
The Politics of Preservation in Rwanda¹

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Introduction

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 has been analyzed from a variety of perspectives, and through the eyes of a wide range of actors. Historians have examined the roots of ethnic divisions in Rwanda during the colonial period,² anthropologists have analyzed the symbolic logic of certain forms of violence perpetrated against innocent civilians,³ while others have looked at the role played in the genocide by the deference to authority that seems to characterize Rwanda's political culture.⁴ This chapter explores one aspect of genocide's aftermath that hasn't received much attention: the fate of genocide sites—the geographic locations where groups of people were massacred. In some ways simple coordinates on a map, and in other ways social and political constructs, genocide sites are both a reminder of what took place during the genocide, and also a symbolic focus of contemporary political agendas at the local, national, and even the international level. Since 1994, Rwandans have had to decide whether to revert certain massacre sites back to their previous uses, such as schools, hospitals, or places of worship. They have had to decide whether to bury the dead, or leave the human remains exposed, so that the manner in which they died is unmistakable. They have been forced to consider the wishes and interests of the victims and survivors, as well as those of the alleged perpetrators, and the national government that is attempting to address the broadest range of constituents possible through its policies. The international community also has a stake in this process. International courts want to use the remains from genocide sites as physical evidence. International visitors to post-genocide Rwanda want to witness the horror of what happened there by viewing the authentic remains of the violence. Those with a desire to make the world understand the scope of the tragedy that befell this small nation wish to keep the physical remains of the killing on display as a testament to what they experienced.

Thus, neither the existence of genocide sites, nor the purposes that they serve in the post-genocide period, can be taken as obvious or fixed. Numerous sets of interests and objectives come into play with reference to these sites, and the process of assessing and reassessing their fate is likely to continue for generations, if other post-genocidal societies are any measure (see especially Young 1993 and Young 1994 on Holocaust memorials). More than twenty-five years after the Cambodian genocide took place in 1975-9, Cambodians are still debating the appropriate course of action to take with reference to physical remains from that period.⁵

Historical and Political Context

Rwanda is located in the Great Lakes region of central Africa. It is a small, landlocked country of approximately 10,000 square miles (roughly the size of the U.S. state of Maryland). Rwanda's economy relies on coffee exports, tourism, and foreign aid. Most Rwandans are subsistence farmers, and the country is, by any economic measure, extremely poor. Like its neighbor Burundi, Rwanda was colonized by Belgium and was granted independence in 1960. The population consists of three ethnic groups: Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. All three groups speak the same language, have the same cultural practices, and are mostly Roman Catholic (with a significant Muslim minority).

For about three months in 1994, Rwandan society experienced one of the most brutal attempts to exterminate a people ever witnessed in the twentieth century. In a country of approximately seven million people, between 500,000 and one million people were murdered.⁶ The killing had been organized and rehearsed well in advance of April 1994, and was carried out with shocking speed and efficiency. The architects of the genocide were a small group of extremist politicians and elites associated with the regime of then President Juvenal Habyarimana. The perpetrators were soldiers, militias, and everyday people throughout the country. The principal targets were ethnic Tutsi, but also included political moderates who posed a threat to the extremist ideology, or those who refused to participate in the killing. All told, roughly three quarters of all Tutsi living in Rwanda as of April 6, 1994, were wiped out.⁷ Thousands of Hutu, Twa, and non-Rwandans were also killed.

The genocide ended in July 1994, when the rebel army of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) overthrew the government of Habyarimana, and forced the Rwandan army, militias, and a large number of Rwandan civilians across the border into Zaire. The RPF was comprised mainly of the children of (mostly Tutsi) Rwandan refugees who had been living in exile for up to thirty-five years. They immediately set up a new government and began the work of reconstructing the country, securing its borders against incursions by the ousted Rwandan army, and dealing with the aftermath of the violence that had swept across the entire country.

