

with guns and grenades. They killed, killed and killed until they were tired of killing. The blood spread out, flowing like red mud. There were so many corpses that you could not pick out the body of your own son. In the evening, they left. Out of about two thousand people, there were four hundred survivors. My mother, Bernadette Nyaramigiri and four elder brothers, along with their wives and children, were among those who died.

The next day, they came back and asked the survivors to lift the corpses. They packed four rounds of dead bodies onto military vehicles. But still bodies remained. That night, we helped each other climb out through the windows. We used clothes to hoist ourselves up. But it was very difficult, especially as many were wounded, or exhausted by shock, fear and tiredness. It was especially hard for the women. Only about five of them managed to climb out. Some children also succeeded.

We headed towards Kanyaro river and the Burundi border. We were about a hundred people, the ones who jumped out and others we found on the route. When we got to Kanyaro, soldiers started shooting at us. I lost two of my children there. Many other people were killed. Despite the shooting, there was no question of turning back. We knew only death awaited us in that direction. People moved towards the bullets in the hope of somehow getting through. The lucky ones crossed into Burundi and were helped by Burundi soldiers. Forty made it out of our little group of a hundred, thirteen men and four women from the church, fifteen people who had joined us on the road and eight children. At the time, my wife was visiting my parents in Kigembe. Two of my children have survived.⁴⁷

Massacre at the Ranch of ISAR, Songa

"Is it a crime to be a Tutsi?"

The massacre at the ISAR ranch and agricultural research station is not unusual in the number of people killed—several thousand—nor in the stories of the survivors. But, more than many other massacres, the central involvement of the Rwandese army is absolutely clear.

Josephine Mukandori, a peasant from Kareba sector in the commune of Ntongwe, is a survivor of the massacre at the ranch of ISAR. She is the mother of five children.

On Thursday we learned that the President had been killed. On Friday, we heard that Agathe [Prime Minister] had been killed and that there had been attacks in Bugesera. But we were told by government officials that they

⁴⁷ Interviewed in Gashora, Bugesera, 8 June 1994.

were doing everything possible to ensure our security. People began to flee to Kareba from the areas already affected by the violence. After that the killings spread to Nyakabungo, meaning that the violence was becoming nearer and nearer to us. The refugees left us and went to Ntongwe in order to seek protection from the authorities.

Meanwhile our sector was okay. We were also influenced by Radio Rwanda which kept telling us to stay at home. Suddenly, the neighbouring sector was attacked. As the fear mounted, officials were still saying that our sector would not be touched. But by then we had lost heart in their words. The men began preparations and organized a defence. Attackers, who were villagers imported from other communes, and who had painted ash and chalk over their faces and covered themselves with dry banana leaves, attacked us on the 16th. There was a confrontation between our defence and the thugs. One of the thugs was killed and the rest of them withdrew.

They came back reinforced by soldiers. When armed soldiers arrived, our defence crumbled. We fled towards the commune of Muyira in Butare. On the 16th, Butare was still considered safe. We spent two nights there. Then the killings started there as well. We ran to the commune of Ntyazo where there was a very strong local defence team. Many attackers were killed, including two soldiers, and a vehicle belonging to the gendarmes was burned. But in the end the population lost. It was inevitable.

In both our sector and here in Ntyazo, Tutsis and Hutus fought together. Especially Hutus whose mothers were Tutsis, or who had a daughter married to a Tutsi, fought alongside the Tutsis. The Hutus who really fought on our side were the ordinary people, not the educated ones who worked in offices and understood the politics at hand. These ones, the ones who understood the politics of the attacks, explained to the ordinary Hutus what was taking place and they began to desert us.

So we fled to sector Ruyenzi in the commune of Ntyazo. We were about five hundred people. We were stopped by the councillor. He lamented about the situation, saying that Habyarimana's blood was wiping out Rwanda. He calmed the adults down and gave food to the children. He talked to us, saying, 'You are lucky to be running away in time. But I don't know where you can pass in safety.'

Feeling powerless to protect the refugees, the councillor and his son escorted the refugees to the ranch of ISAR where he knew that many Tutsis had sought shelter. He hoped that there might be safety in numbers. The efforts of the councillor and his son to shield the refugees against the interahamwe are described in Chapter 15. Josephine described what

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happened at the ranch, making clear how the massacre was a military operation.

Thousands and thousands of Tutsis had gathered at ISAR. I don't know. Maybe as many as ten thousand. Certainly no less than eight or nine thousand. The men put up a defence against the continuous attacks of the interahamwe. Our defence continued from a Monday [25 April] until the Thursday of that week [28th]. Because they were fighting interahamwe, our men had no problem repulsing them.

But on Thursday afternoon, soldiers arrived. After that it was a calamity. As soon as the soldiers arrived, they started shooting. They shot and shot. Everywhere, there was a hail of bullets, bullets, bullets. People started dropping dead. The cows fled. We had been advised to lie down, far from each other if we were shot at. So that's what we did. Some of the men bravely continued to fight back with bows and arrows. But once the soldiers arrived, we did not have a chance. But after a while, the defence collapsed. How could men and boys armed with stones fight their bullets and grenades?

