

Rwanda's 1994 genocide – a million deaths, and the pain of survival

A perspective by Colin Mileman

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How can anyone explain the inhumanity of humanity? Is it possible to put an element of logic to widespread death, devastation and destruction? Can you or I, in any way, understand the intentional and brutal murder of millions of people?

It's these thoughts and more that are clashing inside my head after visiting the Ntarama Genocide Memorial Site outside of Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda.

I visited the country, courtesy of Land Rover South Africa, as part of the Kingsley Holgate United Against Malaria 2010 Expedition, which encompasses a 20 000 km-odd journey through 12 African countries to deliver over 10 000 mosquito nets and, in the process, save well over 30 000 lives (with moms sharing the nets with, on average, two or three children).

But therein lies a gut-wrenching emotional, psychological, ethical contradiction. Here we are delivering life-saving nets to communities in need where, 16 years ago, people saw fit to go out and slaughter their friends and neighbours.

European rules for an African reality

Rwanda is, at 26 338 km², a tiny east-central African country just about the size of Wales with around 10,7-million people according to a 2010 census – which makes it only around 50 percent bigger than SA's smallest yet second most populated province, Gauteng: 17 010 km² with around 10-million inhabitants.



It too, had experienced a troubled colonial past. According to Wikipedia, Rwanda-Urundi (latter-day Rwanda and Burundi) was first taken over by the Germans based on the Berlin Conference in 1884, and joined with Tanganyika to form German East Africa.

In 1916, during World War I, Germany lost control of the region to the Belgians, who subsequently snatched the keys and exerted their influence on all aspects of society, from leadership empowerment to education and agriculture.

Although the people had 'apparently' (according to the official, yet surely naïve, story) lived happily side-by-side for many years under Tutsi monarchical rule, it was the Germans who perpetuated and entrenched ethnic divisions in the country, favouring the Tutsis (the minority) as the ruling class and subduing any discontent, uprising or revolt from the Hutus.

When Belgium arrived, they not only maintained the class divisions but actively promoted racial classification, which was typically based on defining features. The Tutsi were characterised as tall and slim, while the irrelevant nature of the classification even extended to the haves and the have-nots: often those owning ten or more cattle were dumped in the 'elite' group too regardless of their apparent ethnic lineage.

Identity cards were implemented that segmented people as Tutsi or Hutu, thereby driving a legislated and totally unnecessary wedge between the groups. More startling, though, was the fact that the Kigali Memorial Centre shows photographs of Belgians measuring the diameter of peoples' heads and the length of their noses to categorise them.

The people revolt

This ingrained sense of superiority was blatantly and crudely echoed in normal society by the Tutsi royalty. As the story goes, during official parades and ceremonies by the monarchy, the Hutus were apparently obliged to stand with their mouths open so that their 'superiors' could spit in them.

Not surprisingly, moves were underway amongst the Hutus during the late 1950s to move away from the Tutsi-led feudal society. And, following the seemingly unrelated deaths and assassinations of leaders on both sides of the fence, the Tutsis were quickly labelled as dangerous and needed to be killed – particularly after Tutsi forces beat up a Hutu politician in 1959.

As a result, the Hutus retaliated against the decades of oppression with a violent backlash against the Tutsis, with the uprising known as 'the wind of destruction'. Wikipedia states that thousands were killed and many more fled to neighbouring Uganda.

Regular incursions of Tutsi guerrilla groups into Rwanda followed, resulting in bloody clashes with local Hutu troops. Following the split of Rwanda-Urundi into the separate states of Rwanda and Burundi in 1962, the leadership of Rwanda was assumed by the Hutu Emancipation Movement.

Yet more attacks followed, including a Tutsi invasion from Burundi that apparently left 14 000 people dead.

Fast forward to the 1980s, and the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel group composed mostly of Tutsi refugees, began invading Rwanda from Uganda, further raising ethnic tensions and leading to the rise of the 'Hutu Power' ideology. This suggested that the Tutsis were returning to enslave the Hutus and they needed to be resisted.

