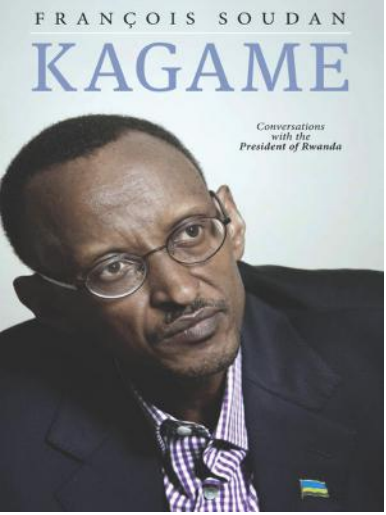
FRANÇOIS SOUDAN
KAGAME
Conversations
with the
President of Rwanda

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Preface

For those who are as result-driven—and obsessed with controlling results—as he is, Rwanda, along with post-war Germany and Japan, is one of the most impressive and successful examples of post-conflict reconstruction in history. With one significant difference, however, for the extreme circumstances under which Paul Kagame came to power were not that of a military defeat, but of a victory over the instigators of a horrendous genocide that was carried out by none other than a portion of the Rwandan people themselves.

Twenty years later, the figures attesting to the extent of this African success story are staggering: Life expectancy has risen from 45 to 65 years; infant mortality
rate has dropped by 70%; per capita income has increased 60%; over a million Rwandans have been lifted out of extreme poverty; more than 90% of children under 12 go to school; yearly economic growth hovers around 7%; and Rwanda ranks 2nd among African nations in the 2014 Doing Business report, which measures the quality of a country's environment in reference to conducting business, the ease of doing business, and results obtained in the fight against corruption.

More surprisingly, Rwanda has become the leading country in the world in terms of women's representation in Parliament. In fact, 64% of elected officials are women; half the judges serving on the Supreme Court as well as 9 out of 21 ministers are women. This extraordinary result is both the fruit of necessity (in the aftermath of the genocide which

exterminated a tenth of the population, 70% of Rwanda's adult population was female), as well as laws and quotas imposed by Paul Kagame's political will, but also, and increasingly so, due to a veritable cultural upheaval among all the inhabitants of the Land of a Thousand Hills.

During the course of numerous interviews with Paul Kagame for the weekly magazine Jeune Afrique, and for this book, I was unfailingly struck by the austere, Spartan, and analytical side of his personality, but also by the impression he gives of never having abandoned the combat he took on thirty-five years ago when, as a young refugee, he joined the ranks of Ugandan rebels in Tanzania serving alongside the future (and present) President Yoweri Museveni. Kagame is a man driven by a permanent sense of urgency and vigilance. He sleeps but five hours a night, works fifteen hours per day, devours economic treatises, never drinks alcohol and hates losing a tennis match—one of his few leisure activities. An indomitably resilient dynamo and the driving force of Rwanda, this president, born from Batutsi aristocracy and seemingly made of tempered steel, knows that "Never again" (the genocide and its million deaths) requires economic development and the construction of a post-ethnic society that has managed to prevail over its bloodshedding identities.

Admittedly, twenty years later all the wounds haven't yet healed. It takes at least one or two generations to go from intercommunity coexistence to reconciliation, even more so since, as the writer Boubacar Boris Diop so rightly described, "the paradoxical nature of the memory of genocide is that the more time passes, the less one forgets." Hence the vigilance, which according to Kagame, shall not be synonymous with vengeance. He— who already decided several years ago to no

longer visit the sites of the 1994 massacres in order to avoid having his judgment and acts influenced by the slightest emotion—is directly at the origin of the Gacaca courts. A unique and unanimously praised experience of participative justice, which has allowed for the handling, with the greatest of equity, of more than a million cases of alleged guilt in the "popular genocide"; a process which allowed Rwanda to avoid lapsing into the unstoppable cycle of ethnic retaliations.

Before the colonial period, Rwanda was a strong, centralized monarchy. Today it is a solid and strictly controlled Republic. For if Rwanda shows impressive results, the methods used to obtain them are unquestionably directive. President Kagame's "watchful eye" surveys each and every acre of this calm, clean, and ordered African country, where it is unimaginable to find a motorcyclist without a helmet, a pedestrian without shoes, a thatchedroof hut, or a plastic bag littering the streets; and where it is seen as poor manners to be smoking in public or sharing banana beer from the same jug—an age-old tradition declared officially unhygienic, and thus prohibited.

To those who criticize his well-controlled conception of the democratic process and human rights, Paul Kagame replies with artful sophistry, which he willingly cultivates: "Only a free people can accomplish so much." He adds: "It is not Rwanda that has a problem with the outside world—it's the Western world that is having difficulties accepting the emergence of a new, self-confident Africa, certain of its rights and uncompromising when it comes to respecting its sovereignty, of which Rwanda is the symbol, reference, and model for many Africans."

In 2017, the year of the next presidential election for which he should be a candidate (although he considers the question premature, and therefore without import), the "Kagame generation" born after the genocide will constitute the majority of voting-age Rwandans. To this youth, who do not feel accountable for the faults that may have been committed by their parents, but who nonetheless are well aware of the crimes of some and the sacrifices of others, Paul Kagame proposes another battle: that of building a pluralistic and democratic society, where one can live their differences in mutual respect.

After war and barbarity there was renaissance; now the time for Rwandan maturity has finally come.

François Soudan

Conversations

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Are you aware of being different from other heads of state?

I do not know how other heads of state feel about holding this position, but in my case, being a head of state is a great responsibility that weighs very heavily upon me. In many respects, it represents a struggle, in the sense that I wish to fulfill my duties to the best of my ability, but I would also like to be who I am. Finding the right balance is always a struggle; one must make sure not to cross the line, so that one's private life doesn't interfere with being the president or with the position's inherent responsibilities. As a statesman, one is constantly sorting out these two aspects, but I must say I take pride in what I have accomplished in that respect.

It seems as though you perceive life as being a constant battle?

It's not the way I perceive it; it just seems to be the way it is…and I see it for what it is. Indeed, I have learned from and been shaped by my life experience. The entire journey has been more or less a fight: anything you want you have to fight for. You can't take anything for granted, I certainly have not.

My experience has always been that you have to stand up and fight for what you want.

And one has the sense that there are more battles to come…

Yes, because such is life, and the same dynamics continue. Past battles may have allowed for a certain progress, but they may have also planted the seeds for future toils, which are necessary to move forward. So even if there aren't any battles to fight in the here and now, you must always be prepared for future strife.

