HOPE FOR RWANDA
Conversations with Laure Guilbert and Hervé Deguine

André Sibomana

Translated and with a Postscript by Carina Tertsakian

Foreword by Alison Des Forges
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When I despair, I remember that all through history, the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall – think of it, always.

Mahatma Gandhi

I thought it was commendable to lend a voice, however weak, to those who do not have the right to speak. Have I managed to make their voices heard? Not always. Those who live without chains, without constraints, those who have enough to eat every day make such a deafening noise on their own behalf that they do not hear the moans that rise from below. If you ask them for a moment of silence, they reply that they cannot afford it. They do not believe that it is their duty.

Albert Londres
Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Roger Clark for his patience and care.

Carina Tertsakian
When I first went looking for André Sibomana in August 1994, shortly after the end of the genocide in Rwanda, I had trouble finding him. Even at Kabgayi, the centre of the diocese, no one seemed to have seen this well-known priest or his readily recognizable vehicle. I went from one to another of the many buildings, scattered over the extensive grounds. Finally a sister who had known me for sometime indicated that he was lodged in a room in the interior courtyard of the convent.

I sat down on a bench in the arcade and studied the flowers still blooming in the untended garden. The sister knocked at the door of a room across the garden and spoke briefly once the door had opened a crack. I had heard that Sibomana wanted no visitors and that he felt his life was in danger. Still I was surprised that he hesitated so long before deciding to come out.

He greeted me with no warmth but did sit down next to me. We had hardly begun to talk when a journalist pushed his way in the gate and presumed to begin interviewing Sibomana. Perhaps out of sympathy for a fellow journalist, the priest agreed to answer a few questions. After a brief discussion, the journalist asked his age. Sibomana replied that he had lived forty years and that was one year too many. With an angry scowl, he refused to talk further and the journalist left.

I didn’t stay much longer since I found no way to respond to Sibomana’s obvious anguish. The next day I went back. This visit went no better, although Sibomana let down his guard enough to talk of some of the horrors he had seen during the genocide and of his own efforts to save people. As we sat on the bench he mused about the human capacity for evil and voiced a desire to become a monk and withdraw from the world. He readily agreed that Rwanda needed courageous leaders more than ever before, but insisted that he no longer saw himself playing such a role.

Just before I left, he remarked that there were still bodies scattered in the nearby woods, both Tutsi slain during the genocide and Hutu
killed by soldiers of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) who had driven away the genocidal assailants. I wanted to investigate the site. Sibomana refused to go with me, saying ‘I’ve seen enough dead bodies.’

Sibomana had come to prominence as editor of *Kinyamateka*, the most important independent newspaper in Rwanda. As a crusader against official corruption, he had been prosecuted for his reports in 1990 but had won acquittal after presenting well-documented proof of his conclusions. Working behind the scenes as well, he had fashioned a powerful statement, issued by the clergy of the Kabgayi diocese, which criticized the close links between the church hierarchy and the government. Spurred by his unrelenting anger against injustice, Sibomana had helped mobilize the Rwandan human rights movement and had ensured that the massacres that presaged the 1994 genocide were documented.

The genocide had transformed Sibomana’s anger to anguish and sapped his driving energy. He was overwhelmed not just by the sheer, incomprehensible horror of the slaughter but also by the betrayal of some of our human rights colleagues. Most had been so overwhelmed by fear that they had retreated into silence, although some did try to save lives more privately. Worse still, some had chosen to support the genocide, echoing the government’s explanation that the killing was a necessary form of self-defence. One human rights activist even went so far as to describe the effort to exterminate Tutsi as normal.

When I came to see Sibomana a third time, I was looking for information about a report of RPF soldiers killing civilians. Once more we took our places on the bench in the sun and I pressed him for what he knew about the massacre. It was not the midday sun that caused the sweat to form and stream down his face. We sat a few minutes in silence, gazing out at the flowers in the calm courtyard. Then, without looking at me, he started to relate what he knew of the incident where soldiers had gunned down unarmed civilians.