Attempts to bring the guilty to justice began almost immediately, with the United Nations establishing an ad hoc tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania to try the architects of the genocide. Concurrently, the new Rwandan government began arresting lower level perpetrators in order to put them on trial in Rwandan courts.⁸ The U.N. tribunal in Arusha, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), has been very slow to indict, arrest, try, and judge its cases, with only twenty defendants appearing in its chambers between 1994 and 2001.⁹

Some argue that the Rwandan genocide began long before 1994. Attempts to identify, ostracize, and dehumanize members of the Tutsi minority date back to the end of the colonial period. Persecution of Tutsi students and professionals, and those associated with the monarchy began in 1959, with serious episodes of violence occurring in 1964, 1973, and throughout the first half of the 1990s. Like a volcano that occasionally spews some smoke before the “big one” hits, the pogroms and massacres of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s were minor eruptions compared to the events of April-July 1994. The violence of 1994 changed the face of Rwandan society forever, leaving a permanent scar on its social, political, and economic institutions, and producing the genocide sites that are the focus of this chapter.

Preservation, Memorialization, and Documentation: Theories and Definitions

The horror of genocide is hard to fathom both in terms of motive and sheer scale. To seek the extermination of an entire group of people (defined as a national, ethnic, racial, or religious in the U.N. Genocide Convention of 1948) is not only diabolical, but also very ambitious. To understand such madness, one is first compelled to explore why a government would see genocide as an

acceptable or effective solution to its problems. Second, one must bear witness to the horrible mechanics of committing murder on a massive scale. From the gas chambers of the Nazi Holocaust to the Killing Fields of the Cambodian genocide, it is often these spatial details of state-sponsored mass murder that become emblematic of the evil itself. The three dimensionality of a physical location, the sight of hastily dug pits and mass graves, and the smell and look of human remains make the locations where genocide has taken place haunting reminders that genocide is an artifact of human society, not a natural calamity. Genocide sites, then, often attain special status in the aftermath of violence as places that reveal the truth of what individual members of a society have done to their fellow citizens.

There are countless genocide sites in Rwanda, some known, others unknown. Rwandans will be unearthing mass graves, erecting monuments and reburying their dead for many years to come. Many of the most notorious episodes of violence in the Rwandan genocide, though, have already been documented, the graves exhumed, and the locations recorded on a map. These locations have great significance, not only for the families of those who perished there, but for politicians, scholars, religious leaders, and aid workers who are addressing the needs of a country that was destroyed by a near-successful attempt at a “final solution.”

In exploring the issues and debates surrounding Rwandan genocide sites in 2000, I observed three distinct, but related activities taking place with regard to these locations: 1) preservation and restoration of human and structural remains, 2) memorialization and commemoration of the victims, and 3) documentation and research on the events. Although at first glance these three things may seem complementary, or as an ordered progression of activities, in practice they overlap, and even contradict or undermine each other. Before discussing these activities in the Rwandan context, let me offer some definitions that will enable me to differentiate them in practice.

Preservation entails halting the natural processes of change and actively maintaining something in a frozen state—a sort of dynamic stasis. Closely related to preservation is restoration, which is the act of making changes necessary to revert something to a previous state that can then be maintained indefinitely. It is perhaps not obvious that any effort to preserve or restore an historical event presumes a temporal location, as well as a physical location. It is always either stated or implied that something is preserved to a condition purported to represent a specific date and time. With reference to the aftermath

of genocide, then, preserving genocide sites entails making decisions about what to preserve (bodies, buildings, weapons, documents), and at what moment in their history.

As a field of practice and study, the preservation of genocide sites is located at the intersection of historic preservation/restoration and forensic anthropology. As international crime scenes, genocide sites often contain important evidentiary material, from physical remains to implements of violence to clues that can be used to assign a date and time to the crime and to identify the perpetrators. Forensic specialists utilize a variety of methods that enable them to collect and analyze soil content, fibers, bones, hair, etc. to infer facts about the events in question.

