same, the same as they did. But through the songs I was able to go and see. To see! At first, no, I didn’t want to ever see what happened in 1994. *It was too hard.* And I didn’t want to see what happened after 1994. What I wanted to focus on is what I have now, what I am doing now, and maybe what I want in the future. I didn’t want to go back to the past.

“But with the songs, I went to Augustin and I said, ‘Whoa...*it’s not so hard!* It is not as hard as I thought.’ And so now I can go back. And we talk—Augustin and I were talking-talking-talking about 1994, and we were saying, ‘Hey, do you remember so and so? We had someone coming from Kigali talking about this and this.’” But before we began really listening to Bikindi’s songs, that conversation we had—no, it would never have happened.”

I prodded her to continue. “So by listening to Bikindi’s songs more and more...”

“...More and more and more...”

“...You all felt more easy about talking about 1994 and remembering things...”

“Talking about 1994: ‘Yeah, remember this guy, he died, but he was Hutu. Ehhh! But the killings was of Tutsi.’ So, I think, somehow it—*somehow*—it helped us to heal. Somehow, to understand now what is happening. Because after 1994, you say, ‘Oh, my goodness, what happened?!’...So the songs allow us to take these things more easily, not so seriously, but they make it easy. I think that is the best thing in music. To relax, you can think about how things go. Easily.”

I then asked, “Do you think it’s something about—because I’ve seen this happen with other people whom I shared the songs with. They went through terrible times, they saw terrible things. But then they listen to the music, they begin to talk about it, and they talk about their experiences, and it becomes easier for them.”

“Mm-hmm! Mm-hmm!”

“One guy told me he was going to sleep very well that night. Another guy said, ‘It is good to remember. I’ve not thought about these things in a long time.’ Maybe sometimes they have to testify before *gacaca*, but it’s different...”

“Yeah.”

“Do you think it’s because when we are just kinda analyzing and thinking about it, we become, somehow, detached from it?”

“Mm-hmm, yeah!”

“Because we’re not really *feeling* so much,” I continued, “we’re just thinking about it and analyzing and understanding, and it helps us not feel so much pain anymore.”

Jeanette affirmed this. “I think you get a certain distance from the situation. It is like you are looking at it from far away.”

## CHAPTER 8:

### COERCED SELF-CENSORSHIP OF BIKINDI'S SONGS

FRANCIS: What do you think about the government? Maybe some of the elements in your songs do not match the policy of the government. For example, if there is somewhere that mentions Tutsi, and the government says, “There is no Tutsi, there is no Hutu”—if you were President or a top government official, would you allow this?

BIKINDI: [In a hushed voice]: You have reminded me even of an important thing: It’s a big mistake, it’s a big mistake. It’s a big mistake to say that you have eliminated ethnicity. It’s a big mistake to say we are only Rwandese. It was a very big mistake, and the *bene Sebahinzi* would not accept it. I have accepted that Mr. McCoy is an American. What I’m talking about is respect. It doesn’t stop me from knowing that Mr. McCoy is American.

MCCOY: It seems that one of the issues in Rwanda today is that the government says, “There is no *ubwoko*,” you know? But yet, everybody knows the government is mostly Tutsi. And so some people I talk to say that the government wants to put “a cloth” over ethnicity so that the government can continue favoring Tutsi.

BIKINDI: Yes! I am talking about the truth. To highlight the truth. When I say, “to share,” I mean it. If the information I’m following is good—the reports I have read—the leadership now is mostly, from the top, Tutsi. If talking about Habyarimana’s or Kayibanda’s government, the top leaders were the Hutus. The word, “share,”—it’s *very* important to me. If you are my neighbor and you want to eat, but then I’m not able to eat too? When the RPF was coming in, one of the propaganda messages it had was to say, “We shall share.” Today, I don’t think that’s real.

FRANCIS: What do you mean by sharing? Do you mean like 50/50, or what percentage do you want? Compared to the previous government, I think they’re sharing. Maybe not as much as people want, but...

BIKINDI: During the monarchy, how many Tutsis were in the government?

FRANCIS: [Seems indignant at the question. Begins to argue. I interrupt.]

MCCOY: I think when you say “50/50,” that is not what you mean by “sharing.” It means that when you see someone in need, you give to that person.

BIKINDI: No! No, I do mean the government. During the monarchy, there were only, like, two Hutus. [Switches to English]: It was terrible, because many Tutsis who were not part of the clan were also not [allowed] in the government.

MCCOY: It was just that one clan [referring to the Abanyiginya].

BIKINDI: Yeah.

MCCOY: So, when you say, “to share,” you mean that power needs to be shared?

BIKINDI: Yeah!

MCCOY: Among all clans?

BIKINDI: Yeah!

MCCOY: Among all *ubwoko*?

BIKINDI: Yeah! [Back to Kinyarwanda] I mean “to share” among the ethnic groups, among Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. If a Twa took over and then pushed out all Hutu and Tutsi, then I would tell them that “the sharing” is not there. And if a Hutu had done it, or a Tutsi has done it, I would say the same. During Kayibanda’s government, do you know why he failed? He chose the twelve ministers from his own district [he reads off their names]. And that is how it happened, why he was taken over. Habyarimana was the leader, and I liked him, but people failed to tell him, “These are some of your mistakes, these

are some of your mistakes, these are some of your mistakes.” And I must tell you that the leadership [now] is with the Tutsis. You asked me, when I return to Rwanda, what I would say. When I arrive in Rwanda, I will not be afraid to tell Rwandans that they have to share. Because maybe in the future, it could be bad, if the leadership refuses to share.

The previous chapter drew upon ethnographic encounters with five individuals in which their engagement with Bikindi’s songs brought some measure of joy and healing. Whatever benefits the songs may impart, they are censored in Rwanda. The first part of this chapter features several ethnographic vignettes and observations made by myself and other scholars that illustrate the repressive sociopolitical context in which they are censored. I also discuss and problematize the ideology that the RPF seeks to instill through its policies and actions. This ideology is self-contradictory. On the one hand, the RPF demands that ethnic identities be erased and supplanted by a nationalist identity, but on the other hand, it demands that people subscribe to a historical narrative in which only Hutu were perpetrators, the victims were mostly Tutsi, and the RPF was the blameless savior of the nation. The second half of this chapter opens with arguments and counterarguments as to whether Bikindi’s songs run counter to this agenda. The laws governing the censorship of his songs will also be discussed, the main issue being that the laws are so ambiguous and open to interpretation that authorities have wide latitude in choosing how and when to enforce them. Many Rwandans are thus uncertain as to what specific forms of expression they can get away with. They are, however, aware of the punishment should they be found guilty of breaking these laws. This anxious dynamic results in what I term “coerced self-censorship,” a particularly powerful form of censorship because, not being official, it has the appearance of resulting from a bottom-up consensus. This grants an air of legitimacy to repressive practices and allows the government to deflect accusations of denying people the right to free expression. Finally, the chapter concludes by contemplating the question as to whether the censorship of Bikindi’s songs is ethically justified or not.

### **The Sociopolitical Context of Censorship in Rwanda**

The RPF is aggressively attempting to do away with notions of ethnicity in Rwanda, insisting on a historical narrative in which ethnicity was solely a colonial fabrication. According

to this narrative, pre-colonial Rwandan society was factionalized more by clan and region, but otherwise, Hutu and Tutsi lived together in relative peace and harmony. “We are all Rwandans!” is the nationalist slogan now commonly echoed by RPF supporters. The RPF’s official rationale for this is that it has been the exploitation of ethnic division that has led to Rwanda’s woes throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, by pinning the construction of ethnicity solely on the colonial enterprise—that is, by blaming it on outsiders—and then invalidating ethnic identity under such reasoning, the RPF reasons that it can put an end to discrimination and violence and lay the foundation for lasting peace.

As noble a crusade as this may be, the RPF undermines its agenda in at least three ways. First, ethnicity is so ingrained in both historical conscience and self-identity that to deny its existence is considered laughable by many Rwandans. As Jeanette once exclaimed to me, “How can you say there is no Tutsi or there is no Hutu?! *I am Hutu!*” Attempting to erase ethnicity only brings it to the fore of people’s awareness, making it an even more salient and relevant marker of identity than it otherwise would be. Ethnicity is generally not a prime factor in determining the quality of everyday social relationships among Rwandans, not to the extent of other factors such as class, kinship ties, locality, occupation, religion, and, of course, people’s own personalities and everyday social affiliations. A Muslim Tutsi and a Muslim Hutu who attend the same mosque are more likely to closely associate and identify with one another than a Muslim Tutsi and a Christian Tutsi. A Hutu banker and a Tutsi banker are more likely to associate and identify with one another than a Hutu banker and a Hutu peasant farmer.

Second, the RPF contradicts its agenda by perpetuating a false narrative in which it was only Tutsi and Hutu sympathizers who were the victims of war and genocide and that it was only Hutu who were responsible for injustice and violence, assigning moral blame and innocence along ethnic lines and thus reinforcing ethnic division. The RPF maintains that three million Hutu participated in the genocide, essentially blaming the entire Hutu adult population. A 2006 report commissioned by the Rwandan Senate, titled *Genocide Ideology and Strategies for its Eradication*, states:

The victim is every person killed during the period of October 1, 1990 to December 31, 1994 because he/she is Tutsi or looks like one, has family relationships with Tutsi, is a friend of a Tutsi or has close relationships with a Tutsi, has political thinking or is related

to people with political thinking opposed to that of the ideology of divisive politics before 1994.<sup>1</sup>

The definition of “victim” here allows for the inclusion of Hutu, but only in cases where they were sympathetic to Tutsi or resisted the government. Des Forges cites a report authored by Robert Gersony, a consultant to the UNHCR,<sup>2</sup> estimating that the RPF killed between 25,000 and 45,000 mostly Hutu civilians between 1990 and 1994.<sup>3</sup> Prunier believes the number may be as high as 100,000.<sup>4</sup> The RPF tried to suppress Gersony’s report, but it has since leaked out to the public. Among its findings, it states, for example:

Local residents, including entire families, were called to communal meetings, invited to receive information about “peace,” “security,” or “food distribution” issues. Once a crowd had assembled, it was assaulted through sudden sustained gunfire; or locked in buildings into which hand-grenades were thrown; systematically killed with manual instruments; or killed in large numbers by other means. Large-scale killings which did not involve such “meetings” were also reported.<sup>5</sup>

The RPF denies any culpability, constructing an image of itself as the great unifying savior that swept into Rwanda and put a stop to discrimination and violence. Many Rwandans, however, are resistant to this narrative. For one, scholarly, documentary, and anecdotal evidence to the contrary is overwhelming, proving conclusively that RPF soldiers committed mass atrocities throughout the 1990s and that the RPF continues to commit human rights abuses today.<sup>6</sup> For a while, this evidence was not widely available within Rwanda, but the internet has begun to change that. In response, on August 6, 2012, Minister of the Interior Mussa Fazil Harelimana announced a new law by which the RPF will monitor people’s phone calls and internet activity, including e-mails. The Minister stated, “It will now be punishable in Rwanda to

---

<sup>1</sup> *Genocide Ideology and Strategies for Its Eradication* (Kigali, 2006), p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations High Commission for Refugees

<sup>3</sup> Des Forges 1999, pp. 328-31.

<sup>4</sup> Prunier 1995, p. 360.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Gersony, *Summary of UNHCR Presentation before Commission of Experts 10 October 1994: Prospects for Early Repatriation of Rwandan Refugees Currently in Burundi, Tanzania, and Zaire*, p. 4. Available at: [http://rwandainfo.com/documents/Gersony\\_Report.pdf](http://rwandainfo.com/documents/Gersony_Report.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> For a thorough assessment of the many sources supporting this, see Filip Reyntjens, “Rwanda, Ten Years On: From Genocide to Dictatorship,” in *African Affairs* (2004), 103, pp. 177-210.



read information not approved by the authorities, and reading this type of information will be regarded as complicity [in spreading divisionism, sectarianism, and pro-genocide ideology].” He then added, “The security services are now allowed to listen to all phone calls and read e-mails between individuals.”<sup>7</sup> The fact remains, though, that no matter what policies the government enacts, the memories among Rwandans of thousands of innocent civilians who were tortured and killed by the RPF are too entrenched and widespread to be eradicated.

The third way in which the RPF undermines its agenda is that the laws that were enacted to fight ethnic divisionism, sectarianism, and genocide ideology are written in a way that has allowed the government to prosecute criticism of the government. This has bred resentment, prevented Rwandans from openly working out the truth of their past, and discouraged genuine feelings of national unity among many Rwandans. It is a serious crime to deny that genocide took place, to spread genocide ideology, or to encourage ethnic divisionism or sectarianism. This may be justified, but it is also a crime simply to deviate from the RPF’s historical narrative of the genocide, especially if one points out the RPF’s own culpability in fomenting violence. Somehow, the RPF also considers this genocide denialism or spreading genocide ideology. Likewise, recognizing the validity of ethnic identity may potentially bring charges of spreading ethnic divisionism or sectarianism.

Some Rwandans (and outsiders as well) believe that the agenda of erasing ethnicity is really a nefarious ploy by an RPF leadership that is mostly comprised of Tutsi to further secure its grip on power. If the RPF can successfully propagate the notion that ethnicity does not really exist in Rwanda, then Rwandans may not notice or, more accurately, not be permitted to point out that the RPF continues to be disproportionately comprised of Tutsi and appears to favor Tutsi when it comes to political and social advancement.<sup>8</sup> The denial of ethnicity is a way to mask ethnic discrimination. As for those who would see behind the mask, the narrative of Tutsi victimhood and Hutu culpability is used to legitimize the persistence of ethnic inequality as a sort of affirmative action used to lift up Tutsi after thirty-five years of discrimination.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Jean Mitari, “Rwanda: censorship reaches a scary level.” *Jambonews.net* (Aug. 17, 2012). Available at: <http://www.jambonews.net/actualite/C3%A9/20120809-rwanda-la-censure-atteint-son-paroxysme/>.

<sup>8</sup> One example of this which has caused resentment and frustration among some of my Hutu friends is that widows of genocide victims receive tax-funded monetary reparations, known as FARG. My friends insist that the recipients of these reparations are exclusively Tutsi. Given the lack of transparency in Rwanda, it is all but impossible to verify any of this. What matters is the perspective of Rwandans and the failure of the government to convince them otherwise.

<sup>9</sup> See Helen Hintjens, “Post-genocide identity politics in Rwanda,” in *Ethnicities*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2008), pp. 5-41.