Deciding to take up his work again, Sibomana had to confront not just intimidation and threats from authorities – accustomed hindrances to his work – but also a new enemy: his own despair. In his very hesitation and turmoil, he offered the best model to others who had been similarly devastated by the genocide and who could no longer cheerfully hope to save the world.
His decision to keep on trying led him to recount his personal journey through suffering to hope. Readers of this book have a chance to share his journey and, as they deepen their understanding of the Rwandan tragedy, to renew their own commitment to the ideals of justice, peace, and reconciliation that fired the spirit of André Sibomana.

Alison Des Forges
New York City
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Map of Rwanda
Chronology

From conquest to social revolution (1894–1959)

1894 German explorers discover Rwanda.
1900 Creation of the first White Fathers mission.
1916 Belgium takes over Rwanda and relies on the traditional elite to govern the country.
1922 The League of Nations puts the kingdom of Urundi (Rwanda–Burundi) under the trusteeship of Belgium.
1931 The king is deposed by the Belgians and replaced by his son Rudahigwa, who is more conciliatory. The Belgian administration imposes an identity booklet in which each person’s ethnic origin is specified.
1932 Creation of the newspaper Kinyamateka.
1952 Creation of the first representative council, the Superior Council, composed mainly of prominent Tutsi.
1957 Publication of a ‘Note on the social aspect of the racial problem in Rwanda’, later known as the ‘Manifesto of the Bahutu’. In this document, the Hutu denounce the ‘feudal regime’ and domination of the Tutsi.
1958 Inter-ethnic tensions increase. The Belgians become wary of signs of a desire for independence among their former Tutsi allies; they get closer to the Hutu.

The Social Revolution, independence and the Kayibanda regime (1959–73)

1959–62 The ‘Social Revolution’. With the support of the Rwandan Roman Catholic Church, the emancipated Hutu elite takes power. The Belgian trusteeship administration withdraws its support from the Tutsi, many of whom are massacred. Several thousand Tutsi flee to Uganda, Burundi and Zaire.
1962 Declaration of independence (simultaneous declaration of independence in Burundi).

1972 More than 200,000 Burundian Hutu – the intellectual class – are massacred by the Tutsi-dominated army. Thousands of Hutu flee to Tanzania and Rwanda.

1973 Hutu extremists in Rwanda push the Kayibanda regime in a more radical direction, exploiting fears of Tutsi provoked by the massacres in Burundi. Public salvation committees organize a ‘Tutsi hunt’. More massacres; another exodus.

The early phase of the Habyarimana regime (1973–90)

1973 The Chief-of-Staff of the armed forces, Juvénal Habyarimana, takes power following a coup d'état (1973–94).


1979 Creation of the Rwandan National Union (RANU) in Kenya, representing Rwandan Tutsi refugees.


1988 Massacres of Tutsi in Burundi. Repression by the army leads to tens of thousands of deaths among Hutu peasants and provokes another exodus to Rwanda.

The democratization of the regime and the war (1990–94)

1990 September Visit of Pope John Paul II. Trial of Kinyamateka journalists.

October The RPF attacks Rwanda from Uganda. Thousands of Tutsi and opponents of the Habyarimana government are arrested on suspicion of complicity.

November First signs of democratization of the regime (development of freedom of the press, de facto creation of opposition political parties). Juvénal Habyarimana announces the suppression of the mention of ethnicity on identity cards.

1991 January–March Massacres of Bagogwe (a group of Tutsi pastoralists).
April  | A multi-party system is recognized.

1992 |

March  | Creation of the *Coalition pour la défense de la République*, CDR (Coalition for the Defence of the Republic), an extremist Hutu party. Massacres of Tutsi in the Bugesera region.

April  | A transitional government is formed, headed by the leader of the democratic opposition, Dismas Nsengiyaremye.

May    | RPF offensive in the north of the country. More than 350,000 peasants are displaced by the fighting.

June   | The democratic opposition meets RPF representatives in Brussels with a view to forming a united front against the Habyarimana regime.

July   | Ceasefire agreement between the government and the RPF.

September–December | Extremist militia begin organizing.

1993  |

January | Signature of a protocol agreement to form a broad-based, transitional government. An independent international commission of inquiry denounces large-scale human rights violations.