Preservation/restoration can also have a pedagogical objective: to educate non-participants in the event about exactly what happened, using the actual physical remains of the episode. This kind of preservation may require less exacting standards than preservation for legal purposes, but still depends heavily on the notion of physicality and authenticity. Specialists in historic preservation are also concerned about reconstructing the precise nature of what took place in a certain location, while seeking to preserve the condition of that place for future purposes. These two fields, with their distinct methods, aims, and histories, have been marshaled to the cause of addressing human rights violations around the world for decades. From the protection and preservation of historic Native American cemeteries in North America to the exhumation of mass graves in the former Yugoslavia, preservation and forensics have played a role in many politically sensitive and legally precedent-setting cases.¹⁰

A second, but closely related activity is **memorialization/commemoration**. In the wake of a tragedy, there is often a deeply felt need to honor the victims, and to enable others to know/remember what happened to them. Memorialization can be a public and collective activity or a very private and personal one. In practice, memorialization can mean celebrating a day of remembrance for a particular event or group of victims, or it can mean erecting a monument, building a museum, writing stories, composing songs, or displaying paintings. It can also be combined with preservation in an effort to show what happened in the past by leaving certain things unchanged while changing others. Memorialization doesn't usually have legal or scholarly aims, but is often used as a political gesture to signify solidarity with a certain group of victims. Memorialization is also an important expression of people's religious and moral responses to loss.

Documentation and research constitutes a third set of activities that frequently take place in the aftermath of genocide. Documentation—the effort to establish an authoritative account of particular events based on primary sources—can readily serve legal, scholarly, or political purposes, but does not always help alleviate grief and facilitate mourning the way memorialization can. Usually conducted by trained scholars, documentation projects are most often aimed at establishing the facts of a particular event or period so that they may be studied, analyzed and established for posterity.

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda has prompted Rwandans to engage in all three activities: preservation, memorialization, and documentation. In August 2000, I attempted to determine what Rwandans were doing with regard to genocide sites, with these three activities as a conceptual reference. I spoke to a range of Rwandans in government, NGOs, academia, and the general population who are involved in these activities at different levels and for different reasons. In many cases, the activities overlap. At the Murambi genocide site in Gikongoro Province, a privately sponsored preservation effort is combined with a local community's desire to commemorate the deaths of a reported 50,000 people. In Kigali, the central government is interested in constructing genocide memorials/museums that can both teach the world what happened in Rwanda, and remind Rwandans themselves about a past they should never repeat. At the National University in Butare, scholars hope to build a documentation center that will encourage research on the genocide, while also preserving important documents from that period.

Preserving genocide sites, then, is inextricably linked to memorialization and documentation. In present-day Rwanda, to the extent that preservation/restoration alone may have the narrowest set of applications and represent the greatest cost, it is not the most popular of these three activities. In combination with memorialization and documentation, however, it has a great deal of potential support, and many eager institutional and individual sponsors.

Genocide Sites in Rwanda: Murambi Technical School

On the morning of August 8, 2000, I set out from the USAID offices in Kigali in a white Toyota Land Cruiser with five other people to visit a well-known genocide site in Gikongoro Prefecture. The air was warm and the sky clear as we drove south along National Route 01, a narrow, but well maintained tarmac road that goes from Kigali to Butare, Rwanda's second largest town. My

husband, a Tutsi of Rwandan origin, sat in front with the driver (a Rwandan employee of USAID), and discussed the ongoing rebellion in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I sat in the back seat with our two year old son, who was fascinated by the long-horned Ankole cattle grazing by the road, and the home-made wooden scooters used to transport people and goods across the hilly terrain. Our USAID host, a young American woman working on democracy and governance projects, sat at the back with a Belgian graduate student who was researching the genocide. None of us had visited Murambi before, the site of a major massacre, and although the conversation was carefree, each of us was privately wondering how we would react, physically, emotionally, and intellectually, to the sight of thousands of dead bodies killed at a school compound six years earlier.

We stopped for lunch in Butare, then turned westward towards Gikongoro. Finding the Murambi genocide site was not as easy as we had anticipated. The people we asked along the way either weren't sure what we were talking about, or told us to head for a certain church or a small road that seemed to go nowhere near our intended destination. We finally stopped and asked some men dressed in light pink coveralls where the Murambi school was. They pointed down a deeply rutted dirt road and said the equivalent of "you can't miss it" in Kinyarwanda. As we rolled up our windows and drove on, I became aware of the huge irony of having just received directions to a genocide site from a group of alleged perpetrators.¹¹

When we arrived at the site, we found a small group of Rwandans waiting for us, including an armed soldier ostensibly on duty protecting the remains from vandals, two or three caretakers of the site, and a tall, solemn genocide survivor named Emmanuel who had a hole in his forehead the size of a large marble. The wound had healed over, but was nevertheless a prominent reminder of the violence that had occurred in this place. The location itself comprises an almost completed, but never-used, technical high school located on a rocky, barren hillside that overlooks other hills in every direction. The "tour" commenced without much fanfare. Emmanuel simply started walking in the direction of one of the school buildings, and we followed along behind him.

