

**Implicated Geographies:  
Public Memorials and the Topographies of Genocide**

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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<sup>1</sup>

—Dr. Susan E. Cook, *The Politics of Preservation In Rwanda*

“The land is exhausted,” Sam Gasana, my guide and translator, told me as we drove through the Rwandan countryside. I think I understood his meaning: The land is exhausted in the practical sense. The agricultural land of Rwanda is over-farmed, with large sections now deforested. It is one of the most densely populated countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and for this reason, among others, natural resources are scarce. Most native large-animal species are gone or are concentrated on nature preserves. Nevertheless, Rwanda is a beautiful country. During the rainy season, the landscape is a deep and luscious green with hills that seem to undulate. The mud brick houses provide a contrast to the greens of the rice paddies and banana trees. The rivers, when filled with rain, rush through the country. Yet the land is exhausted in other ways: the hills and rivers—the physical topography of the land—were worn out and depleted by carrying the weight of the genocide of 1994.

The landscapes in Rwanda were directly involved in the genocide because they provided the staging area—places to hide, herd, hunt, and kill. Now, 12 years after the fact, public memorials are being envisioned and realized in Rwanda that today attempt to take into account the complex factors that comprise the genocide. At the center of the memorialization process are the sites of the killing: landscapes, buildings, and churches.

The immensity of the Rwandan genocide is difficult to grasp. Indeed, the idea of 500,000 to 900,000 individual murders<sup>2</sup> that constitute the genocide in Rwanda is largely incomprehensible, and any attempt to represent it or memorialize it, whether textual, physical, or visual, is problematic. Complicating the memorial process is the direct participation of much of the population in the killing. It is illustrative that the name of the militias—*interahamwe* (“those who work together”)—refers to the localized community public-works projects (*umagandas*) prevalent in Rwanda since the early 1970s. Neighbors and, in some cases, family members participated in the genocide using such weapons as machetes, which required the perpetrator to kill at close range. And although in Rwanda’s case the genocide was nationally and politically sponsored, it was locally and individually enacted, highlighting the fact that most acts of murder are, in a certain sense, individual.<sup>3</sup> Beyond a national memorial that addresses the large and complex scope of the genocide, each community needs to acknowledge this localized collaboration and its effect within that community.

This essay takes into account the physical sites where violence erupted—sites that now operate as memorial spaces—and I consider them vital to an overall analysis of the public memorials in Rwanda. Rather than being passive backdrops, the physical geographies have their own layered



meanings that are intertwined with the cultural, political, and genocidal history of Rwanda. I call these “implicated geographies,” noting that the landscapes have taken on new meanings beyond their physical topographies. These spaces have even greater significance when they are utilized as memorial sites. In an attempt to understand the memorial interventions in Rwanda, it is important to recognize these actual sites as physical spaces and as places for the intersection of multiple meanings.

Also implicated in the genocide are the institutional geographies of the school and the church, structures long upheld as sanctuaries that became killing grounds. Rural genocide memorial sites that dot the Rwandan countryside (over 500 by one count) are located on the actual sites of the violence, and in some cases occupy the same buildings that were used in the genocide. In Kibeho, for instance, the church that was used to corral and kill Tutsis now simultaneously functions as a genocide memorial, parish church, and convent school. In this particular memorial, victim remains and central memorial space are located inside the church just behind the main altar. The space is crowded with conflicting and contested meanings.

In summer 2005 I traveled to Rwanda to visit public genocide memorials and to interview survivors. I studied 15 rural genocide memorials and found that each had common elements. Most have a central building with rooms in which violence occurred preserved for the purpose of memorial display. One had formal exhibition spaces with text and multimedia installations, but most had more informal, even makeshift, exhibits. In all cases, personal items and victims’ remains are on display. All shared a loose affiliation with the Rwandan Ministry of Youth Culture and Sport,

which administers monuments and museums for Rwanda, and with Aegis Trust Rwanda, a United Kingdom-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) that assists governments in building and maintaining memorial sites. However, local personnel administers and staffs all of the memorials. Interviews were conducted on or near the sites with genocide survivors—those who had lived in the area before the genocide or who were victims of the massacres that happened on the site or who continued to live in the area.<sup>4</sup> In some cases, the interviewee also was the museum docent. I was particularly interested in individuals who had experienced the site before, during, and after the genocide so that I could understand better how their perceptions, experiences, and relationships with the site evolved. Furthermore, I was intrigued by how their narratives about the genocide were influenced by the site's physical components and interested in what effect recounting their experience on the actual site had on the form of the memorials.