A Tutsi friend and loyal supporter of the RPF offered an alternative, more benign view of the ethnic disproportion that exists in the government. He explained that the RPF emerged out of the refugee communities of Uganda. These were obviously comprised mostly of Tutsi as it was mostly Tutsi who fled Rwanda in the decade or so following the 1959 Revolution. Therefore, it would only make sense that the RPF continues to be mainly comprised of Tutsi, and the fact that many Hutu have indeed made inroads into the higher levels of the party is a sign that the party is working to be more inclusive. According to my friend, the RPF is not purposely discriminating against Hutu, but like almost any political party, RPF members support and reward their longtime allies who, because of historical circumstances, just also happen to be Tutsi. It will take time, he said, for the government to become more fully integrated.

### **Examples of RPF Indoctrination Processes**

Whatever one's view of the matter, there is no denying that the RPF is working to inculcate the population with its ideology of anti-ethnic, pro-nationalist unity, structuring a collective memory of history and the genocide. To this end, it uses an array of national museums, genocide memorials, ritual commemorations of the genocide, slogans, educational policies, indoctrination camps, compulsory attendance at genocide trials (*gacaca*), media control, laws, and coercive measures such as public harassment and imprisonment of outspoken critics. The following ethnographic examples illustrate how some of these tactics are used to indoctrinate the population.

#### **The National Museum of Rwanda**

On the eastern edge of Butare sits the National Museum of Rwanda. Built in the late 1980s and remodeled after the genocide, the museum houses a treasure trove of ancient and modern artifacts, all well-organized and described in clear detail. It is a magnificent museum, and I spent much time there immersing myself in the cultural material of Rwanda's past, but there is something conspicuously missing, its absence is so subtle that it escaped my notice until it was pointed out to me by one of the museum's foreign consultants. Nowhere throughout the entire museum is there any mention of Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa. Instead, there are references to farmers, cattle breeders, hunters, servants, kings, and so forth. Likewise, there is no mention of the patron-client system. It was the resentment born out of this system, especially the policies of

*ubuhake* and *uburetwa*, that would eventually provide the emotional thrust and intellectual justification behind the persecution of Tutsi.<sup>10</sup> And yet here, in a museum dedicated to educating people about Rwanda's history, all this had been erased. In fact, under government orders, the consultant and his team had been busy the previous few years rewriting all of the museum's display placards in an effort to expunge these most salient features of Rwanda's history. For me, it was like visiting a museum dedicated to the history of the American South and finding no reference to race or slavery.

### **Educational Policies**

The white-washing of history taking place at the National Museum reflects broader educational reforms. From 2004 to 2006, at the invitation of Rwanda's Ministry of Education, a group of American historians, comprised of Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Harvey M. Weinstein, Karen Murphy, and Timothy Longman, embarked upon an applied research project that focused on developing pedagogical techniques, materials, and curricula for teaching Rwandan history. Borrowing from their own academic tradition, they tried to encourage the admission and integration of competing historical narratives that would give rise to critical thought and debate as to the origins and nature of ethnicity in Rwanda. Instead, they were met with stiff resistance. For one, they ran up against the reality that the genocide is still too recent and people's memories too fresh and emotionally laden to make possible a respectful and critical dialogue. More significant was that their efforts to illuminate multiple narratives were thwarted by government officials overseeing the project. Outside of Rwanda's borders, the origins and nature of ethnicity in Rwanda are the crux of a longstanding, hotly contested, but free-flowing debate, but within Rwanda, this debate has been silenced. There is only one narrative that is allowed to be taught and regurgitated, leading the scholars to conclude the following:

In our study, we saw how the victory of one political side created a set of tensions that inhibited curricular reform. The inability to discuss issues of identity, the distortions of a history that the government wishes to tell, the constraints against teaching students how to be critical thinkers, and, above all, the fear of productive conflict have profound

---

<sup>10</sup> This is not to deny that this resentment was cultivated by MRND and CDR leaders in the early 1990s in an effort to win public support by casting blame on Tutsi for the country's misfortunes. This is just to point out that there was a historical basis that these leaders were able exploit, framing the RPF invasion as they did as an attempt to retake Rwanda for Tutsi at the expense of Hutu.

implications for the establishment of a healthy democracy in a country. When one identity group has power and others are subject to that group's policies and practices, history reform becomes an almost impossible task. The danger remains that the party in power, if unopposed, will create a history that structures a civic identity in its own image.<sup>11</sup>

Not all Rwandans toe the party line. The researches conducted numerous anonymous interviews among "education stakeholders" and found that 46% of them, most of whom were Hutu, "expressed beliefs about the origins of ethnicity in Rwanda that were inconsistent with the official narrative."<sup>12</sup> When given a public platform, though, these dissenters were unwilling to go against the official narrative, and as the project wore on, most of the project's participants refused to discuss issues of ethnicity any further.

I also witnessed such indoctrination taking place within the educational sector when I accompanied a musician friend to a performing arts competition at a primary school in Butare. Groups had arrived from throughout the local region to compete, and my friend was very excited because some of his students were competing for the first time. Like many performing arts events that take place in Rwanda, the theme of the competition had to do with nationalist unity and stamping out ethnic divisionism. One of the troupes was especially memorable in how it transmitted this ideology. Their performance drew upon traditional elements of dance, music, and costumery, but the drama itself conveyed the genocidal killing of a Tutsi girl by a boy dressed as a member of *Interhamwe*. The troupe concluded their performance by facing the audience shoulder-to-shoulder and flinging their arms, palms up, towards the floor as if casting something away. As they did so, they loudly chanted, "We throw down the ideology of our parents! We throw down the ideology of our parents!"<sup>13</sup> The young troupe won first prize.

### **Indoctrination Camps (*Ingando*)**

Indoctrination camps called *ingando* are another means by which the RPF is implementing its agenda. Susan M. Thomson, in an immensely absorbing and disturbing ethnography centered on the nationalist unity programme in Rwanda, describes them as follows:

---

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Harvey M. Weinstein, et al. "Teaching History after Identity-based Conflicts: The Rwanda Experience," in *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 52, no. 4 (November 2008), p. 684.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 676.

<sup>13</sup> This is according to my friend's translation.

...another mechanism of national unity and reconciliation is the “re-education” of certain segments of the population through *ingando* solidarity camps. The RPF encourages some—government ministers, church leaders, university lecturers—and requires others—ex-soldiers, ex-combatants, released prisoners, *gacaca* judges, and incoming university students—to attend *ingando* for periods ranging from several days to several months to study government programmes, Rwandan history and to learn about how to unify and reconcile. The format differs according to the profile of the participants. Those individuals required to attend *ingando* do so for an average of twelve weeks, and participants live together in close barrack-style quarters. There is a significant military presence, with armed soldiers monitoring the activities of participants. The setting is formal and information is delivered lecture-style; there is little “downtime” as participants follow a structured programme of “re-education,” with a focus on their socioeconomic reintegration into Rwandan society. *Ingandos* are held in all five provinces, although most individuals receive their re-education in a locale other than their home community. The version of history taught at the *ingando* camps is offensive to many ordinary Rwandans who have participated, notably Hutu who experienced the events of 1959-1962.<sup>14</sup>

Thomson had been conducting field research that focused on ordinary Rwandans’ resistance to the new power dynamics ushered in by the RPF when she was summoned by government officials, had her passport taken away, and was ordered to attend *ingando*. The officials were particularly uncomfortable with her interviews with prisoners accused of genocide. She writes, “After much discussion, it was revealed that my methodology was too ‘kind’ to prisoners accused of acts of genocide; I was not to treat ‘them’ as I was treating Tutsi survivors (the only legitimate ‘survivors’ in post-genocide Rwanda).”<sup>15</sup>

### **Compulsory Attendance at *Gacaca***

Another means of indoctrination is compulsory attendance at *gacaca*, the local community courts where genocide suspects are tried. Based somewhat upon a traditional

---

<sup>14</sup> Susan M. Thomson, *Resisting Reconciliation: State Power and Everyday Life in Post-Genocide Rwanda* (Ph.D. dissertation, Dalhousie University, 2009), p. 178.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxix.

practice in which members of the local community would gather together to determine whether a suspect was guilty or innocent, the *gacaca* system was conceived as a way of efficiently administering justice for the hundreds of thousands of genocide suspects and victims. Suspects are not represented by lawyers, as no lawyers are involved in the trials; instead, guilt or innocence is assessed by a small panel of judges, each of whom is elected by the local community and then trained in the procedures of the court over the course of a few days or weeks. *Gacaca* attendees are regarded as a massive jury and have the ability through their collective voice to influence the judges, often by show of hands in reply to questions posed by the judges to the attendees. Since its inception, the *gacaca* system has been targeted by a bevy of criticisms alleging problems such as unfair procedures, the preponderance of bribery and blackmail, undertrained judges, personal bias, conflicts of interest, lack of protection for suspects and witnesses, and coercion of genocide survivors to testify without lending them needed emotional support.<sup>16</sup> The *gacaca* system is decidedly one-sided. Trials are reserved only for Hutu suspected of genocide-related crimes and may not be used to try RPF soldiers and officials who committed similar atrocities during the violent conflicts of the 1990s.

Throughout a trial, attendees listen to numerous testimonies concerning witnesses' first-hand observations and experiences of the genocide, often in excruciating detail. Suspects, meanwhile, have the opportunity to confess and beg forgiveness. If they are successful in convincing the judges of their remorse, that their beliefs about Rwandan history and the causality of the genocide conform to the official narrative, and that they are willing to cooperate in further investigations, then their sentences may be drastically reduced from life imprisonment to about fifteen years or less, at which point they will be allowed to return to their communities. If they refuse to admit their guilt, then they will likely spend the rest of their lives in overcrowded, disease-ridden prisons. Observing genocide convicts disavow their former ideology and swear fealty to the RPF in what is usually an emotionally dramatic ordeal can have two results: it can either reinforce people's adherence to RPF orthodoxy or it can serve as a stark warning of what is in store for those who openly question this orthodoxy or associate with those who do.

---

<sup>16</sup> See Toran Hansen, *The Gacaca Tribunals in Post-Genocide Rwanda*. Center for Restorative Justice & Peacemaking, School of Social Work, University of Minnesota (Saint Paul, Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 2005); also, Paul Christoph Bornkamm, *Rwanda's Gacaca Courts: Between Retribution and Reparation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

In July 2009, I was invited by Joseph, a friend living in a village in southwestern Rwanda, to observe the *gacaca* trial of his brother, a Catholic priest who was accused of abetting the murders of several Tutsi. According to Joseph's version of events, the Tutsi arrived at his brother's parish seeking sanctuary. The priest instead believed that they would be safer at a nearby stadium and told them to go there. The Tutsi followed his advice, but it turned out to be a trap and they were all killed. The priest insisted that he did not know that they would be in danger at the stadium, and he refused to plead guilty.

The trial took place in a long, one-storied brick auditorium in the center of the village. Around three hundred people crowded together on row upon row of wooden benches. Several witnesses, including a Tutsi, spoke in favor of the priest while a number of others testified against him. At one point, the chief judge asked those in the crowd to raise their hands if they had been present in the area during the alleged crime and, if so, could corroborate the testimony of a man who defended the priest. Around a dozen or so did.

The trial lasted several days. Unfortunately, I had to return to Butare to attend to other matters before it concluded. I left mid-morning, and as I was riding on the back of a motorcycle taxi up the steep mountain road towards the bus stop, I passed by Joseph's brother. He stood in the back of a government pickup truck, clutching the roll bar, as he was driven to the trial by two policemen. He was garbed in the pink smock and shorts that identify genocide prisoners. Since I was the only *muzungu* at his trial, he recognized me and we smiled and waved at one another. A few days later, Joseph called to tell me that his brother had been given a life sentence. When I asked how this could be, given the lack of conclusive evidence, he responded in resignation, "It is the way it is here." Prior to this, three other brothers had also been arrested and imprisoned. He told me that no charges were ever formally filed and that they were released after several years only when a Tutsi lawyer and family friend came forward to argue their case. Soon after this last brother's trial, Joseph fled the country, fearing for his life. I did not know why his family was specifically targeted. When I asked, he seemed equally bewildered. His family had no major political connections to the former regime and none of them were ever members of *Interahamwe*. His conclusion was simply that "someone just has to accuse you, and then 'they' come and arrest you."

Whatever legitimate doubts there may have been concerning the priest's alleged role in the murders at the stadium, he was convicted of complicity in genocide. If he had confessed to

the crime, pled for forgiveness, promised his cooperation, and persuaded the judges that he now adhered to the correct ideology, he likely would have received a reduced sentence. Instead, his stalwart refusal to admit guilt was seen as evidence that his ideology had not been properly reformed in accordance with RPF standards, and he was given a life sentence, a sentence that would serve as an example to the trial's attendees of what awaits those who also dissent from the proper view of things.

### **Censorship of News Media**

In its 2011-2012 Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders ranked Rwanda 156<sup>th</sup> out of 179 nations, up from 169<sup>th</sup> in 2010, but still behind Russia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.<sup>17</sup> Curious as to how journalists operate in such an environment, I set up a meeting in June 2009 with a reporter and professor of journalism at the National University. I expressed that I understood that there was not as much journalistic freedom as there was in the U.S. and then asked him his views on the matter. He explained, "You have to understand that we are recovering from genocide, and it is important for the media to continue to promote peace and unity throughout the community. That is our responsibility."

That same year, just ahead of campaign season for the August 2010 elections, the Rwandan government enacted a number of laws sponsored by the Media High Council that placed heavy restrictions on journalists. These new regulations required that anyone practicing journalism be issued a license by the government. They also made it illegal for journalists to cite unidentified or anonymous sources. This meant that if someone were to make critical statements of the government to a reporter who then published those statements, then that reporter would be required to give the person's name or else face possible fines, imprisonment, and the forfeiture of his or her license.