The school is laid out in blocks of classrooms, each a long cement rectangle with a corrugated iron roof. As we approached the first block, Emmanuel told us that there were many classrooms to see, so we shouldn't spend too much time in any one of them. The bodies, laid out in the classrooms on tarps on the floor, or on raised wooden platforms, were preserved using powdered lime.

Many of them still had some hair and clothing. There was a strong smell in the classrooms, and there were no ropes or barriers preventing us from walking into the rooms amidst the corpses.

They are grouped according to age and sex. On one side of the first classroom we saw corpses of men still posed as if defending themselves against the blows of machetes, and on the other side corpses of women shielding their faces, and sometimes clutching children in their arms. Certain classrooms are full of nothing but children's corpses. Thinking that my two-year-old son would not recognize what he was looking at, I did not prevent him from looking at the bodies. I began having second thoughts when he asked "Mommy, why are so many people sleeping?"

As visitors, as foreigners, and as witnesses to the carnage that had taken place there, we felt compelled to be silent, to allow our gaze to fall on each individual body, and to pause for several moments in each room. Emmanuel kept hurrying us along, though, worried that we would not see everything. He seemed determined to impress upon us both the monotony of room after room filled with the bodies of now faceless, nameless victims, as well as the enormity of the simultaneous deaths of so many innocent people.

According to Emmanuel, the corpses on display are those that were not claimed by surviving relatives after the bodies were exhumed from a huge drainage ditch behind the school where they were dumped by the killers.¹² We wondered why so many bodies were left unclaimed. Emmanuel suggested that this may either be a result of people's inability to identify the already badly decomposed bodies, or the fact that in certain families, there were no survivors left to claim them. Emmanuel also mentioned that many people were too poor to bury their relatives (i.e. to pay for the transport of the body back to the family's village, buy a coffin, and pay for a funeral), and so were forced to leave the bodies behind. Emmanuel did not know how many corpses were on display at the school, but he said between 50,000 and 60,000 people were massacred at the site in August 1994.¹³

While most of the corpses are complete skeletons, there are also rooms full of piles of skulls and other bones. Emmanuel told us that at a certain point in the preservation effort, they had run out of chemicals and funds to preserve the bodies, and so they left some of the remains untreated in a heap in one of the classrooms.

Emmanuel did not offer any information about how the victims came to be at the school, or how they were killed, or how he survived, so we asked him these questions while standing at the edge of the drainage ditch where most of the bodies had been buried in one huge mass grave. He explained that the people had not all gathered at the site spontaneously, but had been called to a meeting at the church parish near Murambi, and were directed to come to the school “for protection.” This is consistent with the account published in *Leave None to Tell the Story*, which tells of a group of Tutsi from Musebeya commune being taken first to the bishopric in Gikongoro town, and eventually to Murambi, where they “were slaughtered with thousands of other Tutsi” (Des Forges 1999: 316-320). Emmanuel said he was one of four people who survived the massacre. He was shot in the head, but was able to crawl away and hide in a thicket of trees on a nearby hillside. From this vantage point, he remembers watching the killers covering the ditch over with soil as the French troops arrived to implement “Operation Turquoise,” a “humanitarian” detachment that effectively protected the genocidal forces as they withdrew from Rwanda ahead of the RPF advances (see Orth, this volume for more details about Operation Turquoise). Emmanuel told us that the French troops actually assisted the killers in covering over the ditch, and then proceeded to erect a volleyball net on the site, in order to enjoy some recreation with the Interahamwe (the notorious militias who oversaw most of the killing). From his family of 49 people, Emmanuel is the sole survivor of the genocide.