Would you agree that you are a mix of old and new Africa, meaning that you come from Africa's past, a bloody past, but that those experiences gave you the determination to forge a better future for Africa?

Absolutely. That makes a lot of sense. I am a son of Africa, and Africa is home and family to all of us. In many ways, we have been given lessons and shaped by its
history, which in the majority of cases has been on some level an unfortunate one: we are the examples. Indeed, we are also examples of what has gone wrong in African history, of what wasn't good. My own story, as someone who became a refugee in childhood and then remained a refugee for decades, has been the same for thousands, if not millions of other Rwandans and Africans. At the same time, we have also had the good fortune of working alongside those who are seeking to change Africa's tragic history. We are in fact right at a pivotal point between its ugly past and the shaping of a brighter future. Being in this key position, we are striving to play our part as best we can as individuals, but also as a country, as a nation.

In a recent interview you said: “God created me in a very strange way.”1 What did you mean by that?

I meant exactly that. I have been blamed and praised for a wide range of acts. Everything is so muddled that it is difficult to discern what precisely it is that people are referring to. It is the strangeness of having one person embody so many different things. Yet, one has to live one’s life and in my case, given my position, I’m not merely living my life, I’m also contributing to other lives.

So, in other words, I was saying: “this is who I am; I shall do things the way I feel they must be done.” This strangeness I am referring to has to do with these perceived contradictions...

Because your image is extremely contrasted...

… these contradictions, whether imaginary or real—for some of the things I supposedly embody are not even things I am seeking to be. This occurs because I’m a real person, living a real life. Once a journalist from TIME magazine said to me: “You are not a saint,” and I replied: “You are right, I’m not a saint.” I’m not endeavoring to be a saint, because in that case I would spend my time thinking about being saintly and not accomplish anything that would benefit the people I am here to serve, or even myself. In the end it doesn’t matter if people see me in many different and contradictory ways. I am who I am. The idea of “strangeness” comes from being so many different things to so many different people. What matters in the end is the outcome of one’s efforts.

The violence of the assertions made to debase and degrade you is simply staggering. Some have gone as far as to say that you instigated, then used, the genocide of your own people in order to rise to power. Even Hitler
isn't accused of going that far. Why is there so much hatred?

I think only a psychiatrist would be able to provide an answer to your question. We are no longer in the realm of rational thinking and I have neither the time, nor the inclination to dig into the subconscious of sick minds. Most certainly people who make these types of comments are trying to escape from their own guilt with respect to the crime of all crimes, genocide. But this is not my area of expertise.

Don't those who criticize you have more of a problem with you than with Rwanda?

I think they have a problem with history, with the past, with the genocide, with their responsibility and with Africa as a whole. I won't accept, the Rwandan people won't accept, and Africans in general are less and less willing to let others decide in their place. That's the root of the problem.

There are two Paul Kagames. The first is a serious man, a man of power, who excels in promoting his country abroad, someone who is efficient, dependable, and readily a visionary when it comes to the future of Rwanda. The
second is someone who rules an elitist regime with an iron hand, who thinks about development before liberty, and dreams of being a sort of Bismarck and Lee Kwan Yew of the African Great Lakes region. Which description fits?

They both do. The two descriptions mixed together draw a portrait that isn't far from reality without being the whole picture either. I do the best I can for my country in a difficult regional context and in exceptional historical circumstances. I act on personal conviction, not based on what others might think. I am myself, with my part of mystery, and I'm not much interested in what is said about me. However, I would like to challenge one term in your description: "elitist." It is true that at a specific moment in our history, I took my responsibilities. Together with a group of activists, we took it upon ourselves to save Rwanda from barbarism and guide the people towards a better future. But this action didn't make some kind of aristocrat or Leninist revolutionary out of me. I come from the people, and no one is closer to the Rwandan people than I am.

As with many Rwandans, your personal story is intertwined with the history of your country. You were born on October 23, 1957, when Rwanda was still a
Belgian colony. You were born in the town of Tambwe. What was Rwanda like in 1957?

Rwanda in 1957 was very poor and in a period of political chaos and transition. The Belgian colonizers were trying to establish themselves and influence changes in the country to correspond with their objectives at the time.2

At the end of World War I, the Germans had handed Rwanda over to the Belgians and then the French more or less took over in the '70s—I mean take over in terms of influence. But in the late '50s, the Belgians, I believe, came to a point where they decided they needed to abolish the feudal system, the Monarchy—even though they were a Kingdom

themselves—they tried to abolish it and persuade the Rwandans to do away with it. They wanted to shape the country.

The Belgians had at first attempted to associate with the Monarchy, but I think the Monarchy was too independent-minded and colonialists do not generally favor
keeping in power people who resist them, so they sought to create a situation that was totally subservient to them. Through the Church's activities and presence in the country, they were able to determine what they could easily exploit in terms of societal differences to cause rifts. And so they introduced a new concept to the population, dividing Rwandans according to what they called "ethnic identities," distinguishing them into Bahutu, Batutsi, and Batwa. This practice originated much earlier (1935), but in the late '50s it reached a climax, a turning point when the Belgians felt they actively needed to promote a great divide within the country to overturn the government. At this time, there were a number of movements across Africa for independence and even within Rwanda. Africans wanted to be independent from colonialists. All of this was taking place over the same time period, from the year of my birth through the early sixties. Under the mounting pressure for change, the colonists decided they would need to manage the outcome. For even if they were ready to let go, they wanted it to happen on their own terms. As they had already created the rift that divided the country, they wanted to use it to their advantage to shape the future of the country and their final influence on it.

This was the Bahutu-Batutsi division. It was also the year of the Bahutu Manifesto, the first political expression of

its kind. In this report, Bahutu leaders claimed to suffer great discrimination while the Batutsi minority was unjustly favored. What is correct in this report, especially concerning discrimination?

Almost everything is correct—in doses. You will find bits of truth in all of it. But this is the essence of the problem. It was a struggle for everybody depending upon their context and point of view. The Bahutu were being told that they were discriminated against and that the Batutsi were bad.

Returning to our discussion, the idea was that Batutsi must pay for whatever wrongs that may have been committed by the Kingdom or the Monarch. On the one hand, the kings maintained that they were neither Batutsi nor Bahutu or Batwa; they were not concerned by these designations. As you know from history, all kings came from one clan. It was not any Mututsi who could become a king. Even the branch of Batutsi that I come from was not the kings' blood line. My side may have provided mothers of kings, because that was how the marriages were arranged. Kings came from a specific lineage. Just like in other monarchies. So with this in mind, how did it come about that one people should pay for wrongs committed by a monarchy which belongs to none of the clans? This is illogical. If something wrong happened, it should be analyzed and put into the right context. This whole notion—insisting that a person belongs to a certain group, and when somebody in that group makes a mistake, everyone must pay for it—is something I cannot understand.