On April 25, 2009, the government banned the Kinyarwanda-language service of the BBC from broadcasting in Rwanda, alleging that it provided a platform for genocide deniers.<sup>18</sup> A report issued that same day by Radio Rwanda stated, "...Negationist words have been cumulating for a long time and Minister [of the Interior] Mushikiwabo termed them as poisoning

---

<sup>17</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Press Freedom Report 2011-2012." Available at: [http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012\\_1043.html](http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012_1043.html). The United States, by the way, ranks 47<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> BBC News Online, "Rwanda bans local BBC broadcast." Apr 26, 2009. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8019398.stm>.



of the minds of Rwandans and said the Rwandan government would not continue to tolerate that situation, thus the suspension of these broadcasts until further notice.”<sup>19</sup> The ban was rescinded two months later.<sup>20</sup>

Nearly a year later, on April 13, 2010, two leading independent newspapers, *Umuseso* (“The Dawn”) and *Umuvugizi* (“The Speaker” or “Teller”), were both suspended for six months, ensuring that they would not be able to provide any coverage of the election. The two papers were especially popular because, unlike other papers that enjoy high circulation in Rwanda, they were published in Kinyarwanda rather than French or English, each of which are spoken by only a small minority. Due to articles that were critical of President Kagame and the RPF, the Media High Council forced them to shut down for “inciting insubordination in the army and police” and publishing “information that endangers public order.”<sup>21</sup> Concerning the newspaper ban, Kagame said in a speech before Parliament:

These newspapers have to stop, WILLINGLY or ELSE! That’s a promise I’m making to you and it will happen. They have no right here, regardless of how the international community sees it or understands it. Let them believe whatever they want. And if they don’t like it, let them take those journalists in. They have no place here. [Translated from a BBC-Kinyarwanda broadcast by Robert Karenzi; emphasis his].<sup>22</sup>

The editors of both papers went into exile following the ruling. The editor of *Umuvugizi*, Jean Bosco Gasasira, was also physically assaulted and beaten. He was later tried *in absentia* by a Rwandan court and sentenced to two-and-half years imprisonment should he ever return from exile. He now lives in Sweden.

*Umuvugizi*, however, defied the ban by continuing to publish online, and in June 2010, the paper’s acting editor, Jean Leonard Rugambage, was shot dead by two men in front of his house in Kigali. In the weeks and months leading up to the 2010 elections, around thirty independent journals, newspapers, and radio stations, including *Voice of*

---

<sup>19</sup> Radio Rwanda, Kigali, in French 1800 gmt 25 Apr 09 via BBC Monitoring. Cited by Media Network, “Rwanda suspends BBC Kinyarwanda programme.” April 25, 2009. Available at: <http://blogs.rnw.nl/medianetwork/rwanda-suspends-bbc-kinyarwanda-programme>.

<sup>20</sup> Human Rights Watch. World Report 2010: Rwanda. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2010/rwanda>.

<sup>21</sup> Ann Garrison, “Rwanda Shuts Down Independent Press,” in *Digital Journal* (14 April 2010). Available at: <http://digitaljournal.com/article/290545>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

*America* and *Voice of Africa*, were ordered to stop publishing or broadcasting under various accusations of disrupting unity and peace.<sup>23</sup> President Kagame was re-elected with 93% of the vote.<sup>24</sup>

## **Genocide Memorials**

The endeavor to indoctrinate Rwandans is psychologically enhanced by the multitude of genocide memorials that dot the nation's countryside. Some are quite grim. Two Catholic churches, one in Ntamara and another in Nyamata, were the grisly sites of large-scale massacres. The RPF chose not to restore the churches, instead leaving the floors covered in the dusty skeletal remains of the victims. Perhaps the most harrowing memorial is the Murambi Genocide Memorial. Located just outside the town of Gikongoro, it sits distinctly alone atop one of the taller peaks in the area, overlooking the many farms and homes that blanket the surrounding hills. Elevation is a marker of social and political status in Rwanda, and so the high altitude bequeaths to the memorial a sense of veneration. It was originally built as a technical training school, but it never opened because its construction was interrupted by the genocide. On April 16, ten days into the genocide, an estimated 65,000<sup>25</sup> people fled to the school, told by local authorities that they would be safe there. It was a trap. Electricity and water were cut off, and with no food, water, or proper sanitation, they soon became weak and tired. The school was then surrounded by FAR soldiers, *Interahamwe* members, and others. On April 21, they marched up towards the terrified gathering with guns, grenades, clubs, and machetes, corralling the victims in the dormitories and classrooms and killing about half to two-thirds of them. The rest fled to a nearby church and were soon killed there as well. Only a small handful survived.<sup>26</sup>

As one makes the drive away from town and up the dirt road towards the hilltop, the trees and the village give way to a broad clearing where sits a wide, two-storied building, its second-story balcony draped with a purple banner, a color that signifies grief in Rwanda. The building once housed administrative offices and classrooms, but now the rooms are mostly empty. The front lobby contains a desk where visitors are greeted. To the right of the lobby is a small

---

<sup>23</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Around 30 News Media Closed a Few Days Ahead of Presidential Election" (2 August 2010). Available at: [http://en.rsf.org/rwanda-around-30-news-media-closed-a-few-02-08-2010\\_38076.html](http://en.rsf.org/rwanda-around-30-news-media-closed-a-few-02-08-2010_38076.html).

<sup>24</sup> Al-Jazeera, "Rwanda's Kagame in Landslide Win" (12 August 2010). Available at: <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2010/08/20108111198120835.html>.

<sup>25</sup> This is according to the RPF estimate. One person told me that the number was likely much less, though still significantly large.

<sup>26</sup> For a brief but provocative film on Murambi, see [http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/massacre\\_at\\_murambi/](http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/massacre_at_murambi/).

museum with exhibits that present the official narrative of the genocide. A room off to the left contains several mattresses where visitors can lie down and recollect themselves if they are overwhelmed with emotion or nausea, for it is not uncommon for visitors to faint or vomit. To the right of this main building lie a series of seven enormous granite slabs, polished to a high sheen. These are mass graves and underneath each slab is a pit containing thousands of dead. To the left of the building is an open pit. About twenty feet deep, it was once also a mass grave, but the victims have since been exhumed in order to serve as the memorial's main exhibit. Behind the main building are several rows of long, one-storied brick buildings, each topped with corrugated tin. These were once dormitories and classrooms.

The first time I visited was about three weeks after I first arrived in Rwanda. It was a Sunday afternoon, and the memorial was deserted except for Francoise, one of the guides and a survivor of the massacre. I had read about the memorial, and so I had some idea of what I was about to see. As Francoise led me out back towards the first of the long brick buildings, I felt my hands grow clammy in nervous anticipation. Francoise was silent and looked away as he unlocked the metal door and pushed it open. He then leaned against the outer wall and gazed across the hills as he wordlessly motioned for me to enter. Inside the cramped, stuffy room were dozens of bodies, each coated in ghostly white lime powder in order to delay the decaying process. Emaciated and brittle, they were sprawled out on simple wooden bed frames, a jumble of arms, legs, hands, and feet. Their lipless mouths were locked into silent screams. A few seemed still to reach out in vain for help. A man and woman clutched each other. Another covered his face with his hands. Though most of their clothes had been removed, some of the women still wore beaded necklaces or bracelets. Tufts of hair still clung to many of the victims' scalps.

The windows were covered with sheets of pinkish-yellow plastic tarp, and the sunlight filtering through them infused the bodies with a warm, eerie glow. As strangely beautiful an effect as this was, the tarp did nothing to allow the air to escape. I tried not to cover my nose—for some reason, I thought it disrespectful—but the acrid, sour odor of lime powder and decomposing flesh was overwhelming. I held my breath. Given the shocking display, one might think it would be like an emotional punch in the gut, but to be honest, I felt nothing but numbness mixed with adrenaline.

After a few moments, I left and nodded at Francoise. He took me to the next room. Among the bodies were several children, some still dressed in the clothes in which they were killed, now crusted with pale, rust-colored bloodstains. Someone had laid a bouquet of silk flowers on one of the bedframes. This time Francoise entered and pointed out to me some of the various ways in which people had been maimed and killed. Here was a man whose Achilles' tendons had been sliced. There was a person, perhaps a woman, who had been stabbed through the belly, another with his or her skull smashed, and another who was decapitated. His severed head, a conical tuft of hair protruding from his crown, sat amid the assortment of bodies in such a way that at first I did not even notice it.

Francoise led me to a third room. In the center of the room, among another array of bedframes and bodies, there was a small, rectangular wooden table, and on top of the table laid two small babies, each facing away from the other, their skin charred. They were still too young for their bones to have fully hardened, and so their bodies had been flattened by the weight of all the other bodies that had once been buried on top of them. I stared at the two babies for a long while, trying to take in what I was witnessing. Finally, I signaled to Francoise to usher me to the next room. This time, I merely poked my head in the doorway before I said, "Okay, I've seen enough." I asked Francoise how many rooms there were. He said that there were a dozen, altogether containing around a thousand victims. I left a small donation at the front desk and then asked my driver to take me back to Butare, about a half hour away. I returned to the guesthouse, went straight to my room, and sat on my bed till that evening, too stunned to even cry.

I visited Murambi a few weeks later and this time went through every room. Most contained more bodies, but one room featured rows and rows of skulls and a pile of femurs, each carefully stacked on top of one other along the base of a wall. In a large, spacious room, perhaps once a cafeteria or auditorium, a long clothesline was strung across from which was draped hundreds of shirts, sweaters, pants, skirts, and dresses, all stiffened and faded from dirt and blood.

The following year, I returned a third time to interview Francoise as well as Imanuel and Juliette, two other survivors who now worked there. I happened upon a group of peasant women squatting in the yard behind the main building, happily chatting and laughing with one another. A row of small piles of dirt was laid out before them and parallel to this was another row of

colorful plastic basins, each full of muddy water. Taking a closer look, I noticed that the piles of dirt contained small finger bones, other bone fragments, teeth, tatters of clothing, and tufts of hair. The women were carefully picking through the piles of dirt, picking out human remains, and cleaning them in the basins in order to give them a proper burial. Fifteen years later and the dead were still being recovered from Murambi, a process that had taken so long that it was for the women as ordinary and tedious a task as sifting flour.

The official purpose of transforming the school into the Murambi Genocide Memorial was to ensure that people never forget or deny what occurred in 1994 and would learn from it so that such horror would never again occur. This would seem to be an honorable cause, but the memorial has met with no shortage of controversy and resentment. While some argue that it is a powerful and worthy reminder of the genocide, others argue that it functions as nothing more than a guilt trip aimed at all Hutu (and to a lesser extent the rest of the world), and that displaying the bodies of the dead for such purposes constitutes a shameful act of desecration.<sup>27</sup> Others, however, view the shame-inducing aspect of the memorial as a positive feature. Echoing this sentiment, Craig Evan Pollack, writing on the various meanings that the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery has for victims of the 1995 genocidal massacre in Srebrenica, Serbia, relates the views of a young man named Damir who lost friends and family during the attacks: “I’m a survivor and a victim. I want revenge—as a victim...Could you imagine a murderer that you didn’t put in jail? Instead, you bury the victim under the window of the murderer. Everyday the murderer sees the victim. It’s a punishment.”<sup>28</sup> Pollack explains that “forcing the Serbs to live among Muslims—Muslims whom the Serbs had killed—would be, for Damir, a way to avenge the ethnic cleansing of Srebrenica.” Likewise, placing the victims of the Murambi massacre under the noses of genocidal killers and accomplices who have yet to be brought to justice may constitute a similar form of punishment.

All of these points of view are valid. Being the highly contested space that it is, the Murambi Genocide Memorial will hold different meanings for different people. Imanuel had lost almost all of his family, including his wife and children. He told me that his work at the memorial helped him feel like he was still with his family, that it allowed him to serve and honor

---

<sup>27</sup> Sandra Laville, “Two Years Late and Mired in Controversy: the British Memorial to Rwanda’s Past,” in *The Guardian* (13 November 2006). Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/nov/13/rwanda.sandalaville>.

<sup>28</sup> Craig Evan Pollack, “Intentions of Burial: Mourning, Politics, and Memorial Following the Massacre at Srebrenica,” in *Death Studies*, vol. 27, Issue 2 (2003), pp. 132-33.

them by giving their deaths meaning in educating others about what happened. I, for one, am grateful that early in my field research I had the opportunity to spend time at the memorial and become acquainted with three of the survivors. It brought a newly visceral sense of reality to my field research and served as a reminder of the stakes that are involved in scholarship on the genocide. The victims that I saw were real people, not props for academic theory.

Nevertheless, the fundamental purpose of most state-sanctioned memorials is not to ensure that people remember the past, but that people regard their past in such a way that conforms with an official historical narrative and the intrinsic ideology that both shapes and emerges from this narrative. Steven Johnston writes, “Yes, memorials tell us things. They tell us, at their best, what to think.”<sup>29</sup> Memorialization is one of the most significant means by which the state attempts to collectivize memory so that individual memory and individual self-narratives are obliterated. In the case of post-genocide Rwanda, René Lemarchand refers to the narrative embodied in the memorials as “the assassination of Hutu memory.”<sup>30</sup> But it is not just Hutu memory that is being assassinated, but the memories of all Rwandans who lived through a different version of the genocide than the one that the RPF insists occurred. Claudine Vidal (who originated the phrase, “the assassination of memory”) criticizes official commemorations of the genocide on the grounds that the RPF has “instrumentalized the representation of the genocide” for political ends. He goes on to claim that such commemorations “capture the silent words of the victims, giving them a meaning determined by contemporary goals” and “take over the private mourning of the survivors and transform it into a collective mourning in the name of considerations that are not theirs.”<sup>31</sup> To memorialize the past is, in a way, to deny it. Still, while memorials may serve as vessels for nationalistic propaganda and while they may not necessarily remind people of the actual past, they do remind people that there *is* a past, that there is a history that should not be forgotten and should be constantly scrutinized.

Most Rwandans have never visited the Murambi Genocide Memorial, not even the locals, a fact which has given cause for consternation to a government so passionate about indoctrinating its citizenry.<sup>32</sup> There are various possible reasons for this. One is that many

---

<sup>29</sup> Steven Johnston, “Political Not Patriotic: Democracy, Civic Space, and the American Memorial/Monument Complex,” in *Theory & Event*, vol. 5, Issue 2 (2001) *Project MUSE*. Available at: [muse.jhu.edu](http://muse.jhu.edu).

<sup>30</sup> Lemarchand 2007, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> Claudine Vidal, “Les commémorations du génocide au Rwanda,” in *Les Temps Modernes* 56(613) (2001), p. 44.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Ntambara, “Murambi Genocide Records Low Visitor Turn-Up,” in *New Times* (30 April 2010). Available at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201004300137.html>.

Rwandans lack the means for transportation to Murambi. Another, related to this, is that the Rwandan peasants who make up the majority of Rwanda's population tend to be more concerned with and isolated within their own local communities. Many Rwandans, though, have simply grown tired of and become immune to constant reminders of the genocide. As a flustered Jeanette once expressed to me, "Always, 'genocide, genocide...' We want to move on, but the government will not let us!"