As our group prepared to leave Murambi, Emmanuel appealed to us to buy him “some soft drinks.” He said this under his breath in Kinyarwanda, in the hope that my husband would translate it to the rest of us and we would discreetly offer him some cash. It soon became clear that Emmanuel was operating outside the policies of the site’s caretakers, who were standing in the shade near our car to make sure that we signed the guest book and left a donation. They explained that the preservation/memorialization at the Murambi site was initially made possible by a group of Rwandan ex-patriates (those like my husband who fled ethnic tensions in Rwanda in 1959) who originate from Gikongoro. It was not clear how much money this group actually raised to help exhume the mass graves, preserve the bodies, and cover other costs. It seems their donation was a one-time gift. Visitors to the site are therefore encouraged to leave donations, which are recorded in a visitors’ log. This money is shared between the guide and the other local people who help to maintain the site.

The Murambi site, like many others in Rwanda, represents an effort to memorialize, as well as to preserve, what happened in a particular place. In its current state, the site does not offer a reconstruction of the killing; the bodies are not laid out where they were killed, and some of the bodies on display may have been killed in other locations. The mass graves have been excavated, and remain open. Thus, the Murambi site has not been restored to represent any particular moment in the genocide, but rather it represents a range of moments in the genocidal and post-genocidal process: the buildings are in the state of near-completion that they were in at the time of the killing, the drainage ditch is as it was at the time of the exhumation in August 1996, and the bodies are a testament to the scope and the nature of the violence, but are not preserved in such a way as to demonstrate how, where, or when they were killed. In short, this site serves as a graphic memorial to the many innocent people who were murdered there, but the details of the violence must be gleaned from the oral accounts of survivor/guides, or researched through secondary sources. The physical remains themselves do not “tell the story.”

Most of the present efforts to preserve and/or memorialize genocide sites in Rwanda are local undertakings that use funds from a wide range of mostly private sources. Officials at the Ministry of Youth Culture and Sports confirmed that only those sites considered “national sites,” including Nyamata and Kibeho, involve government oversight, whereas the vast majority of others are overseen by local communities or individuals.

Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Site Preservation in Rwanda

My visit to Murambi suggests that the presence of genocide sites throughout Rwanda resonates differently with different groups of people. The group of foreigners I was in (including my Rwandan-born husband) had a range of expectations in visiting the Murambi site, expectations that were representative of the international community’s agenda with regard to genocide sites. We wanted to take our time and be allowed to reflect on the tragedy that occurred at Murambi at our own pace. We were surprised and disappointed that our guide rushed us through the site. We were confused about the sequence of historical events that had occurred in this place, and we had to work harder than we had expected to get the story straight in our minds. It seemed awkward and irreverent when the local guides and caretakers solicited monetary gifts

from us in competition with each other. And the lack of a coherent narrative about the events that took place at Murambi, whether in a booklet or on a plaque or just a coherent guided tour, was something of a surprise. It became clear to me that I had expected the visit to teach me some history, shock me morally, and deepen my understanding of the human experience of the genocide. I wanted things to be accurate and authentic and accessible.

In order to get a clearer sense of what Rwandans themselves think about these sites, I conducted a series of interviews with a range of people from different political and institutional perspectives, including government representatives, survivors' advocates, scholars, and ordinary Rwandans. Their attitudes and perceptions reflect an important divide between governmental and non-governmental agendas. From the official government perspective, genocide preservation and memorialization are seen as part of the national agenda of national reconciliation and promoting a culture of peace in Rwanda. Government officials do not admit any internal contradictions between those aims. On the other hand, people representing NGOs and the academic sector view preservation and memorialization as part of the overarching need to accurately document the events of 1994, and they recognize that there are real social and political obstacles to doing so. What everyone I spoke with had in common was a sense that memorialization and documentation of the genocide are far more important in Rwanda than preservation of genocide sites for forensic or pedagogical purposes.