However, it was the Belgians who instilled the poison of racism in every sector of society. Every Rwandan fell into this trap.

Yes. And it happened repeatedly. In every part of the world, in every society, you will find contradictions— problems that one group ascribes to another. What matters, what is important, is how these prejudices get sorted out. The tragic situation of the 1994 genocide cannot and should not be addressed this way. In other words, rationalizing the Bahutu's acts because they suffered in the hands of the Batutsi is not acceptable. Even though there were discrimination problems, or anything else that happened in the past, this is in no way acceptable as a justification for what occurred. If there was discrimination then yes, the leaders of the day, whether kings or other officials, whoever was responsible for it, should be dealt with and brought to justice. But, you don't take it out on the children, or with ordinary people who have nothing to do with it.

How would you define Tutsi and Twa? Races, categories, ethnicities, social groups?

Most accurately as social groups defined by their living occupations. It was more or less a differentiation according to social occupation. Traditionally, Batutsi were mainly cattle herders and Bahutu farmers. The Batwa were mainly craftsmen, dealing in pottery and other types of handicrafts, so the three areas were complementary. However, it is highly questionable as to whether you can restrict these three categories directly to a specific people elsewhere. For example, you can find cattle keepers throughout the entire region as well as pottery makers; it doesn't necessarily mean they are strictly connected to a particular people.

At the time, there was a misconception disseminated for political reasons by the Bahutu. They would say, “Batutsi are foreigners…they don’t belong here.”

There was an ambiguity here that served the Belgians, who considered Batutsi as foreigners and Hamitic, a “superior race.”3 It is a very dangerous theory, although flattering.

Yes, it was designed to be flattering and to promote the problems they were seeking to foster. Placing the emphasis on the perception of Batutsi as foreigners was hypocritical because there is also a theory that historically Batwa were the initial inhabitants of the area, so chronologically speaking, the Batwa would thus be the owners of the land. According to this hypothesis, they were followed by the Bahutu, and then the Batutsi. So why should there be a dispute as to who was here first, between the Bahutu and the Batutsi, when it was actually the Twas who can historically claim to be the first?

Your father, Deogratias, was a successful businessman. What kind of business was he in?

As a matter of fact, my people belonged to a clan that had cows, plenty of cows.

I read sixty.

Actually, a bit more. Sixty may have been just one herd. But he wasn’t just a cattle herder, he was also a farmer. Later on he started a coffee business. He promoted local coffee growing and farming.

A modern man…

Indeed. In fact he founded a cooperative, TRAFIPRO, the first ever in this country. It was coffee mainly, but there were also other commodities. Some of them still exist. That was his main occupation. He wasn't involved in politics. He had close ties with the royal family, but he ran his own business.

What exactly is your connection with the royal family? You're related on your mother's side...

On both sides. Historically, all of my father's family was related to the kings. Some of my ancestors, my aunties, so to speak, were the mothers of kings and the entire clan was close to the palace. At the same time, my mother was first cousin to the last Queen of Rwanda, who was killed in the genocide.

This is quite an impressive family lineage. Are your proud of it?

Well, I really can't be proud, nor can I take credit for it! It's an accident of birth. You can't undo it; you just have to accept it for what it is.

Some people are very proud of their noble bloodline...

Ideologically, I'm at odds with being proud of such things. Let me not be misunderstood: I'm very proud of who I am. As for the sense of being part of something, like a noble ancestry, although it is nothing of my doing, I accept it as my own and am proud of my heritage, but I'm not going to vaunt it. If I were to boast about something, which I still wouldn't under the circumstances, I would boast about something I have achieved on my own. Something I have accomplished,

despite whatever challenges or obstacles that may have come my way. That's a different kind of pride.

I may be born one way or another, tall or short, but what is there to brag about when I have nothing to do with it? This isn't a result of my imagination or my ingenuity. No, it just happened. In my mind it is normal to accept and take pride in who you are. So there are two different kinds of pride. One is the acceptance of who you are, while striving to be the best you can be, and then there is something else: the pride that is born out of what you are able to achieve on your own. These are two different things.

Your mother, Asteria, was a housewife. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

We were six children, two boys and four girls. My eldest brother died in 1985 in Uganda, during the revolutionary days. I was the last born. Between my brother and myself there are four sisters who are all still alive.

Do they live in Rwanda?

One of my sisters lives in Italy, the other three live here.

Your family was Catholic?

Yes.

Fervently so? Pious Catholics?

Accidentally so!

However, you were baptized…

Without my consent!

Was Catholicism important for your mother?

For my mother and father, yes. They were very involved with the church in Kabwayi. It was, I believe, the first church in this region if not in all of Rwanda. We had close ties with the Church. In fact some of their properties used to belong to my father.

The year 1959 was that of the so-called social revolution. And when the social revolution exploded, all the Batutsi, rich and poor, were instant targets. The revolution was headed by the Bahutu and clearly received the Catholic Church's support…

Yes, the Church was deeply involved. A bishop, Perraudin, from Switzerland, was the real authority. There was a strong connection between the colonizers and the Church that was very questionable.

Therefore, your family left about one year later…

It was one year or slightly more.

And during the course of that year the Batutsi were the target of many murder attempts…

Yes, there were different exoduses. People would flee, and then return to their homes when it was no longer safe in the region they escaped to. It was the same for us.

Do you remember the day in 1961 you were forced to move?

Yes I do. I was four years old and the picture in my mind has been reinforced by the stories I have been told. You know, when you're about three or four years old you have an image or an event that has stuck in your mind. And then if you are told the story by others, that becomes engraved in your memory.

But I do remember that last time, when we were torn away. That day they were burning homes, killing cattle and people and the plan apparently was to do away with the rest of the people in the area and lastly come to our house, which wasn't far from the main road. My mother was preparing us for the worst. After a while, she told us to go out to the compound and wait there to face whatever would happen. She didn't want us to be trapped and killed in the house. As this was going on, my mother's cousin, the Queen, who was about 30 to 45 minutes away in a secure area, heard about the killings in our region and sent a car for us. It just appeared, as we were waiting to face our fate in the compound. We didn't know it was coming for us. The driver gave a letter to my mother, explaining that the car had been sent to check on us and if there was a problem the driver was to take us back to the Queen. There was indeed a problem, so we left with him.

Did you know the people coming to kill your family? Were they neighbors? Did they know your father?