Rwanda is covered with genocide memorials, though few as hauntingly grim as the one at Murambi. Just on the two-and-a-half hour bus ride between Kigali and Butare that I took countless times, I would catch constant glimpses of purple banners and bunting, all signifying a massacre site or mass grave. Indeed, I was surprised at how quickly the regular stream of memorials along the roadways receded into the background of my awareness to the point where I hardly noticed them anymore. By my third visit to Murambi, the sight and smell of the bodies lost their impact. I was able to walk into one of the rooms, lay my hands on a dead child's foot, say a quick prayer, pay my respects, and leave. Like the peasant women picking out bits of human remains from piles of dirt, laughing all the while, I had become desensitized. Rather troubled by this phenomenon, I shared my concern with the three guides at Murambi. "No," they reassured me, "it's normal. It happens to all of us. You have to be able to move on and not let it bother you"—and this coming from people who had witnessed almost their entire families brutally murdered on that very site. The indoctrinating effect of genocide memorials relies on their emotional impact, but with so many of them throughout the country, combined with all the other constant reminders of genocide promulgated by the RPF, they may very well be having the opposite effect. Rather than a sobering backdrop to the lived reality of Rwandans, the memorials have become background noise. Nevertheless, concrete reminders of the genocide are everywhere in Rwanda—there is no escaping their ubiquitous presence—and the message they are intended to communicate is this: that in 1994 hundreds of thousands of Tutsi were killed, it was Hutu who did it, and it was the RPF who saved the day; there shall be no denying this.

### **The Suppression of Criticism of the RPF**

It is now impossible to ignore the mounting evidence of atrocities and human rights abuses committed by the RPF. RPF soldiers massacred thousands of innocent Rwandan civilians

during the genocide and a great many more during the massive refugee exodus to Congo that occurred between 1994 and 1996. Most of these victims were Hutu. The RPF supported military campaigns in the Congo in which hundreds of thousands more Hutu were killed. Immediately after its takeover of Rwanda, the RPF also publicly executed multitudes of Hutu without trial on suspicion of killing or abetting killers (capital punishment was later abolished). This has led some scholars to argue that there were actually two genocides taking place concurrently in Rwanda. This is known as the double genocide theory, and it is strictly forbidden to publicly voice one's support for it in Rwanda.

U.S. historians Christian Davenport and Allan C. Stamm were early proponents of the theory. In 1998 and 1999, the two scholars performed research on the genocide for the U.S. Agency for International Development. Throughout the early years of the new millennium, they continued similar work for both the Prosecution and Defense teams at the ICTR. The main purpose of their research was to determine the social categorical identities of victims, including their ethnicity, their numbers, and the whereabouts and dates of their deaths. Davenport and Stamm drew upon thousands of documents and testimonials received from over a hundred NGOs as well as the ICTR, and according to their findings, they determined that the number of victims was fairly evenly distributed between Hutu and Tutsi. Furthermore, they discovered that the violence was most intense wherever the RPF's vanguard was geographically located at any given time. They concluded that just as Tutsi were being systematically killed, so too were Hutu being killed by RPF soldiers. As it became clear to RPF officials and ICTR prosecutors what was being revealed in Davenport and Stamm's research, the two scholars and their team began to confront harassment and a lack of cooperation. The ICTR's Prosecution stopped sharing documents, maps, and testimonials. In Rwanda, members of their research team were detained and interrogated. Finally, in 2003, Davenport and Stamm were invited to share their research in Kigali. Their presentation was abruptly interrupted when a government official stood up and announced that the Ministry of Internal Affairs disapproved of their conclusions and that the researchers were to leave the country the very next day and never return. Davenport and Stamm were labeled "genocide deniers" by the RPF even though they never denied the genocide:

Of course, we have never denied that a genocide took place; we just noted that genocide was only one among several forms of violence that occurred at the time. In the context of



post-genocide Rwandan politics, however, the divergence from common wisdom was considered political heresy.<sup>33</sup>

I would clarify that I do not subscribe to the double genocide theory. While I have little doubt that RPF soldiers killed multitudes of innocent Hutu civilians, the evidence is not yet conclusive as to how high up the chain of command these killings were ordered. My friend John, the former Anglican priest, told me once, “We have a story here. When the RPF came to Butare, Kagame said to his soldiers, ‘You can kill anyone you want, but if I catch you, then I will kill you’.” I believe that blame for the killings of innocent Hutu goes well beyond a small handful of rogue soldiers, but there is not conclusive evidence to suggest that there was a systematic campaign among the RPF leadership to exterminate Hutu. While there may have been an unhealthy degree of nationalistic propaganda disseminated among the RPF and other Tutsi exiles that reinforced a sense of victimhood and entitlement and which was used to increase support for the invasion and takeover of Rwanda, this propaganda did not categorically denigrate Hutu and call for their extinction. After all, RPF propaganda denied the very existence of ethnicity. Perhaps one reason that ethnic violence was more intense in those areas where the RPF was advancing was because the killing of Tutsi was undertaken with more earnestness in order to wipe them out before they could be saved. When RPF soldiers witnessed the immediate aftermath of these killings, they were filled with rage and reacted in kind against innocent Hutu.

Whatever the case may have been, it does not justify their actions. If the RPF does not acknowledge the atrocities committed by RPF soldiers and honestly attempt to hold accountable those who were guilty of them, then there will continue to be political and ethnic tension in Rwanda, forestalling a genuine lasting peace.

### **Elimination of Political Opponents**

Sadly, it appears that the RPF has no intention of moving in this direction—quite the opposite as more recent evidence of atrocities and human rights abuses have come to light. This was especially driven home for me in late July 2010. I had just arrived in the country and was looking to reorient myself. It was a typically hazy, dusty summer afternoon as a friend and I trudged up the long road from the guesthouse to Butare’s town center. As I took in the familiar

---

<sup>33</sup> Christian Davenport and Allan C. Stam, “What Really Happened in Rwanda?” In *Miller-McCune* (6 October 2009). Available at: <http://www.miller-mccune.com/politics/what-really-happened-in-rwanda-3432/>.

and the new, I noticed that the Sombrero Club was unusually quiet and empty. Even during midday, there were normally a few patrons sitting out on the veranda and chatting over beers. It appeared now to be closed. Surely, I thought, such a normally bustling establishment had not gone out of business. Were they remodeling?

“Hey, what’s going on with the Sombrero Club?” I asked my friend, “It seems very quiet today.”

“Ohhh...,” my friend intoned. He then replied in an anxious whisper, even though there was hardly a person in sight, “That man that owns that place was murdered very recently.”

A bit shocked by this news, I asked my friend to elaborate.

“Uhhh...” he began nervously (why was he nervous?), “...you know the elections are next week, and that man, he was a leader of the opposition party, and he was criticizing the RPF, so...” My friend made a slicing motion across his neck.

“What, they found him beheaded?!”

“Yeah, near his car.”

“And people think the RPF did it?”

He let out a short laugh. “Everybody knows! Everybody knows it was the RPF.”

I let that sink in for a moment before continuing, “Well, what does the RPF have to say?”

“Ah, they say it was just some street boys trying to get some money or something.”

He shook his head in sad resignation as he clicked his tongue against the back of his teeth. “You see, Jason, we have a saying here. We say that ‘to speak out against the government is to commit suicide’.”

The victim’s name was Andre Kagwa Rwisereka. Besides being a prominent business leader, he was a founder and vice president of the Democratic Green Party, one of a number of parties vying against Kagame and the RPF for greater political representation. On July 14, just a few weeks before the elections, his body was found lying beside his car near the banks of a river, his head almost completely severed. The RPF denied any role in his slaying. In July 2012, a suspect was arrested, a man who had been a business partner of Rwisereka. The two were thought to have run a loan shark scheme that went bad, and Rwisereka was perhaps the victim of

revenge.<sup>34</sup> Still, at the time of the murder, many Rwandans believed that the RPF was behind it, and many still do.

A month prior to Rwisereka's murder, on June 19, 2010, Lt. Gen. Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, who was once Kagame's Army Chief of Staff before becoming an outspoken critic of the regime, barely survived being shot in the stomach while attending the World Cup in South Africa. The RPF denied any role in this as well. Five days later, on June 24, the acting editor of *Umuwugizi* and outspoken critic of the regime, Jean Leonard Rugambage, was murdered (see above). Rugambage had accused the RPF of shooting Lt. Gen. Nyamwasa. Again, the RPF denied any role in his death. In a 2008 review of a biography of Kagame, *The Economist* asserted that:

“[President Kagame] allows less political space and press freedom at home than Robert Mugabe does in Zimbabwe. He may be planning to bring Rwanda out of poverty in a generation but his prime goal is to maintain his Tutsi government in power until it is certain that the Tutsi people will not be massacred again. Anyone who poses the slightest political threat to the regime is dealt with ruthlessly.”<sup>35</sup>

The RPF views itself as the savior of Rwanda and any criticism of its policies and actions as anti-unity, pro-divisionist, pro-sectarian, and pro-genocide. Many Rwandans live in fear, not of another genocide, but rather of their own government's zealotry in preventing sectarian and genocide ideology from spreading, and they see this not as a noble campaign for peace and justice, but rather as a cynical ruse employed by the RPF to reinforce its monopoly on power.

### **Why Bikindi's Songs are Censored**

It is in this repressive, paranoid, and ideologically narrow sociopolitical climate that Bikindi's songs are censored. A quick summary of the material presented in previous chapters should provide a sufficient understanding as to why RPF leaders and their supporters regard Bikindi's lyrics as expressing an ideology and historical narrative at odds with the new orthodoxy. According to Bikindi (and a good many reputable scholars for that matter), political

---

<sup>34</sup> “Rwanda: suspect arrested in connection with murder of Andre Kagwa Rwisequera,” in *Afronline* (16 July 2012). Available at: <http://www.afronline.org/?p=6817>.

<sup>35</sup> “A flawed hero,” in *The Economist* (21 August 2008). Available at: <http://www.economist.com/node/11959125>.

and economic oppression of Hutu existed long before the arrival of colonialism and was only worsened with the arrival of the Europeans. “Twasazareye” reminds the listener of the hardships that peasants endured under the *ubuhake* and *uburetwa* policies (“...the whip, the forced labor, the days you spent working without pay...”). “Intabaza” features a dramatic retelling of the exploits of Ndori, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Abanyiginya king who consolidated much of central Rwanda under his rule. While Ndori was once considered a romantic hero, exalted in much of the dynastic epic poetry of the monarchy, Bikindi transforms his image into that of a villain who used deception and terror to gain territory and increase his power. He insinuates parallels between the trickery and violence of Ndori and the 1990 invasion of the RPF. Just as Ndori’s conquest eventually ushered in a period of political and economic oppression, Bikindi seems to warn Rwandans that the RPF will do the same if victorious. As in “Twasazareye,” “Intabaza” reminds the listener of the harsh conditions that peasants suffered under monarchial and colonial rule. He then moves to the near present, assigning blame for Rwanda’s troubles to the greed and dishonesty of political and economic elites who safeguard and bolster their own power through dishonesty, cronyism, and greed, all at the expense of the greater good.

In both of these songs, Bikindi is careful not to distinguish between Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa. The songs even affirm an integral part of the RPF historical narrative in that they focus more on clanship and region as the primary criteria by which pre-colonial affiliations and alliances were structured. In “Intabaza,” when he sings of the plight of *bene Sebahinzi* he insists that he was speaking of the farming majority, including Tutsi and Twa. His general message was a call for unity among both the peasantry and elites in order to fight government corruption, fend off the RPF invasion, and arrive at mutually beneficial political reforms.

“Akabyutso” is more problematic in that Bikindi specifically castigates Hutu for the selfish, deceitful, and violent ways in which he perceives them treating one another, a theme inspired by his friend’s son having his eyes gouged out by a fellow Hutu who belonged to another party. Bikindi begs Hutu—but not Tutsi—to act peacefully, to share with another, to be honest, and to unite.

Bikindi’s songs fail to point out the discrimination and the lesser genocides of Tutsi that occurred following Rwanda’s independence. If he had done so, the RPF might regard his songs as more fair-minded and less sectarian. Perhaps the main reason Bikindi’s music is censored in Rwanda has less to do with the lyrical content of the songs as it does with the fact that he and his

music are symbolic remnants of the former regime. He was one of the most prominent and beloved figures in Rwanda before the genocide. His songs still elicit a great deal of excitement and interest among some Rwandans today when given an opportunity to listen. It may be that the RPF believes that Bikindi possesses too much cultural and political capital to allow his music to be rewoven into the present social fabric. RPF leaders surely are not ignorant of the level of resentment against them among many Rwandans. Perhaps they fear that if Bikindi's music were to gain wider circulation in Rwanda, it would only augment this resentment. I asked Jeanette if she thought Bikindi's songs should be freely available in Rwanda. Even though she believed he had been unfairly maligned, she replied, "No, these songs would be more dangerous today than in 1994. They could make people want to commit genocide again."

### **Laws Related to Censorship**

There is, though, no law on the books that explicitly prohibits Rwandans from owning, selling, broadcasting, or otherwise listening to recordings of Bikindi's songs. Instead, the issue of censorship is subsumed under two sets of legal statutes. The first is Law No. 47/2001: On the Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism, enacted on December 18, 2001. The second is Law No. 18/2008: Relating to the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Ideology, enacted on July 23, 2008. Beginning with the first of these, Article 1 sets out to define discrimination and sectarianism as follows:

1° Discrimination is any speech, writing, or actions based on ethnicity, region or country of origin, the colour of the skin, physical features, sex, language, religion or ideas aimed at depriving a person or group of persons of their rights as provided by Rwandan law and by International Conventions to which Rwanda is party.

2° Sectarianism means the use of any speech, written statement or action that divides people, that is likely to spark conflicts among people, or that causes an uprising which might degenerate into strife among people based on discrimination mentioned in 1°.

The French version of Article 1(2) is even more broadly worded in comparison to the English.<sup>36</sup> It reads, "*La pratique du sectarisme est un crime commis au moyen de l'expression*

---

<sup>36</sup> Rwandan laws are inscribed in both English and French.

*orale, écrite ou tout acte de division pouvant générer des conflits au sein de la population, ou susciter des querelles*” (“The practice of sectarianism is a crime committed by means of any oral or written expression or act of divisionism that could generate conflict among the population or cause quarrels”). Article 3 of the law attempts to further clarify what constitutes the crimes of discrimination and sectarianism:

The crime of discrimination occurs when the author makes use of any speech, written statement or action based on ethnicity, region or country of origin, colour of the skin, physical features, sex, language, religion or ideas with the aim of denying one or a group of persons their human rights provided by Rwandan law and International Conventions to which Rwanda is party.

The crime of sectarianism occurs when the author makes use of any speech, written statement or action that causes conflict or that causes an uprising that may degenerate into strife among people.