Spiralling out of control

The intention here is not to give you a Wikipedia-inspired history lesson, but to rather create some understanding of, and insight into, the lead-up to the 1994 genocide. And how this 'resistance' ultimately developed into the elimination of the "cockroaches" as the Tutsis were later defined by the militant Hutus, known as the *Interahamwe*, during the genocide.

And, let me say outright that it would be totally and utterly naive to assume that the conflict between the Tutsis and Hutus can be singularly attributed to the Germans and Belgians.

Scratching through the country's timeline, it's clear that there had been regular territorial disputes, clashes and wars for hundreds of years prior to central east Africa, and the Rift Valley region, seeing a white face for the very first time. The Tutsi kings had fought long and hard for their claim to land, riches and people – to the obvious subjection of the rest. The tale of rich kings and poor subjects, of aristocrats and peasants, is not new in Africa, nor north, east, south or west from there.

But as the Belgians (and the Catholic Church) later reversed their position and promoted Hutu enfranchisement during the late 1950s, the point is that it seems remarkable how the developed nations (and the early missionaries before them) came, saw, conquered and then conspired to divide, segregate and entitle according to their own definitions of ethnicity, culture or creed, or as suited their requirements at the time – as so often has been the case around the world.

What gives one human being the perceived right to determine the apparent identity of another, and to compartmentalise a society that appeared to be living in relative harmony? Even if it hadn't been a land of peaceful milk, honey and pleasantries.

Why have the Western countries always believed in their superiority, and the need to implement their rules on nations of vastly different social, cultural, ethnic and historical backgrounds? For financial gain for sure, but the worrying part is that all of these moves echoed the horrifying single-minded and ruthless approach of the Nazis against the Jews leading up to and during World War II.

The horror unleashed

6 April 1994. The plane carrying Rwandan president Habyarimana and his Burundian counterpart, is shot down near Kigali Airport. Reports suggest that there is mass resistance to the Arusha Accords, which set out a peaceful transition towards a conciliatory power-sharing government after three years of civil war between the Rwandan government and the RPF.

The Hutus want to retain power, the Tutsis fighting tooth and nail to reclaim their land of birth.

It's astonishing that less than an hour after that plane went down – and blamed on the Tutsis – Kigali went under lockdown, with roadblocks emerging city-wide. The relentless hunt for, and slaughter of, Tutsis had begun. It spread like wildfire through central and southern Rwanda, with the north largely being held by the RPF.

It was not a matter of subduing the opposition, but eliminating them. Removing them from the face of the earth – kill, kill, kill, at all costs. "Squash those cockroaches!" the message was hammered home.

"Genocide is never spontaneous. It is an intentional act of multiple murders, aimed at destroying the presence of the victim group. It is usually the act of a government, and its collaborators and perpetrators do not respect age, gender, occupation, religion or status."

Kigali Memorial Centre.

This was an incredibly well organised and co-ordinated programme of killings, using government radio stations, newspapers, community broadcasts from helicopters and vehicles to disseminate the propaganda and fuel the fire, building the sheer hatred of anything related to the Tutsi.

As probably one of the most disturbing pieces of propaganda, the *'Hutu Ten Commandments'* entrenched the divide, and suggested anything to do with the Tutsis was the root of all bad and evil. And this after the world saw what devastation was caused during WWII and the Nazi's ethnic cleansing in its sick aims of achieving the 'master race' (*die Herrenrasse*).

The 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
 - employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or a concubine
- 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.).
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- 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.

**Published in December 1990 edition of *Kangura*,
an anti-Tutsi, pro-Hutu newspaper in Kigali.**

It was driven from the top, from political and military leaders. And from some church leaders. I can only wonder how many wars have been staged, battles fought and lives lost either in the name of religion, or with the sanctioning of the church.

In the streets friend turned on friend. Neighbour on neighbour – just because their ID cards defined them as *different*. Men and boys, women and children were shot. They were hauled out of their homes and hacked to pieces with machetes. Bludgeoned with pick-axes and clubs.

