

**WE WISH TO INFORM YOU THAT TOMORROW WE
WILL BE KILLED WITH OUR FAMILIES¹**

REVIEWED BY MAJOR JAMES W. HERRING, JR.²

*In such countries, Genocide is not too important.*³
French President François Mitterrand

Rwanda's genocide in 1994 burst out of no where. Or so it would seem to those who rely exclusively on the American press for their news. Philip Gourevitch, often using the words of those who survived, shows that the truth is something quite different. Throughout the book Gourevitch searches for what many of us would like to find, some reason, some idea, some thought that gives meaning to such a senseless slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people.

Gourevitch begins our journey through Rwanda at a church in Nyurabuye. It is no accident that Gourevitch introduces us to genocide in a place of worship, the reader will come to realize that religion and Rwanda's genocide have much in common. The killers responsible for the bodies that lie unmolested and unburied in the church at Nyurabuye were members of the majority Hutu tribe. They went about the task of killing with a fanatical zeal. Their "Hutu Power" leaders preached the gospel of death. Death was the only way to rid their land of the minority Tutsi tribe. Death was the only way for the Hutus to be safe. The killing was not just their only hope for the future, it was their duty.

How does a society get to the point where neighbors kill neighbors, husbands kill wives, and mothers kill children with such obedience? Why do victims cooperate with their soon-to-be assassins? Why was the inter-

1. PHILIP GOUREVITCH, *WE WISH TO INFORM YOU THAT TOMORROW WE WILL BE KILLED WITH OUR FAMILIES: STORIES FROM RWANDA* (1998); 353 pages, \$25.00 (hardcover).

2. The Judge Advocate General's Corps, United States Army. LL.M., International and Comparative Law *with highest honors*, The George Washington University National Law Center, 1998; LL.M., Military Law, The Judge Advocate General's School, U.S. Army, Charlottesville, Virginia, 1995; J.D., Campbell University School of Law, 1984; B.A., University of North Carolina, 1981. Currently assigned as an Instructor at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York.

3. GOUREVITCH, *supra* note 1, at 325.

national community so slow to respond? How do you put a society back together once this has happened? Gourevitch addresses each of these questions in a search for answers.

Unlike the current situation in the Balkans, Gourevitch finds the tribal tensions in Rwanda are of fairly recent vintage. Hutu and Tutsi lived peaceably side by side for centuries. Inter-marriage became so common, even Hutus and Tutsis often could not tell each other apart. Tutsis were the aristocratic rulers of both Rwandan and Burundi and the Hutus were mainly subsistence farmers. The colonial powers, first the Germans and then after World War I, the Belgians, exploited this difference between the two groups to maintain control. Tutsis were given positions of authority in colonial governments, while Hutus were generally excluded from colonial administration and educational opportunities.

In 1959, a few years before Rwanda was granted independence from Belgium, Hutus began a wave of killings that caused many Tutsis to flee to neighboring Uganda. This was the first systemic political violence between Hutus and Tutsis.⁴ It was in Uganda that the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was formed. This movement eventually built its own guerrilla force recruited mainly from Tutsis who had fought for President Museveni of Uganda in his successful bid to oust Milton Obote from power.

In 1990, the RPF attacked into Rwanda and made impressive early gains. The war continued until August 1993 when, through the intervention of other African states, a peace agreement was signed between the Hutu President of Rwanda, Habyarimana, and the RPF. The agreement established an interim government that would contain representatives of both warring factions.

President Habyarimana's assassination as he returned from follow-on peace talks in April 1994 was widely reported as the triggering event of the genocide.⁵ However, Gourevitch concludes that the slaughter was not the product of chaos and anarchy caused by the President's death but rather of order and authoritarianism. Rwanda had always been an obedient society, whether the authority was the Tutsi king or the colonial powers. The

4. *Id.* at 59.

5. *Id.* at 113. President Habyarimana's plane was shot down just as it was preparing to land at the Kilgali Airport. It was fortunate that only one nation exploded in response to the shoot down. Also killed in the crash was Burundi's Hutu President who had been participating in the peace talks. Pleas from both the UN and the Burundian Army for calm were largely successful in maintaining order in that country.

power sharing arrangement caused the Hutu extremists, known as “Hutu Power” to begin their preparations for genocide. Gourevitch believes the Hutu Power leaders saw sharing power as a defeat. They began to train militias called the “Interhamwe,” a term that translates as “those who attack together.” The Interhamwe were in the streets of the capital, Kigali, beginning their murderous work within an hour of President Habyarimana’s death.