Yes we knew them. Our father had already fled much earlier because he was in greater danger than the rest of us. I believe it was several months earlier that he fled to Burundi, then later to Congo.

As the vehicle was on its way, some Bahutu saw that a car was coming to our home. They actually signaled to each other to stop what they were doing to rush over to our home in order to prevent us from escaping. We were up on a hill, and there was a mob rushing down another hill across the valley and then up the hill to reach us. My mother told us not to take anything or return to the house, there was no time. We just got into the car and as we came to the gates, the mob coming for us was already about to reach the house.

Where were you first taken?

We were first taken to Nyanza, to my mother's cousin. We must have been there for about a week when we were driven again, this time to my grandparents'—my mother's parents—in Mutara. The three brothers still lived there as things weren't as bad. There was my mother's father, his brother who was the Queen's father, and a third brother.

The three families were big; we literally made up a village. That's where we went but when the killings spread to Mutara, we crossed into Uganda. A place called Kamwezi.

A refugee camp?

Kamwezi wasn't actually a camp. There were many refugees, people who had crossed the border, but there was no official camp. My family was among many other people. We rented a house from somebody and we lived in that house until we were taken deeper into Uganda.

What a shock it must have been to go from a comfortable life to these difficult conditions. A shock for your family, your mother, your father…

I was so young at the time I wasn't aware of it. I can understand it now, with hindsight, but I didn't fully grasp the situation at the time. I'm sure it was very difficult for my family; yes the living conditions were very harsh.

What was your family's livelihood? Farming, international help?

Both. Initially we received rations from the UNHCR, the organization for refugees. People used to line up to receive their rations, every little thing they had to give, no matter how meager that was.

I read that your father refused to work? Was it all overwhelming for him?

Yes, I think it was. He wasn't able to handle it.

Unlike your mother…

Yes, she struggled with it all, but she worked.4

Who paid for your studies?

At first, it was free. However, as you reached secondary school and further you had to pay for it. There were benefactors who sponsored young refugees, paying for their school fees and upkeep expenses. That was how my schooling was paid for. I had a Belgian benefactor, as did my brother

and one of my sisters, whereas others received funding from Denmark for example, or even New Zealand. There was a whole network.

Did you experience discrimination and racism at school? You had the reputation of being a sort of rebel, a troublemaker?

In retrospect, I don't think it was any worse than your normal amount of adolescent bullying and roughhousing. We were in fact always being referred to as refugees, as not being Ugandan, and at the slightest pretext they would bring it up. We took exception to it all of course, and would instantly react.

But were you an angry teenager?

I'm not sure I would describe it that way. We just didn't accept this type of discriminatory behavior. We felt it was incorrect for anyone to treat us that way.

But when, and at what age, did you transform this feeling of injustice into the profound need to get organized and return to Rwanda?

The late '70s, perhaps.

The Kigali regime hoped then that the refugees would slowly forget their homeland.

Yes, that was the plan. They felt we belonged outside the country and should remain outside.

So what happened to make you want to contradict this?

Well, we couldn't accept this prejudicial treatment, of course. But for me the transition came about through the following reasoning: I used to tell my peers, when we would discuss our situation, that they shouldn't be angry at the Ugandan people, even if they behaved incorrectly, or even if now it was taking political proportions, on much higher levels of government. There were now so many Rwandan refugees in Uganda that some politicians were associated with anti-Rwandan events. But as I grew up, some time in the 80s, when we were forming the RPF, I used to say we should redirect our anger. Instead of focusing on what the Ugandans were saying, our anger should be redirected towards the people who placed us in that situation. This was because the situation we were in wasn't the fault of the Ugandans who were insulting us, but that of the people who were responsible for our current condition. Yes, this idea came to me early on, thinking that we shouldn't fight the Ugandans, it wasn't their fault.

But before the RPF, all the Batutsi exile riots coming from Burundi in the early 60s had failed. Were you and your friends aware of this?

Yes. We heard the stories, in the early and mid-sixties.

It was a desperate movement. Were you interested in the political developments in Rwanda at the time? You were 16 when Habyarimana seized power in July 1973. At least to start with, he appeared less anti-Tutsi than Grégoire Kayibanda.5

Yes, apparently he was considered "good," for he was killing fewer numbers of Tutsis than his predecessor… I didn't know what to make of it then. I was interested in what was

happening in Rwanda; I used to listen to the radio and other things but I didn't know what to make of it. At 16, I took a greater interest in what was happening; I was glued to the radio, listening to the news. I knew the names of many people and places, but politically I had some difficulty making sense of it all.

At the time, was there hope among the refugees that Habyarimana would change things, that he would be more open?

Yes, talk circulated all over. Rwandans from camps in many different Ugandan districts: Ankole, Toro, Bunyoro, would meet up in school, and the same stories would circulate. Some spoke of the King[6] taking action so that we could go back home. Other stories recounted that Habyarimana was a lesser evil than Kayibanda. These stories were going around and I suspect they were spun by some people Habyarimana had inside the camps.

At the time Fred Rwigyema was your best friend, your brother. How long had you known each other?

Since the '60s, maybe '64, '65.

You seem to have very different personalities. He's an extrovert, you're an introvert…

Yes, I think that may be a fair description of me…

But he suddenly disappeared in '76, to participate in the first rebellion against Idi Amin.[7] Were you upset with him for not telling you? You didn't hear from him for two years.

Maybe closer to three. A long time. No, I wasn't upset, not at all. He disappeared from school one day, but we didn't know why. And then we didn't hear from him. We thought he might have died.

All the while, you remained in Uganda enduring the systematic discrimination. And then in '77 and '78, you went to Rwanda. The first trip, in '77, you stayed several weeks. It must have been an emotional shock for you. What was Rwanda like at the time? Did you grasp the problems at hand?

Those trips were focused on visiting my homeland and discovering it. I felt very connected to Rwanda—that was the most striking aspect of those trips. My purpose wasn't to identify problems or interpret them. It was to get to know my country.

But how did you go, with what papers?

At the time with a Student I.D. card you could ask for temporary travel documents, given by district commissioners in Uganda. These temporary documents had your photo and a stamp indicating that you were from a certain district in Uganda. They didn't indicate, however, whether you were a citizen or not.

Refugees weren't allowed to travel and coming as a refugee would have been dangerous. But these papers bore no indication of your refugee status when you showed them to the Rwandan police. So the police would just assume that you were Ugandan.

If you had successfully integrated into Ugandan society, if you had become a pilot as you had once hoped, for instance, would you have abandoned your dream of returning to Rwanda?

I don't know, I'm not sure; any path could have developed into something different...maybe…or then again, maybe not.