If anyone was going to stress the importance of preservation for the purposes of forensic investigation, I thought it would be someone in the national judiciary. My conversation with Mr. Alberto Basomingera at the Ministry of Justice was therefore focused on the legal aspects of preserving genocide sites. I asked him if the Ministry felt it was important to preserve genocide sites in such a way that physical evidence is not disturbed or other evidence-gathering procedures undermined. Mr. Basomingera noted that the Ministry of Justice is in the process of implementing the gacaca system of locally-based genocide courts, in which most of the evidence is based on eyewitness testimony. As a result, they are not very interested in the preservation of forensic evidence from genocide sites. He added that it was perhaps only in the high-level cases being tried at the ICTR in Arusha where forensic evidence was relevant. He implied that at the local level, people know what happened, and who did what, and that eyewitness testimony is more than sufficient to

establish the facts of a particular case. Forensic evidence is thus a costly luxury they cannot afford, and do not really need.

Two officials from the Rwandan Patriotic Front party offices, Mssrs. Rutabayiro and Shamakocera, identified the prevention of future violence as the principle aim of preserving genocide sites. They noted that some *genocidaires* may feel that preservation/memorialization perpetuates the public's awareness of their culpability, but that this is not a reason not to do it. Tensions will always exist between those who advocate remembering the genocide and those who advocate forgetting it, but the Party believes that remembering what happened is an important step towards ensuring the security of all Rwandans, at least in the immediate future. They point to South Africa as an analogous situation where memorialization of apartheid is part of the process of social and political reconciliation.

Within the Rwandan government, the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports has primary responsibility for genocide memorials, preservation, and documentation. Their plan for these activities is elaborated in a document entitled "*Office National des Memoriaux du Genocide et des Massacres au Rwanda*" authored by the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Culture in 1996. In it, the objectives, strategies, methods, and budget for a national plan of genocide memorials is laid out. The principle aim of the activities in this plan is to "educate Rwandans in a culture of humanity and to advance the cause of ending genocide in Africa and the world" ("*eduquer la population rwandaise a une culture humaniste et de contribuer au niveau de l'Afrique et du monde a bannir le genocide*"). The centerpiece of the plan is the construction of a national genocide memorial at Rebero l'Horizon in Kigali, comprised of a museum, cemetery, documentation center and conference facilities. Similar museums are planned for each of Rwanda's twelve provinces.

This blueprint for memorializing the 1994 genocide is consistent with the comments made to me by officials at the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports. That said, the centralized nature of the 1996 plan is somewhat at odds with the idea expressed by Jean Mukimbiri, the Secretary General, that the Ministry does not intend for the process to be a centralized one, because they do not wish to perpetuate the political dynamics that enabled the genocide to occur in the first place. He emphasized long-range goals such as civic education, conflict prevention, and social and political reconciliation. The dual objectives of memory and peace are not, in his view, contradictory or mutually exclusive. In addition to memorials, the Ministry hopes to sponsor conferences, debates,

films, and research projects that will continue to examine the events of 1994, and in so doing, promote peace and reconciliation.

With these overall objectives in mind, the Secretary General noted that there were some pressing issues that need attention in the short term. Many Rwandans have not finished burying their dead, and there is an urgent need to acquire the technical skills to preserve corpses, pits, buildings, etc. He added that for now, local communities must assume (logistical and financial) responsibility for memorializing the events that took place around them. He said that various countries that may have been indirectly implicated in the genocide (including the United States) should not “boycott” Rwanda or the cause of studying and remembering the genocide, for fear that it might expose their complicity. The Rwandan government is actively seeking international partners in advancing these objectives. Similarly, he said that because not all Hutus were perpetrators, the majority of Rwandans have a large stake in establishing the facts of what happened so that responsibility can be assigned to individuals, not groups. He added that over the course of the 20th century, people have worked much harder to divide Hutu and Tutsi than to unite them, and that the government has taken it upon itself to reverse this trend.

The attitudes and perceptions I gathered from representatives of the government can be summarized as follows:

- preservation/memorialization fits into a larger set of political objectives that includes reconciliation and conflict prevention
- there are no immediate social or political obstacles to commemorating the genocide through site preservation, construction of memorials, and historical documentation
- a decentralized approach to this process is appropriate to the extent that centralized authority may contain the seeds of conflict in Rwanda, and the government itself is not in a position to fund these activities at the moment.