The multivalency of these memorial landscapes—as locations of violence, working religious sites, and sites of commemoration—points to the significance of physical geographies in the history of the genocide. In Rwanda the memorial process attempts to recuperate all of these implicated geographies. Can a site hold these multiple meanings and still serve as a place of memorial? And can a place with such significant history overcome its violence and become reintegrated into local social systems? How do these implicated geographies negotiate the existing layered meanings?

## II.

In 1894, when Count Gustav Adolf van Gotzen, the first European to visit Rwanda, was introduced to the royal court of Rwanda, he did the unthinkable: he shook the king's hand. Not only were the courtiers of the Rwandan king appalled that anyone would dare touch the king, but also they were concerned that shaking his hand might cause an earthquake. In Rwanda, the king embodied the land; he was the "personification of the hills of Rwanda."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, actions against the land or even mismanagement itself were considered actions against the king.

When Europeans arrived in Rwanda, they were surprised to find a highly organized and sophisticated kingship. The power of this kingship was tied, in part, to the land.<sup>6</sup> If colonial Rwanda viewed the body in terms of perceived ethnic difference and racial hierarchies, then pre-colonial Rwanda viewed the body in relation to the land, labor, and economics—not tribal divisions as the Europeans believed.

The structure of the court positioned the king at the pinnacle of a system of "political, cultural and economic relationships" administered by a collection of chiefs.<sup>7</sup> These chiefs—95 percent of whom were Tutsi—had three principal responsibilities: land holdings and agricultural production, ruling the bodies of men, and overseeing pasture lands. Chiefs could have one or more responsibilities, with one person overseeing agricultural landholdings and the army, for example, while a different person was the chief of pastures.

The divisions, based on economic and labor relationships, had a spatial component that contributed to the hierarchies of pre-colonial Rwanda. The pastoral Tutsis were involved with animal husbandry, specifically raising cattle, and were thus able to control and use rich pasture and grazing lands. Owning cattle indicated high social status and power. The more agrarian Hutu who had access to agricultural lands were associated with farming and considered lower in social status. At the lowest end of the social spectrum were the Twa people. Considered native inhabitants,<sup>8</sup> the Twas' primary labor activity was hunting and gathering, with some functioning as servants to the king. Thus the Twas were not tied directly to the land through labor and they occupied the lowest level in the caste system.

Group identification in Rwanda also had its physical attributes, the Tutsis taller and leaner; the Hutus shorter and stockier; and the Twas as pygmoid.<sup>9</sup> However, caste divisions in pre-colonial Rwanda were established more by social, labor, and land relations than by physical attributes. The system allowed for a certain amount of fluidity, and those who were able to make a shift to pastoral pursuits and animal husbandry managed to obtain Tutsi identification. This separation of responsibilities and power made for a complex network of relationships. "This was a system," writes historian Gerard Prunier, "aptly described by the first German resident, Richard Kandt, as that of 'the intertwined fingers.'"<sup>10</sup>

Thus from the beginning of Rwanda's history, power, people, and the land were interwoven, and the land became implicated (in the original sense of the word: entangled and entwined) in the workings of power. In this way, the physical geographies in Rwanda came to hold larger and more complex meanings by close association with public policy, governmental bureaucracy, and, eventually, genocidal events.