The survivors interviewed for the Kigali Memorial Centre videos talk about how they saw age-old family friends, people who they had shared meals and homes with, savagely slaughtering their mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers – often right in front of them.

**"Genocide was instant.
Roadblocks sprang up right across the city, the militia being
armed with one intent - to identify and kill Tutsis.
At the same time, Interahamwe began house-to-house searches.**

**The names on the death lists were the first to be
visited and slaughtered in their own homes.
The perpetrators had promised an apocalypse,
and the operation which emerged was a devastating
frenzy of violence, bloodshed and merciless killing.**

**The murderers used machetes, clubs, guns, and any blunt tool they
could find to inflict as much pain on their victims as possible.
It was genocide from the first day. No Tutsi was exempt.**

**Women were beaten, raped, humiliated, abused and
ultimately murdered, often in the sight of their own families.
Children watched as their parents were tortured, beaten and killed
in front of their eyes, before their own small bodies were sliced,
smashed, abused, pulverised and discarded.**

**The elderly, the pride of Rwandan society, were despised,
and mercilessly murdered in cold blood.
Neighbours turned on neighbours, friends on friends,
even family on their own family members.
Rwanda had turned into a nation of brutal, sadistic, merciless
killers, and of innocent victims – overnight."**

Kigali Memorial Centre.

The disturbing Ntarama reality

Genocide is nothing new. We've all seen those terrible pictures of corpses, skulls and mass-graves from the worst that the human race has to offer when it turns on itself.

But to actually be there, to imagine the shock, the horror, the pain, the suffering, the unthinkable brutality that hundreds and thousands of innocent people endured transforms the remote imagery into a spine-chilling reality.

The Kingsley Holgate expedition group had already visited the Ntarama Genocide Memorial Site when I joined the group, and it was evident that it was unsettling at best. No-one could conjure up the words to describe the experience in detail, but deep down, it will certainly live with them forever.

Preceding my Ntarama visit, I joined the Holgate United Against Malaria Expedition for one of their many laudable soccer games and net distribution events at a local community school. Interestingly, the soccer match was between Ntarama Football Club and Nelson Mandela FC from the nearby 'Peace Village Nelson Mandela'. It's on rare occasions like this, thousands of kilometres away from home, that you realise how far Madiba's influence extends.



Indeed, Kingsley stated that the president of Burundi, with whom they played a soccer match a couple of days earlier en route to Rwanda, stated that if it wasn't for our revered statesman, he wouldn't be in politics today.

And here we are, first being treated to the singing of 'Baa baa black sheep' by the younger kids, followed by the elegant swaying and drumming of the school's dance troop and then releasing the unbridled exuberance of the entire village as the game kicks off – yet with a niggling reminder of the genocide memorial that awaits just down the road.



I certainly don't know what to expect as we eventually make our way into the memorial site at the Ntarama church, which is draped with purple and white cloth in commemoration of the 16th anniversary.

The original mud-brick buildings are now dwarfed by huge metal pylons and roofing in order to preserve them for future generations. And what's striking about this from the outside, and evident across the country, is that Rwanda isn't hiding from the fact. No-one has simply painted over the disturbing past.



Even in the smallest of villages there are rickety wooden archways embellished with leaves and branches, symbolising the respect for the dead and the tragic events of 1994.

In the country's capital, the Kigali Memorial Centre, which opened in 2004 on the 10th anniversary, tells the vivid and shocking tale of the genocide from start-to-finish. It's accompanied by a separate area dedicated to the concept of genocide and its many tragic occurrences – which has a habit of repeating itself over, and over, and over again.

Before even setting foot inside the buildings at Ntarama, we chat to the facility's guide about what happened here. Totally devoid of emotion, she describes how around 5 000 women and children had taken refuge in the church compound as the news of the genocide broke.

In the past waves of death and destruction, the country's many churches proved to be safe havens to escape to, as the killers refused to enter the 'house of God' to enact their evil deeds.