Then the interahamwe came and started macheting and spearing. Whatever the advice about lying down, you just could not sit there waiting to be killed. Some of us tried to run away while all around us people were dying and falling down.

I left my children and husband behind. All you could think of was surviving. In fact you did not think. You just went with your fear and your legs. As you ran, you had to step over the bodies that were falling all over the place. Hundreds and hundreds of bodies lay scattered everywhere, lying in every twisted position you could imagine. All around, there were cries for help, and sometimes only whispers because people were so hurt. But there was no question of stopping.

The familiar post-massacre massacre was then unleashed on the survivors. Josephine continued:

We hid in a small bush. We were in a group of about fifty. We hid until about 11:00 p.m. None of the fifty adults had come with their husbands, wives or children, except for two women who had babies strapped on their backs. We also had a few children who were on their own. It was a question of personal survival.

We walked the whole night. I cannot claim I knew where I was going. I just moved with the others. We passed several roadblocks; fortunately at that time of night, they were not occupied. We had just about reached the Kanyaro river, at about 4:30 a.m., when the killers started waking up for their daily work, that is killing people. One of them saw us.

He shouted out that we should stop, threatening to unleash many killers on us unless we stopped. We refused to stop. He screamed out an order to the killers. A mob of about thirty thugs came after us. When they reached us, they started boasting about the number of people they had just drowned in the river. One of them then told us: 'You are all agents of the *Inyenzi*. Speaking from the United States,⁴⁸ did you think that the Kanyaro river would be friendly to the Tutsis?'

They started with the men. They took away their money, undressed them and tied them up with their hands behind their backs. They stripped the women down to their petticoats, forcing the babies to cling to their mothers. We were taken to the papyrus swamps. When we approached the swamps, the women were also tied up. They took the two babies off the backs of their mothers and macheted them to death in front of us. Then they macheted the other children to death. Clearly the plan was to kill us in groups. But then one of the killers said, 'But we can't bury them all here. And we will be the losers because their bodies will smell. It's better to throw them into the river.'

We were marched towards the river. I was the first in line. They beat us in order to force us to jump into the river. I did not want to be macheted. Anything but that. I cannot swim but I threw myself into the river to die by drowning. Two other women also jumped in. The killers macheted two children and then threw them in after us. The children had been wounded but were still alive. After that, they macheted the rest of the group and then threw them into the river. The two children, the two women and I were fished out by Burundi soldiers. The five of us were the only survivors of our group. In Burundi, we were taken to a school in Ntenga and the sick were transferred to hospital in Kirundo.

I came back to Rwanda on 26 May. I have had no news of my husband and five children or any other members of my family. I wait and cling on to some hope. But most of the time I imagine and have accepted the worst.⁴⁹

Joseph Rutagarama is a peasant from the sector of Rwesero in the commune of Nyabisindu, Butare. His testimony of the attack on the ISAR ranch also highlights the extent to which the large-scale massacres involved the military authorities, in this case using helicopters for reconnaissance.

The population of Butare did not want to kill each other. Force was used to get them to kill. At first, a lot of bad rumours were spread. Then refugees

⁴⁸ The extremists often alleged that the RPF enjoyed support from the United States.

⁴⁹ Interviewed in Ngenda, Bugesera, 1 June 1994.

began to pour in from Kigali. In addition to genuine refugees, a lot of interahamwe, well-trained and well-armed, also came from Kigali.

The first direct trouble started on the 23rd [April]. A military reservist, Abel Basabose, started burning homes. Our bourgmestre, Jean Marie-Vianney Gisagara, arrested him and some interahamwe. But at the office of the commune, some officers intervened and demanded the return of Basabose's gun to him and the machetes to the interahamwe. They took them home in a van. That night, we were surrounded, sector by sector. The military were responsible for this.

The killings started at dawn the next day. The targets were Tutsis—men, women, children, the old and the handicapped. They wanted to make sure that no Tutsis remained. They said that the RPF are the children of those they spared in 1959. Therefore, this time Tutsis must be wiped out. All eleven sectors of the commune were attacked.

As far as I know, I am the only Tutsi who escaped from my sector. My wife and five children were killed at our commune. My mother, two sisters and five nephews were also killed. I fled to the commune of Rusatira in Butare. I tried to leave for Burundi. When I got to Muyira, I found the same killings were happening there as well. There were barriers everywhere. I made an about turn. On arriving at the commune of Ntyazo, also in Butare, I found some refugees with their cows. We were forced to take shelter at the market. The next day, gendarmes said that everybody had to go back to their commune of origin.

We took the road that leads to the ranch of ISAR at Songa. We arrived about the 26th. We passed a week at Songa. We were about three thousand people when we noticed a helicopter. Refugees continued to arrive and the number shot up all the time. Some days later, by which time we were many thousands more, we were encircled by soldiers. They shot and shot at us. We tried to resist but we could not sustain our resistance because they were armed and we were not. People were being shot and dying everywhere, sending explosions of blood all around. There was complete chaos. All you heard were gunshots, screams and the footsteps of people fleeing.