## III.

The Kagera River forms the Rwanda-Tanzania border and eventually empties into Kenya's Lake Victoria. The rushing waters may be familiar due to the photographs that circu-



lated around the world during the genocide. Victims were lined up along riverbanks and forced directly into the turbid water. After their executions, the victims' swollen and disfigured bodies skimmed the shores and clogged the smaller waterways. The river operated as a perfect venue to dispose of the bodies: thousands washed into Lake Victoria.<sup>11</sup> Fergal Keane, writer and BBC reporter writes: "There were so many bodies it seemed the earth could not hold them. When the dead finally reached Lake Victoria, Ugandan fisherman went out in their boats to recover them and give them a decent burial.... Colleagues had seen the bodies of mothers and children who had been tied together and thrown into the river."<sup>12</sup>

Rivers also figured into the propaganda of the genocide. Leon Mugesera, vice-president of the political party Mouvement Revolutionnaire National pour le Development—a party whose leaders were among the main organizers of the genocide<sup>13</sup>—was at the forefront of the intellectual movement of Hutu nationalism and disseminated anti-Tutsi propaganda leading up to the genocide. He urged militias to send the so-called foreign Tutsi back to Ethiopia via the river (many Rwandans falsely believed at the time that Rwanda's rivers flowed toward Ethiopia). In an infamous speech given in November 1992, Mugesera told a crowd: "We have to take responsibility into our own hands and wipe out these hoodlums. The fatal mistake we made in 1959 was to let them [the Tutsi] get out. They belong in Ethiopia and we are going to find them a short cut to get there by throwing them into the Nyabarongo River [which flows northwards]. I must insist on this point. We have to act. Wipe them all out!"<sup>14</sup>

Later, writes Prunier, "*interahamwe* militias chanted his words" as they went about their killing.<sup>15</sup> Survivors remember the rivers too. Beatha Uwaazaninka was the sole

surviving member of her family following the genocide. She recounted the day she learned of her mother's death: In the open-air market in Kigali she was told that her mother had been thrown in the river while still alive.

As the memorial process in Rwanda unfolds, the rivers, hills, and other physical topographies emerge as key components of memorialization. In Bisesero the physical geography of the area is a central theme that uses the landscape's features in the memorial intervention. Rwanda is called the "Land of a Thousand Hills" (*milles collines*). The countryside in Kibuye Prefecture, near Bisesero, has fields of banana trees and small family compounds, called *rugos*, that operate as the smallest unit of community organization in the country. In such rural areas these family compounds are surrounded by hedge fences lining the wide dirt roads that lead, at a gentle grade, into the mountains.

Along the road to Bisesero we got a flat tire, which occurred several times while I visited Rwanda, so we stopped to change it on a deserted stretch. Sam cut long banana tree leaves and laid them on the ground to protect his clothes. After a few moments, I noticed that we were no longer alone. First, a trio of women appeared and without speaking they helped me find rocks to block the tires. I asked Sam why they had gathered around us. He told me it was unusual to see a white woman change a tire. Then a young shirtless man, a boy actually, appeared with a machete in hand. I realized I was frightened of him because he reminded me of the descriptions of militia members who perpetrated the violence during the genocide. I realized the effect my surroundings had on me. I carried with me the two-fold prejudice of *site* and *sight* that permeated my experience in Rwanda.

#### IV.

The Bisesero memorial site is located west of Rwanda, near Lake Kivu and the Democratic Republic of Congo border. The approach took us through a small village, and as we drove through, an older man ran along the car, shouting, "*muzugu*" (a Kinyarwanda word for white person) to announce our arrival. We came to a rusted, faded sign that told us we had reached the memorial. Written in three languages—Kinyarwanda, French, and English respectively—the sign read: "National Resistance Memorial of Bisesero," a name that takes into account the history of resistance to the *interahamwe* militias in this area.

Unlike other memorials, the Bisesero memorial uses newly built structures, rather than existing buildings, as part of a larger memorial complex that incorporates the land as its

centerpiece. The site is simple and features a central concrete entrance and walkway covered by a sloping arch. Just past the arch is a sculpture with nine spear tips arranged in a circle. My guide, Anastazi, told me that they represent the nine provinces in Rwanda. In the center of this circle of spears is a rock that, he told me, resembles the hillside on which we were standing and represents the hope of a united Rwanda.