But in 1994 it was different. Legions of machete-wielding Interahamwe were directed to specific locations throughout the country to wipe out the 'cockroaches' – and the churches proved nothing more than a convenient concentrated killing ground.

In many instances church leaders provided what they believed would be safe refuge for thousands, only for the so-called genocidaires to proven them wrong. Tragically, in some cases, priests welcomed people with open arms, only to lead them to the slaughterhouse in cahoots with the militant Hutu leaders.

Sitting outside on the soft green grass, I battle to put the mental picture together, watching a mother and toddler through the fence tending to daily chores in their rustic mud home. It's quiet and serene. Eerily peaceful after what we've just been told.

The screams and cries, the begging and pleading, the sounds of pain and suffering, the sounds of murder – it's impossible to even start imagining what it must have been like, with the savagery executed across the entire church compound.

The three bus-loads of genocidaires that arrived at Ntarama were brutal and unforgiving in their task, and were joined by the Hutu militias from the surrounding villages – many of whom were friends and neighbours to those inside.

Those that the Interahamwe didn't finish off in one go before nightfall would be further brutalised by cutting off their feet or slashing their tendons to prevent them from escaping. The following morning these people would finally meet their end as the killing spree resumed.

When those who had fled the Ntarama massacre eventually returned, having scarcely lived to tell the tale, they found 5 000 rotting bodies strewn across the entire complex. The people's very own dogs were eating the flesh off the bones.

"We were overcome by the sadness of the place," explained Kingsley Holgate after having visited Ntarama a day or two earlier. **"Seeing the skulls, the bones, the axe heads, the spears still pierced through the skulls, it was terrible.**

The fact that pregnant mums had been dragged up to the church altar and disembowelled, their foetuses dragged from their bodes. The fact that women had been raped in front of their families.

In many cases they were intentionally raped by those with HIV/AIDS, in the knowledge that they were not only raping them, but destroying their lives – if they happened to survive."

The point of no return

We finally make our way into the main church building. We arrive at the main entrance not knowing what to expect. Has the church been left untouched? Do the bodies remain strewn across the floor and low concrete benches?

It's with a combined sense of intrigue and disgust that I proceed to the main door, taking note of the several gaping holes in the main structure where hand grenades signalled the beginning of a long and painful end for so many people.

But instead of mayhem and destruction as I turn the corner I'm confronted by order and a measure of civility, with a four-tiered rack treated to the same purple-and-white adornments as the exterior.





It's only when I climb the handful of stairs that the neat shelves reveal their horrific tale: the centre two with banks of tightly packed skulls, framed top and bottom by literally hundreds of leg and arm bones stacked neatly in place.

As a journalist with an overriding photographic focus, I often have the good fortune of being able to view things through the intriguing and sometimes narrow perspective of a lens. And it's only on the road back to Kigali that I realise that I probably spent just as much time viewing the horror and inhumanity through the remoteness of the viewfinder as I did without an intervening medium. My means of distancing myself from the horrific reality? Possibly.



I've had the same experience when working on assignments with the police – the shock effect of a bloody murder becomes surreal and removed when you're 'on the job'. It's only when you view the images again in the cold light of day on a roll of bright transparency film or, now in the digital era, on your computer screen that you begin to really absorb and relate to the detail. The lives lost. The act of passion or hatred. The inexplicable tragedy in it all.

At the same time, I feel uncomfortable every time I lift the camera, feeling a sense of obligation to leave what remains in undisturbed peace. What gives me the right to snap away – particularly when throughout Rwanda people have been avoiding my camera and, in some distances, aggressively denying my option of taking a picture?

Then again, it's a story that needs to be told and, as we know, a picture is worth ...

These were people – healthy, happy people with families, with goals, with dreams. All of which was cut short during the intense wave of terror.

On closer inspection, the shock factor really comes into focus, as just about every skull is cracked or shattered in some way or form, indicating the sheer brutality of their death and the pain they endured. So many people were clubbed to death, others hit with pangas, many hacked with machetes, some pierced with spears and axes.