At about 4:30 p.m. we ran. We just ran and ran. Each time we arrived at a roadblock, we found interahamwe, gendarmes, bullets and the desire to finish us off. More people got killed. People get killed on the road. Those whose day to die had not yet come, continued. When night came, we had no physical strength left in us. We rested a bit and later, at a time when we thought it might be a safer time, we went towards the Kanyaro river, hoping to cross into Burundi. We arrived at Kanyaro at about 3:00 a.m. We avoided all the main and known roads to get there. But on arriving at the river, we had a shock. We saw people being beheaded and then thrown into the river. Eight of us had banded together into a little

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group. Somehow, and I can only call it luck, we survived. As soon as we crossed, we notified the Burundi soldiers at Kanyaro. They came and fired across the river. The interahamwe fled.

Joseph said he could not say exactly how many people were killed. He said he only knew that thousands of people who had gone to ISAR had been killed.

Marie Grace Mukamazimpaka, aged twenty, a peasant farmer, lived in the commune of Kinyamakara in Gikongoro.

Three days after Habyarimana's death, the killings started in the sous-préfet of Gikongoro, and were carried out by communal policemen and local interahamwe. Both the local interahamwe and plain villagers were given incitement to loot, particularly the cows of Tutsis. The communal authorities gave petrol to the interahamwe to burn the homes of Tutsis.

About three days later, the trouble reached us. Our commune is very close to Butare. So we fled to the commune of Rushasha in Butare. But the interahamwe of Gikongoro, escorted by communal policemen, decided to attack us in Butare. The refugees, plus the Hutu and Tutsi citizens of Butare, decided to fight back against the invaders from Gikongoro. We were led by the bourgmestre who organized our resistance. But then, the Gikongoro invaders brought gendarmes to help them. That way, they were able to overpower us. They started burning homes, macheting and killing people. The original refugees like us and the residents of Rushasha ran to the commune of Rusatira in Butare. We arrived there only to discover that the gendarmes, of course with their interahamwe, had followed us. They pursued us and we took refuge at the ranch of ISAR in Songa.

We stayed there for four days. We were about eight thousand people by now. For about five days, the interahamwe came regularly to attack us. We defended ourselves and they were forced to leave. When the interahamwe realized that they could not win this battle on their own, two lorries full of gendarmes were brought in.

They started shooting straightaway and people started falling down dead straightaway. Some of the people who were shot somersaulted in the air and fell to the ground. I need not add that our defence melted away when the gendarmes arrived. Our men had told us to lie down flat if we were attacked, so even those of us who were not yet touched by the bullet threw themselves to the ground. But after a few minutes many of us found it impossible to lie still with people dropping dead all around you. So we just took off and the cows the refugees had brought also took off. Soldiers and interahamwe continued to kill those at the back. But other killers were awaiting us in the direction to which we were fleeing, killing

those at the front. In particular, children and old people were mowed down because they could not run fast enough.

The group I was with jumped over a mass of dead bodies. We ran into fields, heading towards the Kanyaro river and the border with Burundi. We took off about 3:00 p.m. We reached the border some hours later. Our group was about a hundred people when we arrived at the border. I threw myself into the river and swam across. I looked around for some fishermen who owned a boat who could help to fish out the seriously wounded. Of course we had to pay them, with money or clothes or whatever. A lot of the people had terrible machete wounds. Some had bullet wounds.

Some of the Hutus who fled to Songa with us fought back with us and some even fled with us to Burundi. Others found it easier to sneak back to their homes to assure their survival. In such a situation, everybody did what it took to survive.

In Burundi, I spent three days at Ntega and then I moved to Bunyara. I stayed a month there. I returned to Rwanda the day before yesterday. One of my brothers who survived this butchery in our country came to look for me in Burundi. Fortunately, we linked up. He is the only one of our family who is alive. Everyone else was killed at Songa or on the way in the panic flights. My father, Rukimirana, my mother, Mukagahima, my two brothers, Nsabimina, twenty-three, and Karangwa, eighteen, my brother Hakizimana and his two children.

I find it very, very painful to accept the death of my family. My whole family wiped out like that. What did we do to deserve it? Is it a crime to be a Tutsi?⁵⁰

PRÉFECTURE OF GITARAMA

As the wave of killings began, Gitarama was quiet, like Butare. It was a stronghold of the opposition to the MRND, and the extremists had made little headway in penetrating the préfecture. The Roman Catholic archbishopric is based at Kabgayi, and many Tutsis and moderate Hutus believed that this would be a sanctuary. At first, therefore, Gitarama attracted refugees fleeing from the killing elsewhere, particularly Kigali.

Louise Kayibanda is a journalist who worked at Radio Rwanda. She lived in the commune of Nyarugenge in Kigali. Once the killings began

⁵⁰ Interviewed in Ruhuha, Bugesera, 2 June 1994.