According to these laws, anything that a person says or does that is somehow related to categories of social differentiation and has the potential to provoke “conflict,” “strife among people,” or, according to the French, “quarrels” may result in that person being prosecuted. These laws are self-contradictory. Article 3 makes it a crime to deny an individual or group of persons “their human rights provided by Rwandan law and International Conventions to which Rwanda is party.” International conventions regarding human rights generally uphold freedom of expression, even if such expression denigrates other groups of people. Also, international law is not unified in its treatment of freedom of expression, as varying exceptions to this right have been made according to different international conventions and declarations. The European Declaration of Human Rights, for example, is more open and permissive than the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (see Chapter 3, pp. 107-8). The question, then, is what international convention(s) is Rwandan law specifically party to? In any case, it would seem that merely possessing a recording of Bikindi’s songs would not constitute such a breach. Instead, the problem would likely arise when someone plays the songs for others. Article 8 of the Law on Prevention, Suppression, and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism establishes the following as a crime:

... [making] public any speech, writing, pictures or images or any symbols over radio airwaves, television, in a meeting or public place, with the aim of discriminating [against] people or sowing sectarianism among them...

Because authorities consider Bikindi's songs as expressions of divisionism and sectarianism, playing them for others in public could be interpreted as an attempt to spread these ideas. However, there must be proof of intent. If a person is convicted of intentionally sowing divisionism and sectarianism, then punishment runs from a fine of 30,000 Rfw (as of this writing, about \$85—no small sum of money for a Rwandan peasant) to 300,000 Rfw (about \$500), in addition to a possible prison sentence of between one and five years. If a person's actions are deemed especially egregious or that person is prominent public figure, a maximum sentence of life imprisonment can also be imposed.

The more recently enacted Law Relating to the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Ideology is more severe. Article 2 defines genocide ideology as follows:

...an aggregate of thoughts characterized by conduct, speeches, documents and other acts aimed at exterminating or inciting others to exterminate people based on ethnic group, origin, nationality, region, color, physical appearance, sex, language, religion or political opinion, committed in normal periods or during war.

While this definition could be critiqued, the more troubling issue is found in Article 3, which states:

The crime of genocide ideology is characterized in any behaviour manifested by facts aimed at dehumanizing a person or a group of persons with the same characteristics in the following manner:

1° threatening, intimidating, degrading through defamatory speeches, documents or actions which aim at propounding wickedness or inciting hatred;  
2° marginalizing, laughing at one's misfortunes, defaming, mocking, boasting, despising, degrading, creating confusion aimed at negating the genocide which occurred, stirring up ill feelings, taking revenge, altering testimony or evidence for the genocide which occurred;

3° killing, planning to kill or attempting to kill someone for purposes of furthering genocide ideology.

For most decent people, “laughing at one’s misfortunes” is considered unkind, but in Rwanda, it is apparently considered a crime. Penalties for breaking the law on genocide ideology range from a prison sentence of between ten to twenty-five years and a fine of between two hundred thousand and one million francs (roughly three hundred to fifteen hundred dollars or so—a veritable fortune for most Rwandans). The penalties are harsher for “a leader in public administrative organs, political organisations, private administrative organs, or non-government organs, a religious leader, or a former leader in such organs.” Young children, defined as those under the age of twelve, are also not exempt. If found guilty, they are taken to a rehabilitation center for up to twelve months. Older children between the ages of twelve and eighteen are given a sentence equal to half the time as adults. Article 8 regarding the dissemination of genocide ideology is especially concerning:

Any person who disseminates genocide ideology in public through documents, speeches, pictures, media, or any other means shall be sentenced to an imprisonment from twenty years to twenty-five years and a fine of two million to five million Rwandan francs.

Note here that the law says nothing about intent. Out of ignorance or carelessness, a person could share a photo, newspaper article, or for that matter one of Bikindi’s songs with someone else, and if the authorities determined that any of those actions constituted a means of spreading genocide ideology, then the hapless person could be imprisoned for a minimum of two decades.

The above laws, ambiguously worded as they are, may be used as legal blanket cover for denying free speech, quelling political dissent, and neutralizing political opponents. It was under the 2008 law on genocide ideology that Dr. Peter Erlinder, an American Professor of Law and Lead Defense Counsel at the ICTR, was arrested upon entering Rwanda on May 28, 2010<sup>37</sup> and imprisoned until June 18. Erlinder had been a vocal critic of Kagame and the RPF, going so far

---

<sup>37</sup> Edmund Kagire and Patrick Condon, “Peter Erlinder, American Lawyer, Arrested by Rwandan Police.” *Associated Press* (28 May 2010). Available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/05/29/peter-erlinder-american-l\\_n\\_594440.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/05/29/peter-erlinder-american-l_n_594440.html).



as to suggest that the genocide should really be referred to as a civil war and that Kagame himself had ordered the massacre of countless innocents. Erlinder had flown to Rwanda to provide legal counsel to Victoire Ingabire, Chairperson of the Unified Democratic Forces and one of the strongest rivals of Kagame in the run up to the August elections. For demanding that Kagame and other RPF officials be tried for their role in mass atrocities during the 1990s, she was arrested and imprisoned on charges of genocide denialism, terrorism, treason, and threatening national security. She was found guilty of treason and is now serving an eight-year sentence. Her supporters were reportedly shocked that she did not receive a life sentence.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the RPF's vow to bring Rwandan law into accordance with international human rights law, the laws on discrimination, sectarianism, and genocide ideology fail miserably to meet those standards. Regarding the law on genocide ideology, the punishment is recklessly disproportionate to the crime. Does "laughing at one's misfortunes" or "stirring up ill feelings" really deserve a twenty-five year prison term? Should such acts even be codified as crimes? This has led to fierce criticism from international human rights groups. An Amnesty International report states that "the vague wording of the laws is deliberately exploited to violate human rights...these broad and ill-defined laws have created a vague legal framework which is misused to criminalize criticism of the government and legitimate dissent."<sup>39</sup>

### **Identity, Suspicion, and Ownership of Bikindi's Songs**

Though the laws broadly encompass various forms of expression, they still do not make it explicitly clear that it is illegal to own and listen to Bikindi's songs. The law on genocide ideology does make it clear that it is a crime to disseminate genocide ideology in the form of media, but it does not clarify that Bikindi's songs are considered a form of genocide ideology, though one would assume that most RPF authorities believe that they are. The question then arises as to whether the songs are actually censored. In fact, for many Rwandans, they apparently are not.

---

<sup>38</sup> "Rwandan opposition leader Victoire Ingabire jailed." BBC News Africa (30 October 2012). Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20138698>.

<sup>39</sup> Amnesty International, "Vague laws used to criminalise criticism of the government in Rwanda." Report (31 August 2010). Available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/vague-laws-used-criminalise-criticism-government-rwanda-2010-08-31>.

## The Freedom of Tutsi Survivors and RPF Supporters

When Julius pleaded for a recording of Bikindi's songs, I asked him, "Are you sure it's okay? I would not want you to get in trouble."

"No, no, it's no problem," he insisted. "I am *Tutsi*, I am *a survivor*. No one is going to accuse me of anything."

Indeed.

It was the same with Pierre when he asked for a recording. Again, I asked him, "Are you sure it's okay?" He did not specifically point out that it was because he was a Tutsi genocide survivor, but he assured me that no harm would come to him. It was also the same with Innocent, Moses, and others who were above suspicion because of their ethnicity, their status as genocide survivors, and/or their close connections with the RPF. Francis was especially free about sharing Bikindi's music in public. When we would ride buses together or go relax at the sauna, he would often pass my iPod around to other friends and acquaintances, letting them listen to Bikindi's songs. When he first started doing this, I asked him if he was sure it was such a good idea. He casually dismissed my concerns, explaining that he was a well-known and respected man in the community, head of the local defense force, and a former RPF refugee who had many friends in the military and government. No one was going to accuse him of anything.

One rather uncomfortable situation occurred when I shared Bikindi's songs with two young up-and-coming local pop musicians and their producer. They invited me to meet at the producer's studio in Butare and to bring a CD of Bikindi's songs. From their elders, they had heard about "the famous Bikindi," but they had never actually heard his music for themselves and so were curious to find out what all the fuss was about. The studio, consisting of two dark, tiny rooms—one for the performers and one for the recording engineers—was tucked away behind a shop in the center of town. I handed the recording to the producer. He slipped it into a CD player that was connected to a high-powered sound system. The young musicians listened intently, giggling at parts here and there as young people do when encountering the taboo. And then they proceeded to turn up the volume to full blast. With the door open to allow a breeze into the stuffy room, anyone out on the street would have heard Bikindi's songs blaring from the studio. I expected at any moment for a police officer to barge in, demanding to know what was going on, but nothing of the sort happened.

“Hey, I think we should turn it down!” I finally implored, and the producer mercifully complied. Clearly, though, that they felt perfectly safe listening to Bikindi’s songs in the open. They were all young university students and Tutsi. One of the musicians was involved in a performing arts project to raise funds for orphans. They offered no reason to any authority to suspect them of being politically subversive.

### **The Concerns of Some Hutu and RPF Critics**

It was an altogether different experience when I shared Bikindi’s music with Hutu and with critics of the RPF. When I first visited Joseph, it was one year before his brother’s trial. We met at his home where I was visited by a few other relatives, friends, and two local priests. In the privacy of his home, I was able to comfortably and freely share Bikindi’s music with them. They all passed around my iPod and listened with great interest, and the older ones were happy to share their thoughts, memories, and feelings concerning the songs. Joseph was so keen on owning a recording that he later traveled all the way to Butare—a difficult eight-hour round trip over cratered mountainous roads—just to acquire one from me. I noticed, though, that when we met at the guesthouse he seemed very nervous. No longer in the safe confines of his home, he kept his head down, his eyes constantly darted back and forth, and he spoke quietly and with hesitation. As soon as he finished the bottle of soda that I had brought him, he quickly left. When I handed him a recording and asked if he was sure it was okay that he be in possession of it, he replied, “It’s okay, I will be careful.”

The next year, when I visited him during his brother’s trial, we went one evening to see the priests at the local parish. With the pineapple wine flowing freely, everyone seemed to be in a relaxed mood. Joseph was interpreting for me. When they others asked how my work was going, I explained that I was still continuing my research on Bikindi. Then, curious to discover how their reactions would compare to the previous year, I asked them in return, “I have Bikindi’s songs right here; would you like to hear them again?” Joseph did not interpret this. Instead, he gave me a wary glance and briefly shook his head. I was about to remove my iPod from the front pocket of my jeans, but he placed his hand over my wrist, hidden under the dinner table. He was subtle about it, and no one seemed to notice, but his message was clear.

I was confused by the incident—everything had seemed fine the year before—and I felt embarrassed and worried that I had perhaps almost put Joseph in danger. The next morning, as

the two of us were walking to his brother's trial, I apologized. "Yes, things are not good right now," he said. "We have to be careful." His concern was that with the attention his brother's trial was receiving and the resulting suspicion that was being cast on his family, bringing Bikindi's songs out in public would only increase this suspicion. Though the two priests were old family friends, there were other less known people present the night before who possibly could not be trusted. If word somehow got out that we had all been listening to Bikindi's songs, the authorities might suspect that Joseph harbored the same sectarian, pro-genocide ideology for which his brother was accused. This could also be used as evidence against his brother.

I visited the Murambi Genocide Memorial for a third time just a few weeks after the incident with Joseph at the parish. My purpose this time was to interview the three guides who worked at the memorial. I accompanied my friend John, the former Hutu Anglican priest, who was well-acquainted with the guides and who agreed to act as an interpreter. Francis was also supposed to go with us, but he was running very late, and so John and I decided to not wait any longer. Besides, we thought, Francis did not know the guides, and so his presence was not really needed. Upon returning to the guesthouse, I found Francis waiting for me in the main room. In a departure from his normally warm, lighthearted demeanor, he seemed distant and irritable. After some stilted small talk, he finally came out with what was bothering him.

"I am a little bit annoyed with you that you went to Murambi with John. You should not have gone without me, and I must insist that you do not do this research without me being with you."

"Yes, but you were running so late," I argued. "We could not wait any longer."

"No, you should not have gone."

"Why?"

"Because people might be suspicious of you and John if they know you are talking about Bikindi and if you have his songs."

"No, it was fine," I tried to assure him. "The guides there are all friends of John. They know that I was just conducting research and that I'm not trying to cause any trouble."

Francis shook his head. "No, it's not a good idea. Maybe someone else finds out, and they tell someone else, and the news gets around. You have to be careful."

"But Francis, you share Bikindi's songs in public with people all the time."

"Yes, but people know me; they know who I am."

“People know John too, and they know that he does not discriminate or anything like that. He is good to everybody!”

“They know him here, but maybe not in Murambi. Look, John is *Hutu*, and even though he is a good guy, if you are Hutu and you have Bikindi’s songs, then there is chance that some people may suspect you. Maybe nothing happens to *you* because you are from U.S.A., but maybe something could happen to John.”

As a loyal supporter of the RPF, Francis was not insinuating that RPF officials would harass John. John was a *gacaca* judge, a former priest, and a highly respected figure in the community. His concern instead was that there are some people who still seek revenge for the genocidal killing of their relatives, and if a Hutu like John was discovered to be listening to Bikindi’s songs, they might suspect him of harboring genocide ideology and thus come after him.

As I let Francis’ admonishing words sink in, I began to comprehend how careless I was and how ignorant I was of the deep social fissures that persist in Rwanda. I apologized to Francis and promised not to venture out again without his permission. By this point, he and I had become close friends and colleagues, but before this moment, I had not realized that he was also using his reputation, political connections, and his cultural savvy—his “street smarts”—to protect me and my research.<sup>40</sup>

In all honesty, had I been more observant and aware, I would have picked up on clues earlier in my research that Bikindi’s songs are not only controversial but pose a possible danger to their owners, depending on their ethnic identity and relationship to the RPF. During my first trip to Rwanda, I arranged a meeting with the Director of the National University’s Center for Arts and Drama in order to inform him of my research and request his department’s assistance if needed. He seemed wary of me and my work, which I attributed to him being a high-ranking official and reputable playwright and me being some foreign graduate student who provided him little reason to think that I was worth his time. After some back-and-forth, he put the question directly to me, “So what do you think of Bikindi’s songs?”

---

<sup>40</sup> I should note that when I later shared all this with John, he did not seem the least bit concerned and thought that Frank was overreacting.

I explained that I did not really know yet, that I was just at the beginning of my research, that I was an American, an outsider, and therefore that I had come to Rwanda to find out what Rwandans think of Bikindi. “Why?” I asked in return. “What would be the problem?”

He leveled his gaze at me and said in no uncertain terms, “Well, if you were to say that Bikindi’s songs were okay, then *that* would be a problem.”

Fortunately (I suppose), I do not think that Bikindi’s songs are “okay.” I believe that they were a vital to a propaganda campaign that encouraged people to commit genocide. But I also believe that there is strong reason to doubt that this was Bikindi’s intent and that there are other reasonable ways of interpreting his songs. Still, simply owning recordings or playing the songs for others may be viewed as expressing approval of the assumed genocide message of the songs, putting one in danger of being accused of harboring and spreading divisionism, sectarianism, and genocide ideology.