Some even paid their killers to shoot them in order to be 'rewarded' with an instant death. An immediate end to the pain and suffering. In a split second, eternal peace in a time of total chaos.

Turn around!

When you start looking more closely into the individual deep-set eye sockets which are eerily and ominously dark, seeing the few remaining teeth on the jawless skulls that same thought comes to the fore – these were people.

There is no artificial lighting in the church, only the flood of ambient sunlight filtering through the two main doors, the small windows and the jagged holes punched through the brickwork by the grenades.

I turn around, and am struck by an image that really brings it all home in gut-wrenching, tear-jerking reality. Draped randomly from the rafters, stuffed into the windows, strung neatly along the walls, piled in the corner are the dirty, dishevelled and blood-stained clothes of those killed at Ntarama.



Colourful ethnic cloths so typical of the women in the area, smart work-like attire for the equally well-dressed men and the abundant clothes worn during the last days of lived by the many precious children.

A couple of days later, at the Kigali Memorial Centre, my heart turns ice-cold and my hairs stand on end as I see a dirty and bloodied Superman blanket in one of the displays – much like what my kids go to sleep with every night at home.

As I walk down the centre aisle Kingsley's words, describing how women were raped and disembowelled at the altar repeat themselves over and over. To the right are coffins filled with many more skeletal remains. And in front of that, knives, machetes, axes, spears and many other crude weapons lie in a ragged pile as a reminder of the painful murder exacted on innocent lives.



Behind this are shelves laden with personal items. Pots and pans. Piles of shoes. Toys and bags.

And at the altar, week-old bouquets of cellophane-wrapped flowers carrying the message 'Never Again' – a message of hope certainly, but it appears that we never learn from our mistakes. Sadly, we haven't learnt from the Nazis. We haven't from Eastern Europe or other regions in Africa. There are countless examples.

In the adjacent priests' room, there's a stack of torn and decaying school exercise books – an open one displaying, by means of impeccable cursive writing and a neatly captioned hand-drawn diagram, what appears to be the common biology project of growing beans.

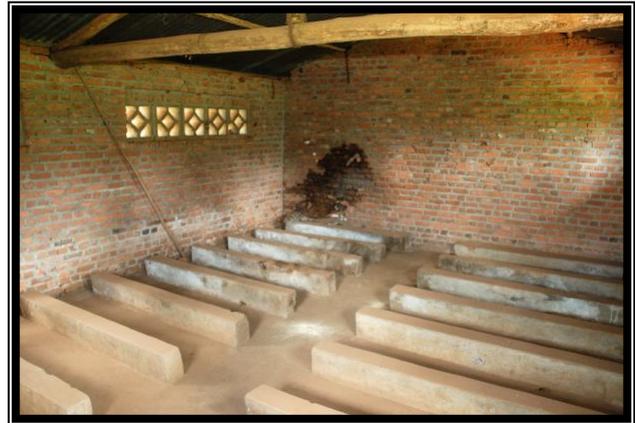
We proceed around the outside of the church building, revealing several more gaping holes in the structure, and what remains of a simple yet undoubtedly beautiful blue stained-glass window.

In the adjacent mud building we're shown where bodies were dumped and burned, certainly some of them probably still clinging to the last vestiges of life and hope as they were consumed by the flames.

And then ...

This is a particularly difficult one for anyone with children. Or anyone with a heart.

The room next door is where the kids went to Sunday School. And tragically, it's where they came to the same atrocious, inhumane end as everyone else at Ntarama. All the kids were killed by means of their heads being smashed against the far wall of the room. The blood-stained wall remains as a sickening testament to the fact.



Just the thought of those innocent little lives being so viciously taken is bad enough. But then also imagining how the cruel act played out in front of the kids, seeing their brothers, sisters and friends being violently murdered – it's too terrifying for words.