From the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector, I spoke with Francois-Regis Rukundakuvuga, who was at the time Executive Secretary of IBUKA, the largest survivors’ organization in Rwanda. Although “commemoration” is one of IBUKA’s three major program areas (in addition to “justice” and “assisting survivors”), it constitutes the smallest range of the organization’s activities, principally due to lack of funds. What IBUKA has done in the area of commemoration has less to do with the physical remains of violence at genocide sites, and more to do with documenting the genocide using

survivors' accounts as the primary source of data. I asked Mr. Rukundakuvuga what he would like to see done in the area of commemoration. He did not hesitate in saying that his first priority would be to undertake an adequate documentation project to gather and consolidate all available information about the 1994 genocide. He envisions collecting individual testimonies from both survivors and perpetrators about their experiences in 1994, as well as accounts of survivors' lives in the aftermath of the genocide. In addition, he hopes that IBUKA will be able to sponsor research on the causes of the genocide, and compile a detailed chronology of what took place between April and July 1994. IBUKA's vision is to gather all this information, and publish it in both print and electronic formats, and then make it available throughout Rwanda in some kind of mobile exhibit.

On the question of whether activities that commemorate the genocide might handicap efforts at cohabitation/reconciliation in Rwanda, Mr. Rukundakuvuga said of course they might. From his standpoint as an advocate for survivors, he recognizes that IBUKA's agenda is often in direct conflict not only with that of perpetrators, but also of other Tutsi and the government itself (and with other survivors' groups, if the comments of Emmanuel at Murambi are any indication). He acknowledges that it is very sensitive to discuss the interests of survivors with reference to the interests of the government and the country as a whole. IBUKA is nevertheless committed to the goal of "resisting death" and will advance the interests of its members regardless of the social or political obstacles they encounter.

Finally, I spoke (separately) with two scholars at the National University of Rwanda. The ideas expressed by these two people were very much in line with Mr. Rukundakuvuga's comments on the issue of preservation/commemoration/documentation. One scholar readily acknowledged that the process of commemorating the 1994 genocide is a politically loaded one. There is no way to go about this process that will satisfy every constituency in Rwanda. For this reason, he added, the activities of preservation and memorialization may be best left to communities, where decisions can be made based on local opinion and the realities of the genocide as it affected particular places.

The University's role in the memorialization process could be the establishment of a national documentation center that can house all the historical information pertaining to the genocide, including archives of the former regime, any available photo or film footage, survivors' testimonies, etc.

This would not only memorialize what happened, but also stand as the central resource for those who wish to study the events of 1994. From the scholars' perspective, accurate and thorough documentation is the first step in a process that includes preservation and memorialization. They reason that without credibly and authoritatively establishing the facts of what happened, efforts to memorialize and commemorate the genocide can tell the story in ways that are partial, subjective, and politically motivated.

The attitudes and perceptions I gathered from representatives of the NGO and academic sectors can be summarized as follows:

- documentation is an important step in commemorating/memorializing the genocide, and is of higher priority than preserving genocide sites
- there are significant social and political obstacles to commemorating the genocide, but none that cannot or should not be surmounted

Conclusion

Although the Rwandan government has a well-articulated plan for memorializing the genocide through the construction of museums, and the National University of Rwanda and IBUKA have a fairly clear idea of how they would like to go about documenting it, no one I spoke with had a specific plan, or a project-in-progress, focused on preserving genocide sites, narrowly defined. To the extent that the Rwandan judicial sector is not clamoring for the protection of forensic evidence, there do not appear to be many compelling reasons to favor a process of preservation over a process of memorialization and/or documentation. Of course some efforts at memorialization may involve leaving things untouched in a way that "freezes" the genocide or its aftermath in time (which is partly the case at Murambi, but perhaps more so at Nyamata). And historical documentation often calls for the preservation of archival materials such as documents, photos, and other material objects. But the restoration and preservation of genocide sites as an end in itself seems to have little resonance in Rwanda.