I doubt that most Rwandans who would desire to own and listen to the songs harbor divisionist, sectarian, or genocide ideology and have no intention of fomenting or participating in violent conflict. Given the multiplicity of valid interpretations one can infer from the songs, owning or listening to them does not prove that one harbors sectarian or genocide ideology. It is absurd to think otherwise. Furthermore, it does not seem that Rwandans believe that owning and listening to recordings is in and of itself a breach of Rwandan law. Instead, the main reason that Bikindi’s songs are not broadcast, sold in the marketplace, or generally shared in public, especially if one is Hutu or a critic of the RPF, is not because there is a specific law or censorial agent explicitly forbidding it (though if broadcast on radio or television, the High Media Council would likely come asking questions); it is because people are afraid of being accused of harboring and spreading divisionist, sectarian or genocide ideology, and they are worried that demonstrating appreciation and approval of Bikindi’s songs could be used as evidence against them. As long as a listener and owner of Bikindi’s songs is above suspicion, then there seems to be no problem. For example, during the Week of Mourning which begins every year on April 7, television stations will air a steady stream of news stories, documentaries, and other films about the genocide. I was told that some of these films will occasionally feature short snippets of Bikindi’s songs. Authorities approve of this, because doing so reinforces the symbolic and causal association of Bikindi’s songs with the genocide.

## Coerced Self-Censorship

The question still remains as to whether the dynamics presented above constitute a form of censorship. Cloonan, in problematizing the issue of defining censorship, refers to the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, which identifies five types of censors: “(i) those who occupied such positions in ancient Rome; (ii) a person who exercises supervision over the conduct of morals of others; (iii) an adverse critic; (iv) officials with the power to suppress media (especially in wartime); and (v) a psychological power to limit thought.”<sup>41</sup> Cloonan goes on to note that the first four types as involving an authority figure or organization, but the fifth involves a form of self-censorship. He goes on to contemplate, “So censorship seems to be something which can be imposed from outside a person or organization or from the inside. But this raises the question of whether censorship has to be *deliberate* or not.”<sup>42</sup> He offers the following as a thoughtful aid to determine when censorship is taking place:

Another way of thinking through what constitutes censorship is to see it as a process of restricting or forbidding which can take place on three levels. The first is prior restraint or the silencing of free expression prior to publication. In music this may take the form of a record company refusing to release a track because of its lyrical content. The next level is restriction. Hence CDs may be sold in some places to restricted audiences or some tracks or pop videos may be played at certain times of the day when an adult is listening (and children generally not). The third level is that of suppression. In music this might mean making distribution of a published record illegal. It may also involve forbidding performances by certain acts. So once an act of censorship has been detected, it is then necessary to determine what *sort* of censorship is taking place.<sup>43</sup>

One may quibble with Cloonan’s categorical differentiation between restraint, restriction, and suppression. The important thing to draw from this is that censorship does not have to be official or systematic to still be censorship. In this case, Bikindi’s songs are censored according to all three levels of censorship as outlined by Cloonan: they are restrained from being published or distributed, they are restricted from being openly sold in the markets, and it is highly unlikely

---

<sup>41</sup> Martin Cloonan, “What is music censorship? Towards a better understanding of the term,” in Marie Korpe, ed., *Shoot the Singer!: Music Censorship Today* (London: Zed Books, 2004), pp. 3-4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

that Bikindi will ever again be allowed to perform in Rwanda. The issue, therefore, is to identify the *sort* of censorship taking place.

I identify the type of censorship occurring in Rwanda as “coerced self-censorship.” To me, this paradoxical terminology captures the essence of a sort of censorship in which individuals are not explicitly prohibited from owning or listening to Bikindi’s songs. However, their choice to do so or not is circumscribed by their fear of ambiguously written laws and of social peers who might make assumptions about the ideology of those who enjoy Bikindi’s music. It is thus up to individuals to determine whether or not they are in danger. Furthermore, this fear is manifest mainly along partisan and ethnic lines. In general, RPF officials and supporters and Tutsi survivors of the genocide feel free to own and listen to recordings; RPF critics and Hutu do not. While the disappearance of Bikindi’s songs from Rwandan society has the illusion of resulting from the free choices of individual citizens—that is, as a form of self-censorship—those choices have, in fact, been coerced by the threat of harassment and punishment from the government and from social peers.

### **Justifying the Censorship of Bikindi’s Songs**

For proponents of free expression rights, the laws against divisionism, sectarianism, and genocide ideology are alarming in their power to silence political argument and dissent, whether in the form of music or other forms of remonstrance. The ability to accommodate a plurality of political views is vital to a healthy, well-functioning society. The RPF declares that because war and genocide are so recent, such repressive policies and actions are needed to ensure stability and nurture reconciliation and development. Proponents of free expression rights counter this by arguing that these repressive policies and actions are actually worsening tensions and undermining peace.

As legitimate as this argument is, however, it ignores one critical factor. Though owning and listening to Bikindi’s songs may be a psychologically positive experience, this was not the case with all Rwandans with whom I shared. Francis and I met up with Pierre on the back patio of an upscale hotel. It was midweek and business was scarce, so the hotel’s proprietor, a middle-aged woman named Rosaline, came over to sit with us. She was friends with Pierre and Francis, and the three chatted away while I, not being able to understand them, had a glass of wine and stared at the stars. Eventually, their conversation wound its way over to me, and Francis



informed Rosaline of my research. He then asked me to take out my iPod to let her listen to Bikindi's songs. I cued them up, motioned for her to slip the earphones in her ears, and then hit the play button. Rosaline listened for only a few seconds before removing the earphones. "That's enough," she said to Francise. Whereas just a moment before she seemed happy and carefree, she now seemed solemn. She looked away, blinking back tears and gulping as she struggled to contain her emotions. Rosaline's husband was killed during the genocide, and having never remarried, she had no immediate family. Listening to Bikindi's music brought her no joy and only reminded her of all that she had lost.

I confronted similar responses on a few other occasions as well. Beata, the young woman who had lost her father and brother, also seemed to derive no joy from listening to Bikindi's songs. She listened for only a few moments before removing the earphones, looking subdued, and when I asked her if she would want to own a recording, she quickly said no, she had no interest. Clarice, the wife of Erick, lost her father and brother as well. Unlike her husband, she also did not show much interest in listening, and when I asked her how she would react if she heard the songs in the marketplace or on a radio somewhere in public, she replied, "I would run away! I would think people were coming to kill again." When I shared the songs with Francoise, the guide who worked at Murambi and who lost all his immediate family there, I asked him if he thought Bikindi's songs should be more available to Rwandans. He thought for a moment before replying, "Maybe it's better to let some things die." Finally, Judith, a singer of traditional song, also lost her husband in the genocide. She stated:

We are fortunate these songs are no longer played. If they were still played, some people would be traumatized because these are the same songs that were played when the killing was taking place...If you were to play them now, you would be putting society in danger. People would go mad. You wouldn't play them! Because otherwise, you would be calling people to do evil and causing other people to go mad.<sup>44</sup>

The genocide was only about fifteen years ago at the time I conducted these interviews. As these responses suggest, many Rwandans are still experiencing varying degrees of distress, and arguments against censorship need to be sensitive to this. If people should have the freedom

---

<sup>44</sup> Personal conversation, June 2009, with aid of interpreter

to express themselves—with consumption of music constituting a form of expression—should they also have the freedom to heal? Where does a person’s right to free expression impinge upon the emotional safety and comfort required for healing? These are not easy questions to address, and in attempting to do so, one must also consider the scope of the problem. A woman may be raped as a hit song plays in the background, and from then on, whenever the woman hears this song, she experiences flashbacks that induce panic and grief. Few would argue that this song should then be banned from the airwaves or market, depriving others from enjoying it. With appropriate compassion, the more reasonable argument would be that she should seek out help and support that will equip her to confront those moments when she hears the song. However, take this scenario and multiply it by a hundred thousand or a half million or by however many Rwandans continue to experience post-genocide distress. Consider also that this sizable group comprises a significant proportion of the population of a very small and densely populated nation. Whatever merits Bikindi’s songs may have, they are, for many Rwandans, indexically linked with the genocide. Hearing them again has the potential to induce psychological harm, all the more so because they have been effectively erased from society for over fifteen years. As discussed in the previous chapter (p. 292), this expanse of time has prevented a sort of immunity to the songs from developing. Save for the most extremist and hard-hearted proponents of free expression rights, the problem laid out here provides cause to reconsider whether stricter limits on expression in Rwanda are justified. Many progressive nations have laws that prohibit libel, slander, hate speech, incitement to crimes, and restrict access to pornographic and extremely violent material. Germany is notably intolerant of hate speech. It may be that, rather than overturning the laws against divisionism, sectarianism, and genocide ideology, they instead need to be written in a more specific manner so that there is no longer any guesswork as to how, when, and for whom they will be enforced.

## EPILOGUE

Under Scottish law, a criminal case may result in one of three verdicts: guilty, not guilty, and not proven. Juries render the latter verdict when they are unable to conclusively determine whether a defendant is guilty or innocent. The impact on the defendant's life is the same as a verdict of "not guilty" other than perhaps a life of scrutiny and suspicion. After seven years of research, this is the position I find myself taking. By no means is this due to an unwillingness on my part to confront uncomfortable facts, but to the contrary, it is simply because the facts are still in dispute. Bikindi's guilt has not been proven.

Christopher Taylor insists that ethnographers who research topics riven with social violence account for the moral imperative to present facts and dispute falsehoods that are expressed by their interlocutors. Foreign ethnographers working within post-colonial and post-conflict contexts are especially hesitant to argue with their interlocutors, preferring instead to analyze the subconscious or covert motives and broader ramifications of their beliefs and statements. The matter of their factuality is ignored in favor of their social relevance. While it is important to avoid ethnocentric representations of other people's realities, Taylor warns that this position:

...evades responsibility in those instances where the constructs of our interlocutors have dangerous political implications...If we completely avoid engaging [non-Western models] at the level of fact as well as at the level of discourse, we may very well become unwitting handmaidens to the violence that such models may promote. This is the case with versions of history that continue to be advanced by Hutu and Tutsi extremists in Rwanda and Burundi and are accepted as truth by many of their compatriots.<sup>1</sup>

Here, though, the facts of Bikindi's actions and the intentions behind his songs are difficult to apprehend. My approach has thus been to suspend Bikindi and his songs between ideological polarities and to show how people's perspectives, interpretations, and responses are tethered to their political loyalties, ethnic identities, and experiences of the genocide and its aftermath. Bikindi's songs defy totalistic explications. There is too much complexity, nuance,

---

<sup>1</sup> Taylor 1999, pp. 56-57.

and contradiction in them for any one side to rightfully claim the truth of their meaning. Where some argue that he was singing for genocide, there are the clear calls for peace, democracy, and equality. Where others say he was pleading for social harmony, there are disturbing passages that can be reasonably interpreted as a call for Hutu solidarity and demonization of Tutsi. There is the historical narrative predominant throughout his songs in which almost every victim or hero is a farmer—widely understood as a symbol of Hutu—and in which almost every adversary is either a monarchist—widely understood as a symbol of Tutsi—or European colonialist.

As I said in the first chapter, the purpose of this dissertation was to open up a needed dialogue concerning Bikindi's intentions, the role his songs had in inciting genocide, and the place they have, or ought to have, in post-genocide Rwanda. In regards to these objectives, I am under no illusion that this work is complete or conclusive; indeed, my guiding purpose has been to argue against certainty and closure. Numerous other avenues of research would undoubtedly yield further insights into these issues. For instance, I have engaged in little analysis of the music itself, its social and cultural relevance, and its cognitive and emotional impact on audiences in the early 1990s. Much of the reason for this is that my focus has been on the responses of participants, and when I asked them to describe the music, most responded to the effect that it was masterfully composed, exciting, fun to dance to, and so forth. It was difficult to get more detail or insight into the musical structures and their relevance, and so for the sake of time and space, I chose for now to leave a more fruitful analysis of the music to the side. I would say, though, that there is no "Hutu style" or "Tutsi style" of music; the music itself does not carry clear ethnic associations in a way that, say, hip-hop carries strong racial associations. More relevant I believe was Bikindi's ability to hybridize the traditional and modern in a way that a cross-generational audience found intriguing. Another avenue of research might involve a choreological analysis; after all, these songs were intended to be performed live, and when they were, they were choreographed. Knowledge of that choreography might possibly contribute to a better appreciation of the intended meaning and effects of the songs. I did ask a couple of the performers in *Irindiro* to describe the choreography, but lacking any substantial knowledge of dance theory, I found it too difficult to adequately assess their descriptions.

I admit that this research has often been profoundly uncomfortable for me. For one thing, I *am* an outsider. I have no idea what it was like to endure the genocide, nor do I have much appreciation for what it is to live under the rule of the RPF. I have tried to get myself out of the

way and let the voices of this study's participants come through—to let them make the arguments—and yet, I am inevitably the one who controls the discourse. Lining up competing interpretations and views of Bikindi next to each other implies a critique of all of them. To say that I was only providing a forum for others to debate is to hide behind false cover because, in the end, I am the one providing that forum and selecting who and what will receive attention. This was made all the more difficult for me in that a number of participants, people who stood in opposite corners of the debate, became my good friends. A few expected me to exclusively argue their side, and I fear that they might see this dissertation as a betrayal. Most, however—and I am so grateful to them—understood and affirmed my purposes. They encouraged me to stay in the center while giving voice to different viewpoints, even if this meant critiquing their perspectives and arguments. One such individual was my friend John, the former Anglican priest who was defrocked after the genocide, likely because he was Hutu. I find solace and wisdom in his words:

I believe that in many democratic countries, people are allowed to express themselves—their feelings, their beliefs—through songs or through the media. So, to some extent, Bikindi expressed his ideas. There's no need to judge him for his ideas...[Instead], we have a responsibility—we ourselves who are judging him. *How are we? Who are we to judge him? How are we, ourselves?* So, I'm saying, "Enough is enough." Let's look forward. Let's look for something positive. Let's look for reconciliation. We should not be fighting and just judging people. But reconciliation should come for real in Rwanda. And what happened should be a history to remind people, and to tell our descendants that such bad things should not happen again. That's what I feel when I listen to the music of Bikindi.

As for Bikindi, I doubt he will ever be able to safely return to his homeland. The RPF would have to call off its witch hunt, allow more openness for dissent, and ensure the security of those with whom it has differences. There is little evidence that the RPF is moving in this direction.