With two amazing young kids of my own, I walk out of the room in stomach-churning disgust, vowing not to take any pictures, view the scene or consider the scenario a second longer. However, in line with my intent on telling the story, I force myself to return, camera primed. I take the shocking picture with sunlight filtering in through the remains of the side window – almost providing a sense of serenity, in dramatic contrast to the events that unfolded.

The Ntarama site has a wall of remembrance where the names of many of the people who died in the church compound are inscribed – but it's clear that this is nowhere near the 5 000 that were slaughtered.

For the first people to return to Ntarama, the sight must have been absolutely horrendous, and the job of identifying the remains, the personal effects, equally devastating.

And, no doubt, because many families were eliminated in their entirety, there was simply no-one to give them a name or the honour they deserved.

"Many families were totally wiped out, with no-one to remember or document their deaths," Kingsley Holgate reads from his notes from the Kigali Memorial Centre.

"The streets were littered with corpses, dogs were eating the rotten flesh of their owners. The country smelled of the stench of the death. The genocidaires had been more successful in their evil aims than anyone would have dared to believe.

"Rwanda was dead."

It's with genuine sadness that Kingsley reads out the hard-hitting lines above, as we take a break at the rickety old steel bridge over the Akagera River. He points out that this is where thousands of bodies were dumped into the river, which is one of the sources of the Nile.



This, the Hutus believed, would send the Tutsis 'back to Egypt', emphasising their consideration of the apparently taller and leaner ethnic group as outsiders of north African origin – talk about propaganda in action!

It's at this point that the Nya Arongo River becomes the Akagera and ironically, the bodies ultimately flowed in the opposite direction, many of them landing up in Lake Victoria.

Shaking hands with the Devil

For anyone aiming to gain some insight into the horror that unfolded in 1994, the history preceding it and the subsequent evolution of the country, the Kigali Memorial Centre in Rwanda's capital city is an essential part of the experience.

It's truly commendable that, instead of hiding from their terrible past, the people of Rwanda have embraced and revealed it in vivid detail, with the images and video footage to support it. The disturbing story told sends shivers down your spine, and it's certainly not for the faint-hearted. But it makes sure that you leave with a totally new outlook on life and family – and disgust at what humans are capable of.

It's a harrowing thought that over 250 000 people are buried at this site in mass graves and burial chambers – that equates to roughly a quarter of Kigali's population.

Indeed, although the estimates on the final tally of those killed ranges between 800 000 and almost 1,2-million, the reality is that more than 20-percent of Rwanda's people ceased to exist when the tragic campaign finally ended – 100 days after the blood began to flow.

Even more tragic, though, is that the world, and the United Nations, saw the events unfolding, and did precious little to intervene.

In his book, **'Shake Hands with the Devil – The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda'**, force commander, Canadian Lt General Roméo Dallaire of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) reveals how, firstly, the little country in the middle of Africa wasn't seen of real strategic significance to any of the UN's member nations and, secondly, it wasn't deemed worthy of the organisation's peace-keeping resources.

Despite going into Rwanda believing it was a simple mission to achieve a peace that both sides wanted, he landed up in a full-scale civil war. Even after fighting tenaciously for a 5 000-strong UN force which, he believed, would have been able to contain the situation, he was granted just 260 peace-keepers and a team of unarmed observers that were quite obviously ill-equipped to deal with the rapidly deteriorating situation . This in total disregard for Dallaire's first-hand experience in the country, and his most fervent pleas and warnings to the UN and member states. Instead his mandate was little more than to evacuate foreign nationals.

He watched in despair as even the Belgians withdrew their forces as late as 19 April 1994 based on a UN Security Council vote, primarily driven by the United States. This followed the killing of 10 Belgian soldiers by the Rwandan Armed Forces.

It's noted that a technical school previously protected by the Belgians was abandoned upon their withdrawal, giving the "Hutu Power" chanting, beer-drinking Interahamwe waiting outside free reign to massacre the 2 000 people taking refuge within its walls.