To the left of the entrance walkway is a corrugated steel shed. Inside are the remains of those killed here. It contains bones—piles and piles of bones—laid out by type and meticulously cleaned. The memorial buildings are not yet complete; victims' remains will be moved to a location inside the memorial site once completed. The exposure of the body, which is a key element to almost every memorial in the country, is a departure from the cultural norm of burial for Rwandans. To allow for a culturally proper burial, as well as implement the body as an object of memorial, sites have underground, open vaults that are accessible to the public.



Bisesero is no exception. However, the vaults stand empty because of a mistake made by the builders in constructing the areas for the remains; they should have been built beneath ground level to convey literal burial. A dispute with the contractors to lower them halted construction.

A steep stone walkway leading to the top of the hill is the backbone and focus of the memorial. It is etched directly into the hillside and forms a deep gash in the land. Anastazi described to me how he had taken this path as *interahamwe* militias chased him:

Arriving here running... seeing attackers here and you have to turn again and you are running, running, running and you have to turn again [in another direction]. You have to go like that [pointing in one direction] and you have to go like that [pointing in another direction] when you run... arriving somewhere you see a group of attackers and you run another way.

Thus the path of his desperate flight, which created a zig-zag pattern on the side of the hill, is translated into a symbol of memorial that uses the very landscape that was the scene of so much horror. As we walked, Anastazi told me that the path marks his “way to Calvary,” and his interpretation tied this place to the specific religious event of Christ’s crucifixion. Anastazi’s identification of the hill in this way makes it sacred to him, distinguishing it from similar surrounding landscapes. As we reached the crest of the hill, he continued, “If you passed this spot you have survived... [if those being hunted] arrive on this particular spot they had a hope of survival [even if] they were being injured or being cut using a machete or with a bullet.” I did not understand why this spot on the hill was safer than any other; no marker or landscape feature exists that would offer protection. All in all, the spot was unremarkable. He told me that it was known among local Tutsis that *this* place on the hill was safe—that it had some kind of power to protect that was not easily identifiable. I sensed at Bisesero that these hills and roadways remained unremarkable until Anastazi, acting as a mediator, redefined and re-imagined the place for him and me through a coupling of the surrounding topography, and the intimate details of the catastrophe that befell him.

The hills around Bisesero comprise a landscape of memory for those who survived the massacres here, and while Anastazi took me around the grounds, he pointed to hills opposite the memorial, which also form part of his narrative. *Mudugudus*, small villages built by the government



for the widows and orphans of the genocide, are visible on these hills, and in the distance one can see a refugee camp for Congolese nationals who fled the civil war in neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo. These markers form part of a larger physical landscape that has historical and cultural implications. Anthropologist Susan Cook writes:

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 locations where genocide has taken place haunting reminders that genocide is an artifact of human society, not a natural calamity.<sup>17</sup>

Everywhere on the landscape are markers of the genocide.

## V.

I could not locate the region called Bugesera on my map of Rwanda, but it is mentioned in my *Brandt Travel Guide*. While driving to the genocide memorial in Nyamata, Sam told me that this region of the country, just outside of Kigali, has a specific history tied to the genocide. According to him, the word Bugesera means “they will be eliminated.”<sup>18</sup> In late 1959 the Belgians responded to the call for a liberated Rwanda, and by July 1962 independence was declared. With the backing of the Belgian government and the Roman Catholic Church, the Hutus took power and the persecution of Tutsis accelerated. When the Tutsi chiefs were replaced with Hutus, the new chiefs immediately organized violence against Tutsis on the same hills they once controlled.<sup>19</sup>

Many massacres took place at this time, terrorizing Tutsi populations to the point of driving some out of the country, while others remained in Rwanda living in fear. During a wave of violence, many Tutsis fled to neighboring Uganda, Burundi, and Congo between 1959–63. In exile they organized and periodically attacked across the border into different regions of Rwanda. President Gregoire Kayibanda issued a warning to the retaliating Tutsis: “Some of you are causing trouble for your brothers who live in peace in a democratic Rwanda... and you will be the first victims... it will be the total end of the Tutsi race.”<sup>20</sup> Under Kayibanda, the first president of the republic, 7,000 Tutsis were “regrouped at camps in the Bugesera area and there were 15,000 others displaced between Byumba, Gisenyi and Astrida.”<sup>21</sup> Ostensibly, this was a way to provide protection to the Tutsis, but the land was marginal and unyielding. Sickness took hold. Army officers would later boast that they had led the 1963 campaigns of terror in Bugesera against the *inyenzi*, a derogatory term used to refer to the Tutsis as cockroaches. Where sickness did not eliminate the Tutsis, armed massacre did.<sup>22</sup>