Near the end of our time together, I asked Bikindi what he would say if he were somehow given the opportunity to speak to all Rwandans. He replied as follows:

BIKINDI: Mm-hmm, I would tell them an important thing. One: To respect one another. Respect one another. No matter who you are, respect others. That's a big thing. So I shouldn't see you as a Tutsi and you shouldn't see me as a Hutu. There should be no enmity. So that is very important. Respect one another. That would be very important. The second thing: To tell the truth, and admit to lies against other Rwandese. To me, as Bikindi, I had not done anything, and then I see the police with handcuffs on me! Because I composed "Twasazareye" in 1986?! Because of that, you put me in handcuffs?! It hurts me. [Switches to English]: *It hurts very, very, very much!* [Back to Kinyarwanda]: Telling the truth...taking money and telling lies...saying that Bikindi killed the priest Gatore—who died in April! And yet they said that Bikindi killed him in June! And I proved this. I proved it!

MCCOY: [Gatore] died in April...

BIKINDI: In April!

MCCOY: ...and you were in Europe...

BIKINDI: [In English]: I was in Europe! [Back to Kinyarwanda]: So that kind of culture is not good. When someone lies, people cannot be united.

The third thing I would tell Rwandese, but more especially the leaders: To share. Some crimes occur because of injustices. Some Rwandese are living like they are in heaven. But others live down "here," like stray dogs. And when they get an opportunity, those hungry people, to get more, then there is trouble.

The fourth: To forgive. If the wife does not forgive the husband and the husband does not forgive the wife, and the children cannot forgive one another, the house is destroyed...*No one is innocent.*

I will finish with a proverb so that you can go with it. A husband enters his big house and discovers his wife with another man in the bedroom. The husband goes to the living room, the main room, and he tells his worker to bring food while he sits and reads his newspaper. This other man—there is only one door for him to get out. Finally, he opens the door and comes out and sees the owner of the house sitting in the living room, saying nothing. And the woman watches her husband and says, "There is nothing I can do. My husband is preparing to kill me."

After eating, the husband takes his newspaper, and he gets in his car and drives off. The woman, she thinks, “I don’t know what will happen in the night.” Later, the husband returns, reads his books, the food comes, and he eats. Then, he goes to the bedroom where his wife and the other man were having sex, and he washes and goes to sleep. Meanwhile, the woman packs up her things and goes to her home...

...After a long time, the woman tells her mother what happened. Her parents go and talk to the husband, and he says, “Did I chase her from the house? Bring her back.” And so they bring her back to the house, and he says, “Whatever I found you doing, I forgive you.” And so she bows down and receives the forgiveness.

So this kind of forgiveness, not many people are capable of it. The only thing for most would be to take a knife and kill the wife or maybe take a pistol and kill the wife and her lover. It’s easy to “forgive” someone, but it’s hard to really give it up.

So these are the four things, if the *bene data*<sup>2</sup> of Rwanda will have peace. So I would tell them those four things.

MCCOY: To respect one another.

BIKINDI: Mm-hmm.

MCCOY: To tell the truth.

BIKINDI: [In English]: To tell the truth.

MCCOY: To share.

BIKINDI: Mm-hmm.

MCCOY: And to forgive.

BIKINDI: [In English]: To forgive.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Bene data* has the same meaning as “brothers and sisters” but more literally translates as “children of the [same] father.”

FRANCIS: How do you find these things, Mr. Bikindi? How are these four things possible for Rwandese society, having gone through...?

BIKINDI: [In Kinyarwanda]: It's simple! For example, there was one person who testified against me who was horrible. I wondered whether this person had been given drugs to say such things!

If I could cry out, to shout out, to cry for people to forgive, to cry for justice, to cry for the truth—these are important values that you cannot weigh. You cannot measure the magnitude of how telling lies, how it can weigh heavily.

Parents know how important it is to bring up a child who is good. A child makes a mess all over. He destroys things. He is aggressive, and he breaks things. You lose that sense of forgiveness and you beat him. But that is not the way to be a parent. Even a young child, you can sit with him and tell him that what he did was not good, and he will not do it again. It matters the place and the environment in which you raise him. If you beat him to show that what he has done is not good, he will say, "My father hit me for no good reason." You must make him understand and pardon him.

FRANCIS: Knowing how Rwandan society is, and that you are part of it, curiously, if when done with your imprisonment, would you go back to Rwanda and cry out? And say that this is what is needed in this society?

BIKINDI: The child runs out of your house even though you created him. He looks at you as a father and then runs away. He runs away because he doesn't see that you have any sense of humor. He doesn't see you as human. He runs away because he is afraid. I have a song that I am planning that says that I wish that I had another opportunity to sing; I would go back to that land of a thousand hills, and I would go up on the mountain, and when I got there, I would cry out.



**APPENDIX A:**

**E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE DATED 23 MAY 2008 FROM THE  
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

HSC Number: 2008.1161

Your application has been received by our office. Upon review, it has been determined that your protocol is an oral history, which in general, does not fit the definition of “research” pursuant to the federal regulations governing the protection of research subjects. Please be mindful that there may be other requirements such as releases, copyright issues, etc. that may impact your oral history endeavor, but are beyond the purview of this office.

## REFERENCES

### Trial Documents

Appeals Judgment. Simon Bikindi vs. The Prosecutor. Case No. ICTR-01-72-A, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), 18 March 2010.

Final Judgment. Simon Bikindi vs. The Prosecutor. Case No. ICTR-01-72-A, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), 2 December 2008.

Indictment. Simon Bikindi vs. The Prosecutor. Case No. ICTR-01-72-A, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), 27 June 2001.

Mbonimana, Gamaliel and Jean de Dieu Karangwa. "Topical analysis of the songs *Twasazereye*: We bade farewell; *Nanga abahutu* or *Akabyutso*: I hate the Hutu or The Awakening; and *Bene sebahinizi* or *Intabaza*: The descendents of Sebahinizi or The Alert by Simon Bikindi." Expert report prepared for the Prosecution. Case No. ICTR-01-72-A. 2006.

Shimamungu, Eugène. Expert Report for the Defense. Case No. ICTR-01-72-A. 2006.

### Works Cited

Adelman, Howard. "The Ethics of Intervention—Rwanda." In *Dilemmas of Intervention: Sovereignty vs. Responsibility*. Richard H. Ulman and Michael Keren, eds. London: Frank Cass Publications, 1999.

Amnesty International. "Vague laws used to criminalise criticism of the government in Rwanda." Report 31 August 2010. Available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/vague-laws-used-criminalise-criticism-government-rwanda-2010-08-31>.

André, Catherine and Jean-Philippe Platteau. "Land Relations under Unbearable Stress: Rwanda Caught in the Malthusian Trap." In *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, vol. 34, no. 1 (1 January 1998): 1-47.

Averill, Gage. *Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of American Barbershop Harmony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Avruch, Kevin. "Notes Toward Ethnographies of Conflict and Violence." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 30, no. 5 (October 2001): 637-48.

Bahirtas, Gezahegn Teji. *Music Censorship in Contemporary Ethiopia: the Case of Ethiopian Radio and FM Addis 97.1*. Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Publishing, 2009.

Bal, Mieke, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer, eds. *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999.

- Barme, Geremie. *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Bassiouni, M. Cherif. *Crimes against Humanity in International Criminal Law*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Alphen aan den Rijn, The Netherlands: Kluwer Law International, 1999.
- Benesch, Susan. "Vile Crime or Inalienable Right: Defining Incitement to Genocide." In *Virginia Journal of International Law*, vol. 52, no. 4 (June 2012): 485-528.
- Berkeley, Bill. *The Graves Are Not Yet Full: Race, Tribe, and Power in the Heart of Africa*. New York: Basic Books, 2002: 2.
- Berry, John A. and Carol Pott Berry, eds. *Genocide in Rwanda: A Collective Memory*. Washington, D.C: Howard University Press, 1999.
- Bissell, William Cunningham. "Engaging Colonial Nostalgia." In *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 20, no. 2 (May 2005): 215-248.
- Blecha, Peter. *Taboo Tunes: a History of Banned Bands and Censored Songs*. San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2004.
- Blumer, Herbert. *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969.
- Bornkamm, Paul Christoph. *Rwanda's Gacaca Courts: Between Retribution and Reparation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: BasicBooks, 2001.
- Brown, Laura S. "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995: 100-112.
- Brison, Susan J. *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of Self*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Bruner, Jerome. "Life as Narrative." In *Social Research*, vol. 54 (1987): 11-32.
- Buchler, Justus. *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, [1955] 1995.
- Buckley-Zistel, Susanne. "Remembering to Forget: Chosen Amnesia as a Strategy for Local Coexistence in Post-Genocide Rwanda." In *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 76, no. 2 (2006): 131-50.

- Carlsson, Ingvar, Sung-Joo Han, and Rufus M. Kupolati. *Report of the Independent Inquiry Into the Actions of the United Nations During the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda* (S/1999/1257). 16 December 1999.
- Caruth, Cathy (ed.). *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Carver, Richard. "Shooting the Messenger: the Media, Ethnicity, and Political Violence in Africa." Speech delivered at the Annual General Meeting of the Freedom of Expression Institute, Johannesburg, South Africa, 23 May 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Neutralising the Voices of Hate: Broadcasting and Genocide." In *African Voices on Development and Social Justice: Editorials from Pambazuka News*. Ed. Firoze Manji and Patrick Burnett. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2004: 69-73.
- Chrétien, Jean-Pierre. *Rwanda: les medias du genocide*. Paris: Karthala (with Reporters sans Frontières), 1995.
- Clapham, Christopher, ed. *African Guerillas*. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1998.
- Clifford, James and Marcus Fisher. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Cloonan, Martin. "What is music censorship? Towards a better understanding of the term." In *Shoot the Singer!: Music Censorship Today*. Ed. Marie Korpe. London: Zed Books, 2004.
- Corey, Allison and Sandra F. Joireman. "Retributive justice: the *Gacaca* courts in Rwanda." In *African Affairs*, vol. 103, no. 410 (2004): 73-89.
- Craig, Dylan and Nomalanga Mkhize, "Vocal Killers, Silent Killers: Popular Media, Genocide, and the Call for Benevolent Censorship in Rwanda." In *Popular Music Censorship in Africa*. Ed. Michael Drewett and Martin Cloonan. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishers, 2006: 39-52.
- Dallaire, Roméo. *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*. New York: Carroll and Graff Publishers, 2003.
- Davenport, Christian and Allan C. Stam. "What Really Happened in Rwanda?" In *Miller-McCune*. 6 October 2009. Available at: <http://www.miller-mccune.com/politics/what-really-happened-in-rwanda-3432/>.
- Dean, Carolyn J. *The Fragility of Empathy after the Holocaust*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Dennett, Daniel C. "Why Everyone is a Novelist" In *The Times Literary Supplement*. 16-22 September 1988

- Des Forges, Alison. *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Call to Genocide: Radio in Rwanda, 1994." In *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide*. Ed. Alan Thompson. London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007: 41-54
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Defeat is the Only Bad News: Rwanda under Musinga, 1896-1931*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011.
- Desmarais, J. C., "Idéologies et races dans l'Ancien Rwanda." In *These de philosophie*. Montréal: Université of Montréal Press, 1977: 277.
- Diamond, Jared. "Malthus in Africa: Rwanda's Genocide." In *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, by Jared Diamond. New York: Penguin Press, 2005: 311-28.
- Drewett, Michael. "Remembering subversion: resisting censorship in apartheid South Africa." In *Shoot the Singer!: Music Censorship Today*. Ed. Marie Korpe. London: Zed Books, 2004: 88-93.
- Drewett, Michael and Martin Cloonan, eds. *Popular Music Censorship in Africa*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006.
- Dunn, Christopher. *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- Eakin, Emily. "Anthropology's Alternative Radical." In *New York Times*, 21 April 2001: A15.
- Ellul, Jacques. *Propaganda: the Formation of Men's Attitudes*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc (Vintage Books Edition): 1965/1973.
- Emoff, Ron. "Phantom Nostalgia and Recollecting (from) the Colonial Past in Tamatave, Madagascar." In *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 46, no. 2 (Spring – Summer 2002): 265-83.
- Eylon, Lili. "The Controversy over Richard Wagner." Jewish Virtual Library, 2010. Available at: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/Wagner.html>.
- Eyre, Banning. *Playing with Fire: Fear and Self-Censorship in Zimbabwean Music*. Copenhagen: Freemuse, 2001.
- Feld, Steven. "Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style, or 'Lift-Up-Over-Sounding': Getting Into the Kaluli Groove." In *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, vol. 20 (1988): 74-113.
- Foucauld, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Trans. Colin Gordon et al. New York: Pantheon, 1980.
- Franche, Dominique. *Généologie du génocide rwandais*. Brussels: Tribord, 2009.