"Rwanda had gone to hell. Even the international community had forgotten about us. It was as if Rwanda had been deleted from the earth."

Survivor, Kigali Memorial Centre.

Sadly, it was only on 17 May, after around 500 000 lives had already been lost that the UN admitted that "acts of genocide may have been committed". This led to UNAMIR II being established, and eventually sending 5 500 troops in to assist. But even then, the supply of 50 armoured personnel carriers from the US was delayed due to 'cost arguments and other factors'.

In part, this effort was in response to France's plan to occupy portions of the country. Considering that the French had a legacy of supporting the Hutus and the Rwandan army, it would have only exacerbated the already dire situation.

The genocide finally ended when the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), headed by Paul Kagame – the country's astute current president – swept into Kigali and gained control of the country on 18 July 1994. A million people were dead and more than two-million displaced around the country and across the neighbouring borders. The action-packed film *Hotel Rwanda* gives a chilling insight into the genocide, and Dallaire's impossible task.

Dallaire left Rwanda in September 1994 a broken man, suffering major post-traumatic stress disorder for many years, even attempting suicide after witnessing humanity's most harrowing acts.

Despite his truly exceptional efforts, he felt intimately responsible for the lives lost – both amongst the Rwandan people and his own soldiers. He has ultimately become a Canadian Senator, campaigning for many causes, including human rights and veterans' mental health.

Never again?

It was only in 1998 that Kofi Annan, the head of the UN peacekeeping operations in 1994 (who Dallaire reported to), and ultimately the secretary-general of the UN from 1997-2006, accepted responsibility for failing to prevent the genocide, admitting that their member states lacked the political will to stop the massacres.



Too little, too late.

And it's clear, from the exhibition on the top floor of the Kigali Memorial Centre, which is dedicated to the concept of genocide in general, that the human race never learns from its own mistakes.

Sadly, the 'Never Again' scrawled on the endless flower bouquets means very little when we didn't learn from World War II, when 6-million Jews, including 1,5-million children, were killed from around 1933 to 1945.

To put the Rwandan genocide into perspective, according to historical records, the Nazi death camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau exterminated 450 000 lives from April-July 1944, and around 1,4-million in total. It's estimated that the Germans established 15 000 concentration, labour and death camps in its occupied countries during its tyrannous reign.

In Rwanda, around 1-million lives were savagely extinguished *in just 100 days*, testifying to the astonishingly effective (for lack of a better word) Hutu campaign.

Beyond Rwanda and Nazi Germany, it's abundantly clear that history continues to repeat itself. The intentional murder (i.e. genocide, or sometimes defined as 'politicide with communal victims') of large numbers of people places huge bloody stains on our past, and threatens to blight any ideas of a peaceful future

(info from Wikipedia):

- Uganda – 1980-86, up to 500 000 people killed
- Syria – 1981-82, 30 000
- Iraq – 1988-1991, 180 000
- Bosnia – 1992 to 1995, 225 000
- Burundi – 1993-1994, 50 000 (with worrying signs again in 2010)

Even now the Darfur conflict in Sudan has brought genocide into 21st century, with this troubled region apparently having cost over 2-million lives over the past 17 years, and the majority since the hostilities escalated in 2003.

The pain of survival

It's not just the shocking number of deaths, but the pain and suffering felt by the remaining survivors that tells of the real tragedy.

Firstly, the intentional infection of women by the HIV/AIDS-positive militias ensured that those that emerged from the ruins would endure ongoing pain and suffering – and would transmit this to future generations. There has been scarce availability of anti-retroviral drugs for the victims, while the Kigali Memorial Centre points out that those convicted and imprisoned for the genocide receive the medication in jail.

Moreover, the harsh emotional and psychological effects are equally devastating and remain forever – there's an entire generation living without their family and friends, having seen many of them slaughtered right in front of them. And then, later seeing those very same killers walking in the street, living next door.

It's clear on many of the interviews played on the Memorial Centre screens that beyond the loss of their loved ones, few of these people have ever regained their true sense of humanity, respect, love. They're devoid of emotion – and many refer to the agonising pain of survival, that they often wish they too were dead.