As we drove through the Bugesera region, I was struck by how dry the area looked in contrast to other areas I had seen previously. The earth was sandy and, as we passed red mud houses and small villages, I wondered how people could survive working the land. According to Sam: “This land was quite dry and full of tsetse flies and the government sent the Tutsis there to die of famine and [of] diseases like sleeping sickness caused by tsetse flies. But the people who were sent there managed to survive and the government decided to massacre them during the genocide in 1994. These people were sent over there after the first genocide against the Tutsis took place in 1959.”<sup>23</sup>

By 1990 a small-scale civil war had broken out in Rwanda. In March 1992 a report had been circulating that members of the *Parti Liberal* were calling on the Tutsis to “rise up and massacre their Hutu neighbors.” This report later proved false, but the local authorities were given the directive to organize a special community work party, or *umaganda*, to “clear the brush.” Everyone knew this meant kill the Tutsis.<sup>25</sup> These reports and calls to *umagandas* were broadcast on the radio stations as a warning to Hutus to protect themselves. And, according to Prunier, this false threat broadcast over the airwaves, gave the perpetrators the excuse of self-defense.<sup>26</sup> Because of the exile and concentration of Tutsis in the Bugesera area, it was easier to locate and kill them.

In such places as Bisesero and Bugesera, physical geographies and state-sponsored violence intersected and created



places that revealed, as geographer Denis Cosgrove writes: “that landscape is a social product, the consequences of collective human transformation.”<sup>27</sup> These physical places have since become inseparable from the more complex signifiers of the genocide, meaning we must navigate between multiple meanings.

How the Roman Catholic Church was literally and historically entangled in the genocide provides a similarly complex relationship. Perpetrators of the killing used the physical structures of such religious power as churches, convent schools, and seminary complexes as tools of genocide. In fact, 11 percent of the victims were killed inside church structures. This physical connection to the genocide reveals the more institutional structures of power that also offer historical ties to the events of the genocide.

## VI.

The first Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in Rwanda in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, about the same time as the German explorers, and they made their mark evangelizing the Tutsi population. The focus on one group over another was rooted in the colonial narratives about race that circulated at the time, as well as the church’s ideas about the origins of African descendents<sup>28</sup>. Such racial discourse was grounded in Hamatic myths<sup>29</sup> that argued Tutsis were descendents of Ham, who, as a son of Noah, claimed Semitic—not African—origin. While still considered by the church to be inferior to the so-called white races, this myth more closely positioned the Tutsis to European ideal and, therefore, as superior to the Hutu and Twa.<sup>30</sup>

Because religious teachings asserted that descendents of Ham are the current inhabitants in Ethiopia, Tutsis were viewed as nonnative and *other*. Perpetrators of the 1994

genocide used this idea as a justification with *genocideres*, echoing this rhetoric by stating that by killing the perceived alien Tutsis and throwing their bodies into the river was “sending them back to Ethiopia.” These same ideas of racial division circulated through the school system and were pronounced from the church pulpit. According to Tom Ndahiro, a journalist and the commissioner of the Rwandan National Human Rights Commission, the Christian churches played a central role in the creation and furtherance of racist ideologies by “rigidly controlling historical and anthropological research; by reconfiguring Rwandan society through the manipulation of ethnic identities.”<sup>32</sup>

Rwanda is one of the most Christianized countries in this region of Africa; more than 90 percent of its population is baptized into a Christian religion, with the Roman Catholic Church as the predominant denomination (65 percent Catholic, 20 percent Anglican or protestant, 5 percent Adventist, and a small but growing number of Muslims).<sup>33</sup> By the time Tutsi King Mutara III Rudahigwa converted to Christianity in 1931, the Catholic Church was firmly entrenched in Rwandan religious and cultural life. The Tutsis understood that the church had a great influence and saw the resulting changes in Rwandan social and political power. The church controlled the school system and in order to obtain a secondary school education it was necessary to attend a church-run institution. However, the conversion to Christianity was largely a social gesture; Rwandans understood that becoming a Christian was necessary to join Rwanda’s new Belgian-backed elite class. According to Gerard Prunier:

... the reasons for converting to Christianity were fundamentally social and political. Christian values did not penetrate deeply, even if Christian prejudices and social attitudes were adopted as [a] protective cover. Catholicism, after Mutara III Rudahigwa, became not only linked with the highest echelons of the state but a completely legitimizing factor, a banner, a source of profit, a way of becoming educated, a club, a matrimonial agency, and even at times a religion<sup>34</sup>

While Christianity, and specifically Roman Catholicism, was firmly established in Rwanda by the 1980s, how the Marian Fathers came to Kibeho in a remote part of southern Rwanda is as tied to the genocide of 1994 as it is to the evangelizing missions that came to the area in 1900.



On the road from Butare to Kibeho we passed through beautiful grasslands with terraced hillsides covered in rice patties. Fences made from scavenged tree limbs and branches surrounded the fields, creating a patchwork fence that echoed the patchwork land. Green fields and banana trees and red dirt were everywhere. We crossed a small river where Ankole cattle, with long, lyre-shaped horns, grazed. The road changed from paved to wide-rutted dirt. A few miles from Kibeho we rounded a corner and saw a huge statue of Jesus in the distance. I asked Sam to stop, and we turned into a complex still under construction that included living quarters and a small church. Father Bogg, a member of the Marian Fathers (an order established in Poland in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and dedicated to the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary) greeted us. The Marian Fathers' founder, John Papczynski, later known as Father Stanislaus of Jesus Mary Papczynski, started the order as a devotion to the Virgin Mary. He swore to defend the honor of the Immaculate Conception with his life if necessary. Members of the order dedicate themselves to pray for individuals trapped in purgatory and provide religious education to those who lack it.

In November 1981 the Virgin Mary is believed to have appeared in Kibeho, and those who received the apparitions claim that Mary issued a call for the world to renounce sin and turn to God. The sightings continued until 1989, and then they suddenly and inexplicably stopped. Among the apparitions reported in detail in the official judgment issued by the Bishop of Gikongoro was an account of a "river of blood," a tree in flames, and many decapitated corpses.<sup>35</sup> In hindsight, devoted members of the local church in Rwanda saw this apparition as a predictor of the genocide that would begin only a few years later. In 1984 the Marian Fathers established its complex and guesthouse for pilgrims, just three years after the first apparitions began and only a few kilometers away from the church in Kibeho. Thus the local Christian populations considered the land around Kibeho sacred, with the church as the locus of religious, community, and to a certain extent, economic activity. Furthermore, because of the sightings of Mary that were believed to have appeared there, the church and surrounding areas of Kibeho took on particular significance as a place of consecrated worship, pilgrimage, and safety. It is understandable that when the killing of Tutsis began after the crash of the president's plane, they fled to such places as Kibeho for protection.

In an interview with Claire, a 23-year-old survivor of the massacres at Kibeho, the details of the killing of her family and other community members is the centerpiece of her

narrative. In our interview held at the Kibeho Genocide Memorial, she begins:

All my family died in the church—all died except [my] elder sister. I was 12 years old—so when we arrived here in the beginning we all went to the church thinking we couldn't be attacked in the church so [Tutsi] men [were] outside trying to resist to fight the people who were trying to attack the church ...when they were overcome [by the killers] their [the Tutsis] powers [to fight back] were less.... they came in the church, then they killed the people... they burned the people. First of all after they managed to overcome the men they broke the door... they brought small firewoods leaves branches ....put them there then brought some petrol and started a fire [in the church].<sup>36</sup>