At the end of 1979, Fred returned with Museveni; Idi Amin had been defeated, and Milton Obote was to become the next president of Uganda in May 1980.8 You chose to join the military. Why did you make such a decision? Did you want to join the Ugandan army and have a career in the military, or was the idea of returning to Rwanda your underlying motive?

This was not a career move. In fact, leading up to this decision, I had taken several trips to Rwanda ('77, '78) and then in '79 I was reunited with Fred. I understood what had transpired, why he had disappeared. We immediately discussed the opportunities that would be made available to us by joining the army. We envisioned what we would learn and gain from the experience. It was also a manner of broadening Rwandan refugees' participation so that they could be part of something. We felt we could build up a base that would enable us to have the capacity to be effective. That was the 1979 conversation. Joining the military, getting involved, and using this opportunity, given the developments in Uganda, to learn and construct something that we could later use as a stepping stone towards building something else.

In late '79 or early '80 you were offered the opportunity to train in Tanzania for six months in military intelligence. What

did you learn, and why did you make this choice to focus on intelligence? Did you have an interest in particular?

I think the training ended in ’78, and it took place over a period of 7 to 8 months in all. Intelligence covers many things. As far as my interests were concerned, they were very wide-ranging. There wasn’t anything specific at the time, just the desire to develop the means to serve a greater purpose.

On the political front in ’79, the Rwandan Alliance for National Unity (RANU) was created. Fred was a founding member, but you weren’t. Why?

Although I was involved in the movement, I had many reservations. In fact, before RANU, earlier than ’79, there had been other associations whose endeavors had been to bring refugees together. The idea was to create a sort of energy that could unite refugees and thus allow for political action and mobilization behind the scenes. As far as RANU is concerned, I was very much involved and participated in a number of discussions, specifically those dealing with how RANU would function and what purpose it would serve. But I found it a bit ambiguous, nothing was well-defined. I spoke to Fred about it as he was very active. I explained that I had reservations, that I was skeptical. I told him I would be there if he needed me, but that I wouldn't take an active role.

There was a monarchist movement within RANU. Indeed many aspects weren’t clearly defined. Were the members intellectuals?

Yes, they were intellectuals but they were rather disorganized, their objectives weren’t clearly defined…

You joined Museveni and Fred in the bush in February ’81. At the time, did you already have in mind that this was shaping you for something else?

Yes. My idea was always that this was a basis to serve another purpose, always.

Like many African leaders of his generation, Museveni had progressive ideas. He sympathized with Marxism, Pan-Africanism. Did you also share these ideas at the time?

All my ideas revolved around Rwanda. Whatever it would take to have a place we could call home.

So your ideology was Rwanda!

There is an important distinction that needs to be made here. We would read books, all kinds of books from all over the world. We did learn about Marxism, but also about many different schools of thought, in the general scheme of learning things. However, I wouldn't read a book about Karl Marx because I wanted to become like him. For I had no intention of becoming a Marxist. I read it with the same intent that I read books from all over the world: to examine how different people handled different situations. I read all these books to skim the good ideas from them. There were different ideologies and points of view. What was important was to recognize different ideas that pertained to our struggle and could open up perspectives and possibilities concerning our own problem. We didn't want to be converted to any specific ideology. We wanted to benefit from history—all kinds of past experiences in order to find an answer for Rwanda.

But you must have been inspired by people such as Che Guevera or Ho Chi Minh, freedom fighters...

Yes, we knew about all these people, would read and learn about them, but not with the goal of emulating them. We wanted to determine, however, what lessons could be drawn from their situations. They were different people, in different contexts. I had my own context, and I am my own person.

Were you ever a socialist?

Never.

A Progressive?

In the broadest sense, when it means combining various aspects of different and diverse ideas...

Anti- colonialist, of course?

Without a doubt.

Pan-Africanist.

Indeed.

Did you admire Museveni at the time? What type of a leader was he?

Yes, at the time there was a lot to admire him for and good reason to be associated with him, most definitely in that specific context. He embodied what I would call good leadership.

At the beginning, you were a group of 27, including two Rwandans, you and Fred. The risk was rather great. The chances of victory were very slim.

Absolutely. You engage in something like this out of conviction, fully aware of all the risks involved, and you seize the opportunity.

Is it true that in 1986, when the National Resistance Army was victorious over Ugandan government troops, 20% of the troops were made up of Rwandans?

I don't know what proportion we represented, but the numbers were clearly increasing. That figure might be an exaggeration.

The first several years of the Ugandan civil war were particularly fierce, especially in the Southern region after the Okello brothers came to power staging a coup d'état in 1985.

Yes in the West, then the South.

What kind of rebel army was the NRA? Was it disciplined? Did it inspire you?

Yes, within the context it had a very high level of discipline. It felt strongly about purpose, which is what allowed it to overcome the other forces. A large part of it did greatly inspire me.

So Museveni was a good guerrilla leader?

Yes, he was. I learned a great deal from him.

You were an intelligence officer at the time. What exactly was your job?

To start with, I was just an ordinary fighter; then I handled several different things, gathering information, etc.

I suppose you were involved in many different episodes of the war. Where were you when Kampala was taken in January 1986?

I wasn't there. About six weeks earlier I had left for Burundi, then to Nairobi seeking medical treatment for my eyes. I had been having eye problems for a long while, but because I went many years without receiving proper treatment, one of my eyes became very seriously compromised.
In fact, when Kampala was taken, I was already in the hospital.…

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was created in Kampala in 1987. Who had the idea to create a front? Was there one specific person who said: we must create a political and military front?

It was a shared idea. A group of us discussed it at length - many of whom are still alive, people such as Tito Rutaremara, Joseph Karemera, Geoffrey Byegeka, and Protais Musoni.

Fred and I were instrumental in all of that. We strived to steer the group away from the wrong kind of thinking, which we felt was too segregated. We suggested a front, which meant bringing different people from different backgrounds together, regardless of what they believed in, as long as they believed in the struggle to liberate our country. That idea laid

the foundation for the front. Whether Catholic or Muslim, or Marxist, or capitalist, anyone; as long as we agreed that we needed to do something about our country, that is the initial step we could, and would, take together. How to shape our country later on, depending on the pool of ideas represented in the front, was another discussion altogether.

And today the front still exists. It never occurred to you to create a new political party?

We have sustained this initial idea of the front. It remains open to everybody from everywhere. Our ideals are still independence, respect for people's rights, including their right to prosperity, and all that is entailed when striving towards these goals. What label people give themselves matters not to us.