The response of the international community to events in Rwanda is as troubling as the events themselves. Gourevitch makes a persuasive case that the international community failed to act when it should have and then only made the situation worse by finally acting as it did. The genocide in Rwanda, although carried out mostly with machetes, knives, and hoes, moved faster and was more efficient than that perpetrated by the Nazis. It lasted for a mere one hundred days and gained little press attention until it was well underway.

It did not, however, come as a complete surprise to the United Nations (UN). The UN had a small military force in Rwanda to aid in implementing the peace agreement. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR), a force of about 2500 troops, had received information from an informant in the Rwandan government in January 1994 that Hutu militias were being trained to carry out attacks against Tutsis. Still smarting from its misadventure in Somalia that resulted in the death of eighteen American soldiers just a few months before, the UN denied a request from the UNAMIR commander to seize weapons in an attempt to thwart the militias.⁶

Even after the killing began, the international community was still reluctant to intervene. Gourevitch uses excerpts from U.S. State Department briefings to show just how hard the United States worked to avoid the use of the word “genocide.” The State Department played a semantic game by saying that “acts of genocide” had occurred in Rwanda but refusing to say that genocide was ongoing. When questioned by a reporter as to why the State Department would not use the word genocide to describe what was occurring in Rwanda, the spokesperson replied “there are obligations which arise from the use of the term.”⁷ The “obligations” the State

6. Not only did the UN refuse permission for UNAMIR to act in January, once the genocide began the Security Council cut UNAMIR’s strength by 90%. The Security Council took this action even though UNAMIR’s commander, Canadian Major General Dallaire, stated that he could halt the genocide with just 5000 troops. *Id.* at 150.

7. *Id.* at 153.

Department spokesperson referred to are the legal obligations of the United States as a party to the Genocide Convention.

What finally stirred the international community to action were pictures of Hutu refugees fleeing to Zaire (now Congo) and Tanzania. Although there were undoubtedly innocent Hutus who were genuinely afraid for their lives in this horde of humanity, Gourevitch notes that these refugees included many of the very people who organized, planned, and actively participated in the genocide. By encouraging other Hutus to flee with them, with tales of the horrors that awaited them in Rwanda once the Tutsis seized power, the Hutu Power leaders succeeded in bringing their power base with them. These people received food, medicine, and shelter from the international community. Gourevitch quotes from conversations with relief workers who knew the Hutu Power leaders were effectively controlling these camps and the relief supplies in them, but the international community did not want to risk the violence that was likely if they tried to remove the guilty from the mass of refugees.

Gourevitch points out the double tragedy that this placed on the Tutsis. First, the international community stands by and does nothing while the Tutsis are slaughtered. Then, once the scope of the killings is clear, the international community rushes aid not to the survivors of the genocide, but to the perpetrators who have now fled the country. The Tutsis are abandoned to rebuild their lives and their country on their own while a guerrilla army, cared for by the international community, forms on its border.⁸

Gourevitch's story of how Rwandans try to cope with the genocide is just as intriguing as the story of the genocide is tragic. Whatever they may have thought of the international community before the events of 1994, it is clear that Rwandans now realize it is up to them, and to them alone, to make something of their country. They cannot count on anyone for help.

Major General Paul Kagame,⁹ the Rwandan Vice-President and Minister of Defense, drives this point home in his conversations with Gourevitch. Kagame made this point clear to others, telling the United States

8. There is little doubt that the UN and the United States knew what was going on in the camps. Gourevitch relays the story of an American military officer sitting in a car at the Rwanda-Zaire border near Goma calling Washington with a list of armor, artillery and other weapons the Rwandan Hutus were bringing with them into the camps. *Id.* at 165.

9. It is interesting to note that Paul Kagame was a student at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas when the RPF first invaded Rwanda in 1990. He was there as an officer in the Ugandan Army. *Id.* at 217.

during a visit to Washington in July of 1996 that “if the international community could not handle the monster it was incubating in the camps, he would.”¹⁰ Kagame discusses with Gourevitch how the failure of the international community to close these camps led to Rwandan support for Laurent Kabila in his fight against Zairian President Mobutu. Mobutu had been an ally of President Habyarimana and, in Kagame’s opinion, still supported the Hutus who continued to attack Tutsis not only in Rwanda but also in Zaire. One does not have to look hard to see that the fires of conflict that burn in the Congo today are merely a continuation of the forces set loose in Rwanda’s killing fields in 1994.