At Kibeho those who were not killed by machete or *impili*—a club studded with nails—were burned alive in the church, she told me, and in the confusion she was able to escape through a hole blown in the church wall by a grenade. Claire was careful to tell me the details of the place: the resistance of the local Tutsi men who defended people in the church building, how the church door was broken down, the firewood that was gathered, the petrol that was poured, the fire that burned the church to the ground and, as a twelve-year-old, Claire's ability to save herself in all of the confusion. Claire offered the critical context of the moment and located her narrative in the details of the catastrophe that befell her. Like many of the survivors I interviewed in the rural memorials, Claire's narrative offers a fluid and at times a nonlinear rhythm, punctuated by references to the physical evidence of the violence at the memorial. Such digressions that highlight blast holes in the side of the church or a victim's remains displayed in an underground vault add a dynamic element to the narrative, grounding it in the local contemporary landscape.

Such coupling of the landscape with the survivors' personal narratives was often repeated in the rural memorials. I interviewed Ferdinand Rwakayigamba, a survivor of the genocide at Nyarubuye, at the district office near the church: "I was 36 years old [and] I was a nurse from another area visiting his parents. After the crash of the plane of the president on the sixth of April, I was on holiday and was supposed to return to work on the seventh... On the morning I was to leave, my father told me 'No, wait my son.

I heard bad news from the radio. Everyone should remain where they are. Nobody should move"<sup>37</sup> Ferdinand told me that he regularly attended his childhood parish church at Nyarubuye before the genocide. He lost all the members of his immediate family in a two-day period in 1994. All were killed in the church at Nyarubuye." During the interview, there is a long pause before he continues, "That's where I used to pray before the genocide. [After the genocide] I used not to go there... I used to feel bad there... I spent five years without going there."<sup>38</sup>

The church and genocide memorial complex at Nyarubuye, which are located in the Kibungo Prefecture of western Rwanda, was one of the first sites of genocide foreign journalists discovered. Here over 20,000 people were massacred while they attempted to flee across the border into Tanzania, which lies only a few kilometers away.

Before the genocide, the buildings at Nyarubuye were part of a larger complex that included a church, a primary school, dormitories for staff, and a priest's rectory. The main building is a large church, which has been repaired since the civil war and genocide and that functions today as the parish church. Over the entrance is a large statue of Christ, arms outstretched in supplication. In one of the more famous visual images of the genocide, this same statue was photographed with a decaying body of a Tutsi sprawled in the courtyard in front of the church. Next to the cathedral, across a red dirt courtyard, was a U-shaped building that house classrooms. These rooms were empty, with the exception of a few that remain dedicated to the genocide memorial. This low concrete building with long enclosed brick colonnades was set in an L-shape. Windows with rust-colored iron bars revealed a small courtyard where workmen used pickaxes to break up stone. As with other sites in Rwanda, this one also contained mass grave vaults and a small prayer pavilion opposite the entrance to the cathedral.

I asked Ferdinand whether he now prays in the church at Nyarubuye. He told me he has returned to Nyarubuye as a congregation member and as a peer counselor for the survivor organization AVEGA, an agency dedicated to promoting the general welfare of genocide victims and focuses specifically on widows of the genocide.<sup>39</sup> He added: "I was traumatized [by the genocide]. AVEGA told me it is good to go there [to the church at Nyarubuye] to go frequently there. Sometimes when I go there and come back I feel so bad, I go and I talk to them and tell them how I felt and they give me more counseling and they tell me how to behave... how to overpass all this kind of stuff."<sup>40</sup>

Today Ferdinand helps other genocide victims make peace with this place. He told me how he encourages survivors to return often to the church and how this helps those who survived the massacres here.

Usually [when] trauma appears we take the people a week before the anniversary in April to the memorial specifically.... We clean the bones and we make them talk about and discuss that stuff and they are equipped to deal with it better.... In the beginning it was hard because when people go there they start crying and we stop them from crying.... So this time we let them cry, then they feel relieved. I go to see the memorial because it is where my parents and my family died and going there makes me remember what happens.<sup>41</sup>

The strategy to confront a place that holds such difficult meanings and memories has at its core an attempt to integrate all the meanings of a place into one larger, more complex narrative. For Ferdinand, this place has regained some of its sacredness and has acquired new meanings in relation to his work with other survivors.