A few months before the creation of the front you were selected for another training course, in Cuba, once again in military intelligence. Did you find it useful to study there? It was a delicate time period, the Cubans were one of the Soviet Union's beachheads in an intelligence war with the United States.

First of all, the study of anything, anywhere, is always beneficial if you have a purpose and want to see it through. As for the time period, there was a lot to learn— we didn't just learn about Cuba, we learned about America too.

How long were you there?

I was in Havana for nine months. It was a 20-minute bus ride to reach the city center. Classes were in Spanish, but they were also translated into English.

Museveni owes much to Rwandans. You were instrumenttal in his victory.

Yes, but we're indebted to him as well, because he taught us so much. So it's mutual.

Nevertheless, as early as '88 he started to grow weary of the refugees and entered into negotiations with Habyarimana; yet from a certain standpoint you can understand him, for you weren't exactly easy to handle.

That is true.

You planned an armed struggle against a neighboring State. Who can accept this? Imagine if this situation happened to you today, it would be unacceptable....

I agree with you, it would be entirely unacceptable. That's why I bear Museveni no grudge, nor anyone else, over this issue.

He came under attack from certain areas of his own country.

Yes, he was criticized by some of his own people.

The reality is that you built a guerilla army within the army of…

…another country. Yes we did, that is absolutely true.

It's unique in African history. It's unheard of.

Possibly...

Whose idea was it—Fred's and yours?

Mainly. The idea started with us and grew from there.

So in 1989, Fred was relieved from his post as army chief of staff to be appointed to the more ceremonial position of deputy minister of defense. Whereas you were director of military intelligence?

He began as deputy army commander-in-chief and deputy minister of defense. That was the appointment in theory, made just after the victory in 1986. So he was effectively number 2 in the army, then he was changed to deputy minister of defense, in 1989, which meant he was transferred from the army to government administration. Then he was removed from that position, and appointed Chief operations officer, for the Northern part of Uganda.

And you were director of military intelligence?

Well although my title was director, I served under the director, so I was one of the deputies.

I read some reports saying that you were feared. It's a good quality to have in that position.

I don't know. I just did my job, that's all.

There was great pressure on Museveni at the time. He was accused of being Rwandan…he negotiated with Habyarimana…

They still sometimes call him Rwandan today!

If Habyarimana had accepted at the time to open the doors of Rwanda to all refugees, history, and your story would have been very different.

I believe many of the problems could have been preempted if Habyarimana had reached out to the refugees. If he had shown the willingness to enter into a dialogue with us concerning the organization of our return and our rights. If he had explained the problems from his perspective and then sought a solution, it would have been very difficult for us to turn around and wage a war against him. Even if he had told the refugees that despite the problems at hand they were free to come to Rwanda, to do business there and see their relatives, or just that they could circulate freely, I suspect many people would have been satisfied knowing they had this option and perhaps would have left it at that. But the moment you are told you don't belong somewhere, that you won't be granted any rights, that you may never come back and must stay where you are, that has the opposite effect on people. It fosters anger, it galvanizes people. Even if they know that the risks they are taking aren't without consequences for their relatives in Rwanda, it makes them feel that they should take a stand and fight for what is their right.

The end of '89 was witness to a mini-invasion led by dozens of hotheads. It was a failure. What happened?

Some young people decided things weren't moving along quickly enough, or not enough was being done, so they went into Rwanda to build a stronghold, hoping that others would follow. But the timing was grossly wrong. We had to preclude the maneuver by contacting them and bringing them back. The situation was saved by the fact that the crossing into Rwanda had been made discreetly. We also had to assure them that what they attempted was already being planned, and make them understand that their action risked not just putting themselves and all of us in danger, but more importantly putting the entire plan in jeopardy, risking the success of the whole struggle. Fortunately, in the end, we were able to contain it.

1989 was a very important year for you. First of all, because you were married with a Rwandan lady from Nairobi. Is the Kinzer story correct?9

Yes, it’s more or less accurate.

And afterwards, you and your wife Jeannette went to Fort Leavenworth U.S. Army command for special military training. You took Fred’s place.

Yes, initially he was the one who was supposed to go, but it was suddenly changed to me.10

When exactly did you leave for Fort Leavenworth? How long was the training for?

We left in May 1989. The training was supposed to last 12 months.

What a big change and opportunity for both of you!

Yes. I was there with French colonels, Belgians… coincidentally, the French colonel who happened to be a commander in the crossing zone was there as well.

You spoke to Fred almost every day by telephone from Kansas. That must have been very expensive! He called you I suppose?

Yes of course! It was easier that way. We did indeed speak every day.

And you selected October first to cross the border into Rwanda.

It wasn't supposed to be then. Nor was there a process of selecting a specific date. It just happened that way. If anything, it was supposed to have happened earlier.

And it was understood that you were supposed to come back a few weeks later?

No, immediately. I was supposed to return as soon as it started.

So you informed the school prior to October first?

No, when it happened. The next day, on October 2nd, I went to the school administration and told them I wanted to leave. I didn't want to just vanish into thin air.

And then on October 5th, 6th, or 7th, you were still in Fort Leavenworth and you learned by telephone that Fred was dead…

Yes, the reason was, after informing the school administration, there were other things to settle. I was renting a house, I had bills to pay. I wanted to make sure that everything I left behind had been settled. I didn't want to disappear and leave the school with a debt. I wanted to make sure there were no loose ends, that "every t was crossed and every i was dotted."

That's pure Kagame… So at this point, you must have been very sad and feeling a great sense of urgency… The RPF was on the brink of collapse.

Yes, it was a very sad time. And I had no choice, I had to go.

It was a very complicated journey back home. You started by going from St. Louis to New York.

We left Fort Leavenworth Kansas for New York City. There I contacted a friend of mine who worked for the Ugandan embassy—he was in fact the Ugandan ambassador to the UN. He obtained a visa for my wife and myself for Brussels as I wanted to leave my wife in Brussels first. But the ambassador was suspicious. He asked why I was going at this time. He wanted to know if I was planning on joining the movement. I told him that I was just taking a break from school with my wife and that I would be back after this vacation. So he obtained visas from the Belgian embassy, and I'm certain the embassy didn't realize who I was, for they were already on

alert to look for me. In fact, we were flying via London where my wife
was to take a connecting flight for Brussels alone. I knew that in fact the Belgian authorities were looking for me. I had a ticket from London to Nairobi to Uganda and back. But at the last moment, instead of taking the Nairobi leg of the trip from London, I decided to change my itinerary. I saw there was a plane leaving for Ethiopia; I bought a ticket for that plane. As it turns out, they detained my wife in Brussels, because the intelligence network had learned I was coming. She asked why they were detaining her and all they said was that there was "no problem." Meanwhile my sister and her husband were waiting to pick her up from the airport; they waited for hours wondering what was going on. They knew her flight had landed and that she was on board, but there was no sign of her. My wife kept asking why they were holding her but they never gave her a reason.