A continuing legal legacy of the genocide is the over 125,000 suspects awaiting trial in Rwandan jails.¹¹ Gourevitch takes us through one of these miserably overcrowded facilities. The Rwandans, whose judicial system was decimated by the genocide, have little sympathy for those in confinement, no matter how horrible the conditions. The Rwandan government has attempted to address this problem by passing a 1996 law that categorized the responsibility for the genocide. Only those leaders at the top of the hierarchy would face execution. Lesser players could receive reduced sentences if they confessed.¹²

The Rwandan government has struggled with the competing ideas of justice and law in trying to dispose of these thousands of pending criminal prosecutions. What is clear is that the Rwandan government believes it needs to address this situation. Rwanda did not support the creation of the International Tribunal for Rwanda. According to Gourevitch, Rwanda viewed its creation as an “insult.”¹³ The Rwandan government would have preferred that the UN assist the Rwandan government in rebuilding its judicial system to dispose of these cases. Of course, the subsequent slow start of the UN’s Rwanda Tribunal only served to further convince Rwandans that the UN had chosen the wrong approach. Yet again, it appeared to Rwandans as if they had been shabbily treated by the international community.

One interesting rift in Rwandan society that Gourevitch explores is that between the Tutsis, and for that matter the Hutus, who survived the genocide and those Tutsis who had been living in exile since the massacres

10. *Id.* at 292.

11. *Id.* at 242.

12. *Id.* at 309.

13. *Id.* at 252.

in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Within nine months of the RPF victory, over seven hundred and fifty thousand Tutsi exiles returned to Rwanda.¹⁴ Although the Rwandan government welcomed the returnees as they had skills sorely needed to rebuild the country, they had little in common with the Tutsis who stayed in Rwanda. As one Tutsi told Gourevitch, he felt closer to his Hutu neighbors who also survived the genocide than he did to the Tutsi returnees.¹⁵

Although providing the reader with an understanding of what happened before, during, and after the genocide, what really hits home are the many conversations Gourevitch relays from survivors and even some perpetrators. We meet Paul Rusesabagina, the manager of the Hotel des Milles Collines in Kilgali, who, through judicious use of his well stocked liquor supply and connections with various military and government leaders, turned the hotel into a refuge for some 2000 Tutsis. Nothing shows the absolute madness of what happened in Rwanda better than the fact that several of the Hutu Power leaders, while carrying out the systematic slaughter of Tutsis throughout the country, sent their Tutsi wives to the Hotel for safekeeping.¹⁶

Another individual the book introduces is the Catholic Bishop of Gikongoro, Monsignor Augustin Misago. Bishop Misago had been publicly accused of sympathizing with the Hutu Power killers. He was said to have personally been involved in the massacre of a group of Tutsi schoolchildren. Bishop Misago told Gourevitch that the people who implicated him in the genocide were taking advantage of the opportunity to attack the Catholic Church. He admits that he dealt with the Hutu Power leaders but is content to defend himself by asking, "What could I do?"¹⁷ Several other accused individuals offer the same feeble defense. These pleas of helplessness sound hauntingly familiar to those who have studied Nuremberg and the follow-on tribunals.

14. *Id.* at 230.

15. *Id.* at 234.

16. *Id.* at 140.

17. *Id.* at 138. Gourevitch also relates that at the time he was in Rwanda he spoke with an official at the Rwanda Ministry of Justice who told him that a case could be made against Bishop Misago but "the Vatican is too strong" for the new Rwandan government to take on a Bishop. Times have apparently changed. On 13 September 1999, the Rwandan government began the trial of Bishop Misago. He says he is being made a scapegoat for the Church. If convicted, he would face a mandatory death sentence.

We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families is a difficult book to characterize, other than to say it is a book about genocide. In his introduction, Gourevitch says that it is a book about “how people imagine themselves and one another—a book about how we imagine our world.”¹⁸ The book has no table of contents. It has no chapter titles. The reader moves from conversation to conversation with occasional narration from Gourevitch. Yet this unusual stylistic tool works well. The story stands on its own without additional organization or categorization. In a relatively short and very readable 353 pages, Gourevitch looks at how international relations, international law, domestic politics, domestic law, racism, religion, culture and psychology all played a part in the Rwanda’s genocide and subsequent events in the region. This book is a must read for anyone wishing to gain a better understanding of this still very volatile part of the world.

Is there hope for Rwanda? Gourevitch closes with a news report that appeared on Rwandan television in April 1997. A captured Hutu rebel was shown confessing to being one of the raiding party who killed seventeen schoolgirls and a nun at a school a few nights earlier. The Hutu captive relayed how when they entered the school the girls were told to separate themselves so the rebels would know who was Hutu and who was Tutsi. The girls refused to comply saying they were all Rwandans. The rebels then treated them equally, beating and shooting them indiscriminately.¹⁹ This is as close as Gourevitch can come to finding a positive note in this otherwise tragic symphony.

18. *Id.* at 6.

19. *Id.* at 352-53.