To the extent that building memorials to commemorate the genocide may serve a specific political agenda (or agendas), there are also many long-term reasons for embarking on this project. Educating present and future generations of Rwandans about the genocide in order to prevent future genocides and instill

a culture of respect for human rights is a clearly-stated aim of the Rwandan government. Although people shy away from the idea that genocide sites might represent some opportunity to generate income from foreign visitors (tourists), the desire to expose the world to the gruesome reality of what took place in Rwanda in 1994 is also evident. Whether these pedagogical goals are better served by the existence of memorials/museums, or by carefully preserved sites, (or both) is an open question. The thinking I encountered in Rwanda, however, seems to favor the former over the latter.

From a personal and religious point of view (as opposed to political, legal, or intellectual standpoints), it is clear that communities that suffered such inconceivable losses of life during the genocide are compelled to commemorate those events somehow. Whether by burying victims together in a common cemetery (as opposed to traditional practice of burying them at the homes of their relatives), or by building some kind of monument, or by leaving the pits, schools, churches, etc. untouched as visual reminders of the killing, there is a widespread desire to remember and honor the dead. Again, there is no indication that preservation meets this need any better than memorialization.

There is merit in all three areas of activity, although I found the most widespread feeling of urgency in Rwanda for memorialization projects. This may reflect the relative recency of the genocide, and the continuing sense of shock, trauma, anger, and disbelief experienced by survivors and their communities. In the longer term, accurate documentation of the 1994 genocide may prove more significant in deterring revisionist histories and enabling better research on comparative genocide at the international level. As Rwandans continue to undertake preservation, memorialization, and documentation of the 1994 genocide, there will inevitably be unforeseen social and political ramifications of these processes. As such, the story of Rwandan genocide sites is the story of the Rwandan genocide: a tale written one village at a time about a tragic past that refuses to stand still against the backdrop of a future whose exact political contours are not yet known.

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Endnotes

¹ This chapter is an adaptation of a policy report commissioned by the U.S. Agency for International Development entitled “Preserving Genocide Sites in Rwanda: A Preliminary Assessment” (September 2000). The fieldwork on which the report was based was conducted in Rwanda in August 2000.

² See especially Lemarchand 1970, Des Forges 1995.

³ See Taylor 2000.

⁴ See Prunier 1996, and Adelman and Suhrke 1999.

⁵ See for example, “Hun Sen: referendum on monuments after Khmer Rouge Trial.” Associated Press, April 25, 2001, and “Killing Fields bones to stay on display.” Reuters, 11 January 2002.

⁶ Des Forges 1999, page 1 and 15.

⁷ Ibid, page 16.

⁸ The entire legal and judicial system in Rwanda was more or less destroyed in the genocide, and the pace of justice has been extremely slow for the 120,000-130,000 alleged perpetrators who have been charged with genocide in the Rwandan courts. For more on this topic, see Uvin and Mironko 2003, Des Forges 1999, and Scherrer 1997 and 2002.

⁹ For updated information on the status of ICTR trials, visit www.ictor.org.

¹⁰ See *The Graves : Srebrenica and Vukovar*. 1998. Eric Stover, with photos by Gilles Peres. Zurich: Scalo.

¹¹ The “men in pink” were prisoners out on manual labor details. Accused “genocidaires,” especially those who have already pleaded guilty, are often allowed to leave the overcrowded prison compounds and work in the nearby communities.

¹² The research compiled by Des Forges states: “At the time of the 1996 commemoration ceremonies for the genocide, victims from mass graves at Murambi were exhumed and laid out in the classrooms before being reburied. Daniele Lacourse, a Canadian film producer, visited the school, where sixty-six classrooms were filled with between forty and sixty bodies each, totalling some

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2,600 and 4,000 victims exhumed” (Des Forges 1999: 320). These numbers are consistent with what I observed in August 2000, suggesting to me that few, if any, of the bodies were ever removed from the site.

¹³ Des Forges writes “In 1995, a Rwandan government commission set the death toll at the Murambi Technical School at some 20,000, a figure which some have since raised to 70,000, although the bodies exhumed there at the time of the 1996 commemoration of the genocide numbered in the range of 5,000.” 1999, p. 16.