And so you went to Addis Ababa…

Yes, and they were in a time of great turmoil. When I went through it was about a week before the Mengistu government fell. The airport was in total chaos, crawling with government soldiers searching for enemies of the regime. And I was carrying a briefcase with tens of thousands of dollars, donations from the Diaspora picked up in London, which of course I didn't declare at Addis,
because with such mayhem going on it would have been easy for somebody to simply kill me and take the money, or just take the money.

For the flight to Entebbe, someone was supposed to clear me through the security checks, but he wasn't where he was

supposed to be. So I forced my way through the customs barriers, snuck between the x-ray machines and a few other obstacles, and I finally found my plane, which had been delayed. The local authorities were searching for people. Everyone's luggage was on the tarmac. You were supposed to come pick up your bag and place it on a trolley that was brought to the plane's baggage hold once all the luggage had been identified. But then I noticed that my bag had been separated from the other passengers' bags, because of what was inside: there was a military uniform and a few compasses, many military books and other items that could be used to identify me. At the luggage trolley, a man was standing there surveilling the luggage—with my bag between his legs! I realized they had put my bag aside so I would claim it and then they could identify me. But the man seemed completely overwhelmed and confused. So I just walked up behind him, slipped my bag out from between his legs, placed it on the trolley and walked onto the plane. He was so busy he never noticed.

When you finally arrived in Kampala, you went to the front, which was an absolute disaster. Who was responsible for this? Was it Fred himself?

Well, logically it couldn't be Fred because he was already dead. But, there were a few things that should have been taken into consideration that hadn't been. There appeared to be a lack of organization and thorough thinking, which probably contributed to why he was killed. The whole operation called for more planning and organization. Everything was in disarray.

Because it was a frontal attack? Which is contrary to the principles of guerilla warfare...

It was completely disorganized, even as a frontal attack.

A disaster. And it was the first time that the French intervened directly, through operation Noroît.11

Yes, they became involved, a few days later. During the first weeks they helped Habyarimana, collecting intelligence, giving military advice and supplying weapons.

And so you arrived and decided to retire the entire RPF force to the Virunga mountains. You established a base there.

Yes, we absolutely had to regroup and reorganize ourselves.

What is your assessment of the role France played in Rwanda from 1990 to 1993? Mitterrand wanted Habyarimana to solve the crisis by proclaiming democratic reforms and entering into an agreement with the RPF. Habyarimana agreed to legalize opposition parties in 1991, at Mitterrand's suggestion. It appears that France did not play a strictly negative role.

It may not have been a purely negative role, but the real question is, should this actually have been Mitterrand's responsibility? Was it the role of anybody outside Rwanda, let alone Mitterrand, to influence how things should change in Rwanda? Why should Mitterrand have been in charge of what happened, or furthermore, what was the justification for promoting change according to

Mitterrand's, or France's conception of this change? This is the first part of the problem.

The second part of the problem is timing. The only reason Mitterrand insisted in 1991 that Habyarimana legalize opposition parties, was to abate the pressure coming from the RPF, which had taken up arms. The so-called international community never truly endeavored to address the real problem: for decades people had been forced to live the lives of refugees outside of their own country, stateless. Yet neither the Rwandan heads of state, nor the international community considered doing anything about it. The response only came once the RPF started exerting pressure on the Rwandan government. Prompted by this pressure, almost as an afterthought, Mitterrand asked for change. But this was solely in order to forestall a possible war when—although whether they had to be involved at all remains a question—this should have been carried out years earlier for the sake of the refugees. It should never have to come to this.

As far as I am concerned, the role that France played, whether positive or negative, is beside the point. France should not have allowed itself to be in that position—nor any other member of the international community. Decisions about Rwanda were made in pure ignorance, without a thorough understanding of the issues at hand, without proper knowledge of the history, nor taking into
account the political problems. They ended up proclaiming superficial measures to deal with a situation that had existed for decades. Yet at the same time, if they did feel the need to get involved, those measures should have been taken much earlier to actually and effectively prevent the problem in question.

In fact, on a certain level, France did play a very negative role. As we discussed earlier, France became directly involved in the war. It fully supported Habyarimana's army and all security forces. The extent of France's involvement was bewildering. I shall never forget my encounter with Paul Dijoud12 in Paris in January 1992.

The man told me two things outright. Firstly, he told me to stop the combat so that Habyarimana could decide how to deal with us and what concessions he would make to our cause. Secondly, he basically told us the following: he considered that the RPF were good fighters, but that if we didn't stop, even if we managed to take Kigali, we wouldn't find our people there because they would all have been massacred! Therefore, this man must have had some knowledge that the genocide was about to happen. Paul Dijoud. I have never forgotten his name. I wasn't alone when he said this. Tito Rutaremara was with me, as well as Frank Rusagara, Aloysia Inyumba, Emmnauel
Ndahiro, Patrick Mazimpaka, and Jacques Bihozagara. And Dijoud was with a group of officials. We must have been ten or twelve in the room. So this is not personal speculation. As we were leaving, he escorted me out saying that he was looking forward to seeing me appointed as the commander of the new Rwandan army. I replied I'd do my best if that happened.

But then you were arrested and questioned.

Yes, I was arrested; I spent the day in jail! During the night following the meeting, at 4 o'clock in the morning, at the Hilton Hotel where I was staying in Paris, hotel security and the police waltzed into our rooms with the master key,

abruptly switching on the lights and waking me up. They had guns pointed at me and were shouting “get up! get up!” My security people, Emmanuel Ndahiro and Tom Byabagamba, were sleeping in adjoining rooms, and I was in my room. When I looked over at them, they were down on the floor, being handcuffed. And then we were driven, taken somewhere for questioning; I have no idea where. To tell you the truth, when I first woke, I thought they were a bunch of thugs!

Did you ever discuss this incident with Mr. Chirac or Mr. Sarkozy?

No.

Did you ever receive an apology?

Well, no. But the point is, France played a very negative role.

I know this is hypothetical, but if the Arusha Peace Agreement had succeeded and had been successfully entered into and implemented, with the RPF becoming a political party, and there were free and fair elections 22 months later, do you think it would have been possible for you and your party to win the elections?