## VII.

For Anastazi at Bisesero and Ferdinand at Nyarubuye these implicated geographies have fluid meanings and lend themselves to constant reinterpretation. For Anastazi, the Bisesero memorial is an opportunity to recount the stories of local resistance to the militias, offering a counterpoint to the overwhelming strength and ferocity of the *interahamwe*. Ferdinand is today able to reclaim his parish church and consider it scared ground while still using its phantom presence of violence to help other survivors do the same. In each case, survivors do not deny the specter of violence that remains, but rather they're able to integrate it into their experience. Instead of providing precise information organized in a more formal memorial intervention, as in the Kigali Genocide Center, the national museum located in the capital of Rwanda, the rural memorials resemble a more open-ended and fluid process of remembrance. And they are most effective when they rely less on an attempt at direct representation, ritualization, and organized presentation and more fully on a subtle engagement of the meanings of memorial landscapes.

Much of the genocide occurred in unremarkable everyday places: schools, churches, and private spaces. The genocide haunts everything. The strategy to confronting the



everyday of the genocide exactly where it occurred, which holds such difficult memories, has at its core an attempt to recuperate rather than leave it behind, literally or figuratively. Such reworking offers an alternative chance to recapture an everyday place and inscribe it with new and more manageable meanings.

1. Susan Cook, "The Politics of Preservation in Rwanda," in *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda: New Perspectives*, eds. Dr. Susan Cook, et al (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 296
2. Scott Straus, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwanda Genocide*, (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 2
3. Susan Sontag "Regarding the Torture of Others," *The New York Times Magazine* (23 May 2004): 12. In reference to the Abu Gharib prison scandal and the individual nature of acts of torture, Susan Sontag wrote "What makes some actions representative and others not? The issue is not whether the torture was done by individuals (e.g., not by everyone)—but whether it was systematic, authorized, condoned. The issue is not whether a majority or a minority of American performs such acts but whether the nature of the policies prosecuted by this administration and the hierarchies deployed to carry them out makes such acts likely."
4. Interviews were conducted and recorded with the knowledge and consent of those being interviewed.
5. Gerard Prunier, *The Rwandan Crisis: History of Genocide*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 9
6. *ibid*, 9
7. *ibid*, 11
8. *ibid*, 5
9. *ibid*
10. *ibid*, 12
11. Fergal Keane, *Season of Blood: A Rwandan Journey*, (London: Penguin Press, 1996), 75
12. *ibid*
13. Prunier, *The Rwandan Crisis*, 409
14. *ibid*, 171–172
15. *ibid*, 172
16. James E. Smith, *A Time to Remember: Rwanda Ten Years After the Genocide*, (London: Aegis Institute, 2004), 78
17. Cook, "The Politics of Preservation in Rwanda," 296
18. The translation of this word came from my guide Sam Gasana
19. Prunier, 51
20. Linda Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder*, (New York: Verso, 2004) 9
21. *ibid*, 51
22. *ibid*, 9
23. Conversation with Samuel Gasana, Kigali Rural Prefecture, August 22, 2005
24. Prunier, 137
25. Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder*, 27
26. Prunier, 137
27. Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 14
28. Carol Rittner, "The Church's Blind Eye to Genocide in Rwanda," *Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches*, eds. Carol Rittner, et al (St Paul: Paragon House, 2004), 230
29. *ibid*
30. Prunier, 8–9
31. Rittner, "The Church's Blind Eye to Genocide in Rwanda," 230
32. Hugh McCullum, *The Angles Have Left Us: The Rwandan Tragedy and the Churches*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), 65

33. *ibid*, 34
34. Ignace Mboneyabo "Judgment on the Apparitions of Kibeho," *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, (11 July 2001): 8
36. Clare interviewed by the author Kibeho August 26, 2005
37. Ferdinant Rwakayigamba interviewed by the author August 23, 2005 Nayrubuye District Office.
38. *ibid*
39. <http://www.avega.org.rw/goals.html>
40. *ibid*
41. Saul Friedlander, "History, Memory, and the Historian: Facing the Shoah," *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Michael Roth et al, (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2001), 272