- Freedman, Sarah Warshauer, Harvey M. Weinstein, et al. "Teaching History after Identity-based Conflicts: The Rwanda Experience." In *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 52, no. 4. (November 2008): 663-690.
- Garner, B. A., ed. *Black's Law Dictionary*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. St. Paul, MN: West Group, 1999.
- Garrison, Ann. "Rwanda Shuts Down Independent Press." In *Digital Journal*, 14 April 2010. Available at: <http://digitaljournal.com/article/290545>.
- Gersony, Robert. *Summary of UNHCR Presentation before Commission of Experts 10 October 1994: Prospects for Early Repatriation of Rwandan Refugees Currently in Burundi, Tanzania, and Zaïre*. United Nations High Commission for Refugees.
- Gilovich, Thomas. *How We Know What Isn't So: The Fallibility of Human Reason in Everyday Life*. New York: Free Press, 1993.
- Gourevitch, Philip. *We Wish To Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*. New York: Picador, 1998.
- Gulseth, Hege Løvdal. *The Use of Propaganda in the Rwandan Genocide: A Study of Radio-Télévision Libre de Mille Collines (RTLM)*. M.A. thesis, University of Oslo, 2004.
- Gunderson, Frank. *Sukuma Labor Songs from Western Tanzania*. Lieden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2010.
- Hansen, Toran. *The Gacaca Tribunals in Post-Genocide Rwanda*. Center for Restorative Justice & Peacemaking, School of Social Work, University of Minnesota. Saint Paul, MN: University of Minnesota, 2005.
- Hatzfeld, Jean. *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*. Trans. Linda Coverdale. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005 [2003].
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Life Laid Bare: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak*. Trans. Linda Coverdale. New York: Other Press, 2006 [2000].
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Antelope's Strategy: Living in Rwanda after the Genocide*. Trans. Linda Coverdale. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009 [2007].
- Herman, Edward S. and David Peterson. *The Politics of Genocide*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: the Aftermath of Recovery—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 1992/1997.
- Heusch, Luc de. *Sacrifice in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

- Higiro, Jean-Marie Vianney. "Rwandan Private Media on the Eve of the Genocide." In *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide*. Ed. Alan Thompson. London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007: 73-89.
- Hintjens, Helen. "Post-genocide identity politics in Rwanda." In *Ethnicities*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2008): 5-41.
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Terrence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Hoffer, Eric. *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers (First Perennial Modern Classics Edition), 1951/2010.
- Human Rights Watch. World Report 2010: Rwanda. Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2010/rwanda>.
- Johnson, Bruce and Martin Cloonan. *Dark Side of the Tune: Popular Music and Violence*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate. 2009.
- Johnston, Steven. "Political Not Patriotic: Democracy, Civic Space, and the American Memorial/Monument Complex." In *Theory & Event*, vol. 5, issue 2 (2001) *Project MUSE*. Web. 29 Oct. 2012. Available at: [muse.jhu.edu](http://muse.jhu.edu).
- Jones, Bruce D. *Peacemaking in Rwanda: The Dynamics of Failure*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001.
- Kagire, Edmund and Patrick Condon, "Peter Erlinder, American Lawyer, Arrested by Rwandan Police." *Associated Press* (28 May 2010). Available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/05/29/peter-erlinder-american-l\\_n\\_594440.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/05/29/peter-erlinder-american-l_n_594440.html).
- Kimani, Mary. "RTL: the Medium that Became a Tool for Mass Murder." In *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide*. Ed. Alan Thompson. London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007: 110-124.
- Kirkby, Coel. "Rwanda's Gacaca Courts: A Preliminary Critique." In *Journal of African Law*, vol. 50, no. 2 (2006): 94-117.
- Kirschke, Linda. *Broadcasting Genocide: Censorship, Propaganda & State-sponsored Violence in Rwanda 1990-1994*. London: Article 19, 1996.
- Koen, Benjamin, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Korpe, Marie, ed. *Shoot the Singer!: Music Censorship Today*. London: Zed Books, 2004.
- Kuperman, Alan J. "Provoking Genocide: A Revised History of the Rwandan Patriotic Front." In *The Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 6, no. 1 (March 2004): 61-84.

- LaCapra, Dominick. *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Lacger, Louis de. *Ruanda I: Le Ruanda ancien*. Kabgayi, Rwanda, 1930.
- Lanzmann, Claude. "The Obscenity of Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995: 200-220.
- Laub, Dori. "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995: 61-75.
- Laville, Sandra. "Two Years Late and Mired in Controversy: the British Memorial to Rwanda's Past." In *The Guardian*. 13 November 2006. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/nov/13/rwanda.sandraLaville>.
- Layton, Lynne. "Trauma, Gender Identity and Sexuality: Discourses in Fragmentation." In *American Imago*, vol. 52, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 107-125.
- Lemarchand, René. "Anglo-Saxon Conspiracy?" *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* by Gerard Prunier [Review]. In *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 38, no. 2 (1997): 348-49.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Genocide, Memory and Ethnic Reconciliation in Rwanda." In *L'Afrique des Grand Lacs: Annuaire 2006-2007*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007: 21-30.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Li, Darryl. "Echoes of Violence: Considerations on Radio and Genocide." In *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide*. Ed. Alan Thompson. London: Pluto Press, 2007: 90-109
- Lidtke, Vernon L. "Songs and Nazis: Political and Social Change in Twentieth-Century Germany." In *Essays on Culture and Society in Modern Germany*. Ed. Gary D. Stark and Bede Karl Lackner. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1982.
- Lienhardt, Godfrey. *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961/1988.
- Linden, Ian. *Church and Revolution in Rwanda*. Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1977.
- Livingston, Steven and Todd Eachus. "Rwanda: U.S. policy and television coverage." In *The Path of a Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaire*. Ed. Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999: 209-230.
- Longman, Timothy. *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.



- Lonsdale, Jonathan. "Moral and Political Arguments in Kenya." In *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*. Ed. Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyok, and Will Kymlicka. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004: 73-95.
- Macquet, Jacques. *Les système des relations sociaux dans le Ruanda ancien*. Tervuren, Belgium: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 1954.
- Mahmood, Cynthia K. *Fighting for faith and nation: Dialogues with Sikh militants*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
- Malkki, Liisa. *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- McCoy, Jason. "Making Violence Ordinary: Radio, Music, and the Rwandan Genocide." In *African Music*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2009): 85-96.
- McNeil, Donald T. "Killer Songs: Simon Bikindi Stands Accused of Writing Folk Music that Fed the Rwandan Genocide." *The New York Times Magazine*, 17 March 2002, 58-9.
- Melvorn, Linda. *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*. London: Zed Books, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*. London: Verso, 2006.
- Mitari, Jean. "Rwanda: censorship reaches a scary level." *Jambonews.net*, 17 August 2012.
- Mironko, Charles. "The Effects of RTLM's Rhetoric of Ethnic Hatred in Rural Rwanda." In *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide*. Ed. Alan Thompson. London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007: 125-135.
- Morris, Leslie. "The Sound of Memory." In *The German Quarterly*. Sites of Memory, vol. 74, no. 4 (Autumn 2001): 368-78.
- Newbury, Catherine. *The Cohesion of Oppression: Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda, 1860-1960*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Newbury, David S. "The Clans of Rwanda: An Historical Hypothesis." In *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 50, no. 4 (1980): 389-403
- Nowrojee, Binaifer, Dorothy Q. Thomas, and Janet Fleischman. *Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence during the Rwandan Genocide and its Aftermath*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996.

- Ntambara, Paul. "Murambi Genocide Records Low Visitor Turn-Up". *New Times*, 30 April 2010. Available at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201004300137.html>.
- Otunnu, Ogenga. "An historical analysis of the invasion by the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA)." In *The Path of a Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaïre*," ed. Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999: 31–49.
- Pages, Pere. *Un royaume hamite au centre de l'Afrique*. Brussels: Institut Royal du Congo Belge, 1933
- Peirce, Charles Sanders. *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. Ed. Justus Buchler. New York: Dover, 1955 [2011].
- Peskin, Victor. *International Justice in Rwanda and the Balkans: Virtual Trial and the Struggle for State Cooperation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Pollack, Craig Evan. "Intentions of Burial: Mourning, Politics, and Memorial Following the Massacre at Srebrenica," in *Death Studies*, vol. 27, issue 2 (2003): 125-142.
- Potter, Pamela. "Musicology Under Hitler: New Sources in Context." In *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 49 (1996): 70-113.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Dismantling a Dystopia: On the Historiography of Music in the Third Reich." In *Central European History*, vol. 40 (2007), 623-651.
- Potter, Pamela and Celia Applegate, eds. *Music and German Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Pottier, Johan. *Re-imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge University Press: 2002.
- Prunier, Gérard. *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Rwandan Patriotic Front." In *African Guerillas*. Ed. Christopher Clapham. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1998: 119-33
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Reporters Without Borders. "Around 30 News Media Closed a Few Days Ahead of Presidential Elections." 2 August 2010. Available at: [http://en.rsf.org/rwanda-around-30-news-media-closed-a-few-02-08-2010\\_38076.html](http://en.rsf.org/rwanda-around-30-news-media-closed-a-few-02-08-2010_38076.html).

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Press Freedom Report 2011-2012." Available at: <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012,1043.html>.
- Rettig, Max. "Gacaca: Trust, Justice, and Reconciliation in Postconflict Rwanda?" In *African Studies Review*, vol. 51, no. 3 (December 2008): 25-50.
- Reyntjens, Filip. "Rwanda, Ten Years On: From Genocide to Dictatorship." In *African Affairs*, vol. 103 (2004): 177-210.
- Rice, Timothy. "Toward a Mediation of Field Methods and Field Experience in Ethnomusicology." In *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*. Ed. By Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J. Cooley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Ricoeur Paul. *Time and Narrative, Vol. I*. Transl. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Transl. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago, University of Chicago, 2004.
- Ritivoi, Andreea Deciu. *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002.
- Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania: Publishing House, 1971.
- Ruskin, Jesse D. and Timothy Rice. "The Individual in Ethnography." In *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 56, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2012): 299-327.
- Sacks, Oliver. *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales*. New York: Touchstone (First Touchstone Edition), 1998: 110-11.
- Sant Cassa, Paul. "Exoticizing Discoveries and Extraordinary Experiences: 'Traditional' Music, Modernity, and Nostalgia in Malta and Other Mediterranean Societies." In *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 44, no. 2 (Spring – Summer 2000): 281-301.
- Sarkin, Jeremy. "The Tension between Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda: Politics, Human Rights, Due Process and the Role of the Gacaca Courts in Dealing with the Genocide." In *Journal of African Law*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2001): 143-72.
- Schechtman, Marya. *The Constitution of Selves*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Scherrer, Christian P. *Genocide and Crisis in Central Africa: Conflict Roots, Mass Violence, and Regional War*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002.
- Shirakawa, Sam H. *The Devil's Music Master*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

- Shelemay, Kay Kaufman. *Let Jasmine Rain Down: Song and Remembrance among Syrian Jews*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Sherrif, Robin E. "Exposing Silence as Cultural Censorship: a Brazilian Case." In *American Anthropologist*, New Series, vol. 102, no. 1 (March 2000): 114-32.
- Shumway, David R. "Rock 'n' Roll Soundtracks and the Production of Nostalgia." In *Cinema Journal*, vol. 38, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 36-51
- Smith, Pierre. *Le récit populaire au Rwanda*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1975.
- Smithson, Roger. *Furtwängler's Silent Years: 1945-47*. Paris: Société Wilhelm Furtwängler. 1997.
- Sommers, Marc. *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* by Gerard Prunier [Review]. In *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1998): 212-14.
- Stephens, John and Robyn McCallum. *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarrative in Children's Literature*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Straus, Scott. "How many perpetrators were there in the Rwandan genocide? An estimate." In *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 6, no. 1 (March 2004): 85-98.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006.
- Strawson, Galen. "Against Narrativity." In *Ratio (new series)* XVII (4 December 2004): 428-452.
- Sutton, Julie P. *Music, Music Therapy and Trauma: International Perspectives*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Taylor, Christopher C. *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994*. New York: Berg, 1999.
- Temple-Raston, Dina. *Justice on the Grass: Three Rwandan Journalists, Their Trial for War Crimes and a Nation's Quest for Redemption*. New York: Free Press, 2005.
- Thompson, Alan, ed. *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide*. London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007.
- Thomson, Susan M. *Resisting Reconciliation: State Power and Everyday Life in Post-Genocide Rwanda*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Halifax: Dalhousie University, 2009,

- Titon, Jeff Todd. *Powerhouse for God: Speech, Chant, and Song in an Appalachian Baptist Church*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988.
- Toner, P. G. "Tropes of Longing and Belonging: Nostalgia and Musical Instruments in Northeast Arnhem Land." In *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, vol. 37 (2005): 1-24.
- Turino, Thomas. *Music as Social Life: the Politics of Participation*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007.
- Turner, Thomas. *The Congo Wars: Conflict, Myth, and Reality*. Londong: Zed Books, 2007.
- Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Piscataway, NJ: Aldine Transaction (Reprint Edition): 1969/1995.
- Umutesi, Marie Béatrice. *Surviving the Slaughter: The Ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire*. Trans. Julia Emerson. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.
- UN Doc. S/RES/955, 8 November 1994.
- UN Doc. S/RES/977 1995, 22 February 1995.
- Uvin, Peter. *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda*. Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda: Different Paths to Mass Violence." In *Comparative Politics*, vol. 31, no. 3 (April 1999): 253-71.
- Van Alphen, Ernst. "Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, and Trauma." In *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*. Ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999: 24-38.
- Vansina, Jan. *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya Kingdom*. Trans. Jan Vansina. University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.
- Vidal, Claudine. "Les commémorations du génocide au Rwanda." In *Les Temps Modernes*, vol. 56, no. 613 (2001): 1-46.
- Walker, James. *The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota Sioux*. Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 1917/2012.
- Waller, James. *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

- Waters, Tony. *The Rwanda Crisis, 1959-1994: History of a Genocide* by Gérard Prunier [Review]. In *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 34, no. 4 (December 1996): 717-19.
- Waugh, Colin M. *Paul Kagame and Rwanda: Power, Genocide and the Rwandan Patriotic Front*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2004.
- White, Bob W. *Rumba Rules: The Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu's Zaire*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.
- White, Michael & David Epston. *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990.
- White, Michael. *Maps of Narrative Practice*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2007.
- Whitehead, Anne. *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.
- Wicke, Peter. "Sentimentality and High Pathos: Popular Music in Fascist Germany." In *Popular Music*, vol. 5 (1985): 149-58.
- Wilson, Janelle L. *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2005.
- Wood, Elisabeth Jean. "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones." In *Qual Sociol*, vol. 29 (2006): 373-386.
- Yanagizawa-Drott, David. *Propaganda and Conflict: Theory and Evidence from the Rwandan Genocide*. Paper presented at Harvard Kennedy School, 2010. Available at: [http://jagiellonia.econ.columbia.edu/colloquia/political/papers/d\\_yanagizawa.pdf](http://jagiellonia.econ.columbia.edu/colloquia/political/papers/d_yanagizawa.pdf).
- Yano, Christine R. *Tears of Longing: Nostalgia and the Nation in Japanese Popular Song*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asian monographs, no. 206, 2002.
- Zimmerman, Mara. "Now You See It, Now You Don't: Few guidelines exist for gaining access to evidence after trial." In *The News Media & The Law* (Spring 2010): 19. Available at: <http://www.rcfp.org/browse-media-law-resources/news-media-law/news-media-and-law-spring-2010/now-you-see-it-now-you-dont>.
- Zwerin, Mike. *Swing under the Nazis: Jazz as a Metaphor for Freedom*. New York: Cooper Square, 2000.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Jason McCoy was born in 1976 in Pusan, South Korea, where his parents worked as music missionaries. His mother taught him to play piano and trumpet, and throughout much of his childhood, he performed in school bands and church choirs. Due much in part to his upbringing in Korea, Mr. McCoy has long had an interest in the diverse cultural thought and expression. Combining this with his passion for music (he earned B.M. and M.M. degrees in composition from the University of Southern California), in 2005, he chose to embark upon a career in ethnomusicology. He enrolled in the Florida State University where he earned an M.M. (2007) in ethnomusicology. His thesis focused on religious belief, ritual, and community formation as embodied in a Southern Gospel Sing service. His current major area of research concerns the musical propaganda of the Rwandan genocide, particularly the songs of the controversial Rwandan musician, Simon Bikindi.

He is married to Texas native, Kristin McCoy, who works as a speech-language pathologist. They have one son, Graydon Todd McCoy.