Despite the trauma, the pain and anguish, there has been little effort to offer any measure of widespread social counselling – once again due to a lack of resources.

Accordingly, some of the UAM Expedition crew commented that they sensed a worrying undertone among the Rwandan people, despite locals saying that they're now Rwandans, not Hutu or Tutsi. And, although Rwanda will never forget, they questioned whether it's possible for a populace to ever forgive the atrocities, and never to enact revenge.

"If we take revenge for what happened to us, we can only expect the children of our victims to take revenge on us and our children.

It becomes a never-ending cycle, so somebody has to break the cycle."

Kemal Pervanic, survivor of the Omarska concentration camp in Bosnia
Kigali Memorial Centre Genocide display

As far as I'm concerned, my personal jury is out on the issue of an underlying sentiment or tension. But as the previous chapter reveals, we never, ever seem to learn from our horrific mistakes.

A country on the rise

Whatever your views on Rwanda's past, there's no denying that beyond the genocide and under RPF leadership it has been transformed into a leading light in Africa.

"In 2009 a CNN report labeled Rwanda as Africa's biggest success story, having achieved stability, economic growth (average income has tripled in the past ten years) and international integration. The government is widely seen as one of the more efficient and honest ones in Africa."

Wikipedia - Rwanda

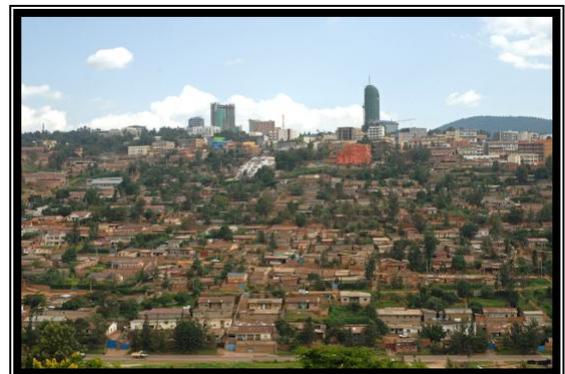
Certainly, Kingsley Holgate, who has travelled in all but five of Africa's countries to date (and plans to do the rest later this year on another one of his exceptional humanitarian expeditions), commented that it's without doubt the cleanest and neatest country on the continent.

Plastic packets are strictly outlawed, and everyone is tasked with keeping the country clean – even to the extent that one Sunday every month, the entire population gets out on the streets and does their bit. Apparently even government ministers are required to join in the act.

On our Sunday late-morning drive to Kigali Airport for the flight back to SA, we saw scores of policemen in uniform working on the side of the road, cleaning up dirt and rubble, tending to gardens, removing weeds ...

Clearly our fat-cat 'leaders' and officials could learn a lot from this tiny nation.

There's also a clear sense of economic buoyancy when it comes to Kigali's undulating skyline. Towering over the mud brick houses and small businesses that typically dominate the valleys are an inordinate number of high-tech high-rise office blocks and hotels. Many of these signal the Chinese invasion, with the eastern 'friends' also developing the road infrastructure.



Nevertheless, it's a positive shift – and one that's extremely encouraging for the rest of the world.

I've certainly seen that Africa is a land of extreme contrasts – between the rich and poor, good and evil, unrivalled beauty and unimaginable tragedy, genocide and the laudable efforts of people such as the Holgate family. It's just a great pity that Rwanda had to endure the worst of the worst.

Let's just hope that the ghosts of the past don't still haunt its promising future. And that, one day, the world will learn ...

**"If you knew me and you really knew yourself,
you would not have killed me."**

Felicien Ntagengwa, Kigali Memorial Centre



For more images, visit: www.milemanmedia.co.za/portfolio.html

Sources:

- Kigali Memorial Centre
- Wikipedia, and its many associated links
- *Shake Hands with the Devil* (2004) – Lt Gen Roméo Dallaire

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