February | The RPF resumes fighting in the north of the country and arrives on the outskirts of Kigali. Between 800,000 and 1 million Hutu peasants are forced to flee and live in a camp for the internally displaced, where they suffer from starvation. A French military intervention prevents the RPF rebels from taking control of the capital and forces them to resume peace negotiations.

June   | Creation of a new provisional government. Dismas Nsengiyaremye is forced to flee. Agathe Uwilingiyimana takes over as prime minister. She will remain in this post until she is killed on 7 April 1994. General elections in Burundi: for the first time in the country’s history, a Hutu, Melchior Ndadaye, becomes president.

August | Signature of the Arusha peace accords, which put an end to hostilities and provide a power-sharing agreement between the MRND, the democratic opposition and the RPF.
October  
*Coup d’état* in Burundi. Melchior Ndadaye is assassinated by extremist Tutsi soldiers. Massacres of Tutsi; repression by the army and massacres of Hutu; 700,000 Hutu flee to Rwanda, fuelling fear of Tutsi among Rwandan Hutu peasants.

December  
French soldiers of Operation Noroît leave Rwanda and hand over to UNAMIR (United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda).

1994
January  
The Arusha accords are blocked. The broad-based transitional government cannot be set up.

February  
Assassination of Félicien Gatabazi, leader of the *Parti social démocrate*, PSD (Social Democratic Party), and Martin Bucyana, leader of the CDR.

March  
Atmosphere of civil war in Kigali. Incidents occur on a daily basis and lists of people to be eliminated are drawn up.

April  
Juvénal Habyarimana goes to Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) for a regional peace summit. 6 April: he is assassinated as he returns, along with Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira. 7 April: Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana and several other ministers are killed. Massacres of Tutsi and Hutu opponents begin in Kigali and several other areas. 8 April: creation of a provisional government made up of Hutu extremists. 9 April: France and Belgium fly in troops to evacuate European expatriates. 21 April: the UN Security Council votes to withdraw UNAMIR.

May  
The United Nations votes to adopt an arms embargo. The Human Rights Commission asks its Special Rapporteur, René Degni-Ségui, to investigate ongoing massacres.

June  
16 June: France considers a military intervention in Rwanda. 22 June: the Security Council authorizes the despatch of a ‘humanitarian force’. 23 June: start of Operation Turquoise and creation of a safe humanitarian zone in the south of the country. 28 June: René Degni-Ségui describes the ongoing massacres as ‘genocide’. The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that between 500,000 and 1 million Tutsi and Hutu government opponents were killed during the genocide.
July 4 July: the RPF takes control of Kigali. 10 July: creation of a government of National Unity. 13–14 July: fearing the advances of the RPF, 1 million Rwandan Hutu – many of whom were heavily involved in the genocide – flee to eastern Zaire, in the Goma region. In the following two weeks, 50,000 of them die of exhaustion and cholera.

August 22 August: end of Operation Turquoise.

**Rwanda since 1994**

1994
September–December
The reconstruction of Rwanda begins. Pasteur Bizimungu is President of the Republic. Paul Kagame is Vice-President and Minister of Defence. Of the 7.5 million inhabitants in Rwanda before the war, almost 1 million have been killed, 2 million are living in camps for the internally displaced (mainly in the south of the country, in the former safe humanitarian zone) and 2 million in refugee camps (mainly in Zaire and Tanzania). Nearly 600,000 Tutsi, most of them descendants of Tutsi who were forced into exile between 1959 and 1990, return to Rwanda.

1995
April 22 April: massacre of displaced persons at Kibeho by RPA (Rwandan Patriotic Army) soldiers.
August Break-up of the government of National Unity. Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu and Minister of the Interior Seth Sendashonga flee the country.
September The UN Security Council creates a commission of inquiry to investigate supplies of arms and military equipment to the ex-FAR (Forces armées rwandaises) (Rwandan Armed Forces).

1996
July *Coup d'état* in Burundi. Sylvestre Ntibantunganya - Cyprien Ntaryamira’s successor – is overthrown by Major Pierre Buyoya who is supported by the Burundian army. Regional trade sanctions imposed on Burundi.

August Adoption of a new law on crimes of genocide.