I don’t believe so. I wouldn’t assume anything given these circumstances. We were not known, so to just appear and suddenly be elected doesn’t seem highly probable. The entire system, the machinery, everything was in the hands of Habyarimana's party, the MRND [the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development]. In fact, I don’t believe any opposition, or so-called opposition parties would

have won. Unless, and this would have been the only possibility, there had been a coalition of the RPF and the other parties. Together, we would have had a chance of winning against MRND and Habyarimana. But with each group standing on its own, I don't believe there would have been a chance. Not to mention the fact that it would have been impossible to have "free and fair" elections under those circumstances. It just wouldn't have been possible. So, I certainly wouldn't be comfortable telling you that the RPF could have even come close to winning.

Do you dissociate Habyarimana himself from his entourage? Specifically his wife and the members of her inner circle, the Akazu, who were much more extremist in their thinking and actions?

No, they were the same—different personalities sharing the same ideology, the same thinking, and the same actions. There is no doubt about it.

If you believe the genocide was something carefully planned over a number of years, which in fact it was, why didn't you try to take over the country sooner in order to prevent it. In February 1993, for instance, you launched a major offensive, but stopped it, why?

The answer is quite straightforward. Yet, let me just take a moment to point out how the question itself illustrates the injustice, unfairness and even prejudice within the international system. People have raised this question several times, and often in a negative context, out of ignorance and a lack of true understanding of the situation. You are implying that if we had really wanted to, we could

have prevented the genocide. This question puts the RPF in the position of having more power and control than we actually had. It sounds as if we could have just taken control of the situation at any moment we desired. But the RPF wasn't all powerful. We had limitations. Limitations in capacity, but also we were limited in what we could accomplish. The world imposed heavy constraints upon us. We were limited in our capabilities and we had the whole world on our backs restraining any room for maneuver that we might have had. In 1993 we did not try and take over for the following reasons: Firstly, we were over-extended. We did not have the capacity to take over the country and defend our position. What purpose would it serve to take Kigali by force if we couldn't defend our position?

Secondly, from the moment that fighting started with the Bagogwe massacre [Jan. 25–Feb. 4, 1991] in the North, followed by negotiations being interrupted in Arusha, the whole world's attention was focused on the RPF. Uganda was put under pressure to make sure we didn't advance our military forces—they wanted Uganda to block our rear. We were under incredible pressure and we had to make a decision, to look beyond the immediate
military gains accomplished on the ground. We had to look at the whole picture. The world was focused on us and entirely unsupportive of our cause; the orders against us were just too overwhelming. We had to stop. But we had also managed to make our point. We had put pressure on a government that was killing civilians and had forced them into a new round of negotiations. Additionally, this government saw that we were more powerful than they had imagined. For, although limited, we still had been able to overrun their defenses with great speed and efficiency. During the course of negotiations, they

used the time to reorganize, rearm, and retrain. They started deploying troops meant to directly face our forces, to create a wall, in effect. We were grossly outnumbered, three or four times so, judging by the immediate deployments that were stationed in front of us. That's what had made them feel comfortable to continue with the killings. They felt they had created an actual barrier in front of us that we would never cross. But we tried to play by the rules: if they didn't stop we would end negotiations. And if necessary we were willing to fight. They didn't take us seriously. They didn't think we had the ability to go through with our threats. Nor did they think we would be able to advance further than where they had blocked us. But that is a different story.

On April 6, 1994, what were you doing precisely when Habyarimana's plane was shot down?

We were watching a soccer match. The Africa cup.

Were you in Mulindi, the RPF's headquarters?

Yes, we were in the middle of the match and one of the aids came saying he just received a message from our forces.

What was your immediate, personal reaction?

The first message comprised many haphazard details: a blast had been heard somewhere; people were running to the parliamentary building; signs of movement of troops and people had been witnessed. My immediate thought was that the government had moved into action for some reason—we had politicians there in accordance with the Arusha agreement and there were people who had come to see our parliamentary

representatives—they had worked late, left the building and then apparently had turned around and run back to take refuge. One of them had been told that Habyarimana's plane had been shot down. There was a great deal of confusion throughout the city. That's when our commander sent a message for us to
organize ourselves, to be on alert, in case something happened. What was going through my mind was that this was a definite sign of trouble, and that in reaction to the plane being shot down something was bound to happen that would affect us directly.

Did the thought that this was the first act of genocide cross your mind?

No, frankly, I didn't immediately link what was going on to a direct call for genocide, or anything on the pure scale of a genocide, even though our intelligence had been long aware of preparations for the act of genocide: the training and arming of militias, for instance, or the broadcasting of hate messages against the Batutsi in the media. We openly shared this information with whomever would come to Mulindi—the Americans, the Belgians, and the French. We also pointed out that Habyarimana's government was allowing armed militias to launch state-wide attacks on Batutsi, while we were in the midst of working towards peace. The RPF was serving in a transitional government arrangement, as per the Arusha Accords, but at the same time this was what we were witnessing. Why would the government risk the peace process with these actions? We felt the militias were being trained to backup the government forces. In fact, they were also being used to mark

houses in order to identify which ones belonged to the Batutsi. We cross-checked the information and found it to be true. It was common knowledge.

Yet even so, to imagine mass killings on a genocidal scale was not something that is easily conceivable. I don't think anybody could have envisioned that this was taking place. To foresee that RPF leaders were in danger, or people in places of influence, yes, but to conceive of a meticulously-planned genocide was just too warped an idea, indeed it was unthinkable.

Now, after several days we were receiving news that the militia that were trained during the cease-fire period had been going straight to kill, not just opposition leaders or military but civilians; they were going into villages and killing the inhabitants. The UN force commander, Roméo Dallaire, came to see me around April 8th. He naively wanted to take me to Kigali and talk to the other side. He had brought helicopters! I told him he was risking his life traveling by helicopter, that he could easily be shot down, and he replied not to worry he had brought two helicopters!

I wasn't going anywhere with him. They had brought down Habyarimana's plane why would it be any different to shoot down a UN helicopter? Finally I told him that if he was speaking to the other side, and if they stopped the killings or managed to somewhat appease the situation, he
could count on me to be responsive in terms of holding back our side. However, I also asked him whether he knew who was in control? Who was actually behind all of this? There appeared to be a situation of complete anarchy with no one in

control. His only reply was that I didn't seem to be in control either.

What is your personal conviction about the perpetrators of the attack against the plane?

My personal conviction is based both on suspicion and on the investigations carried out by the United Nations. None of this occurred by coincidence. Days, even weeks before Habyarimana's plane was brought down, there had been public conversations—talk on the extremist radio stations and newspapers—that something was about to happen. As the date drew closer, the timing became more specific. Habyarimana used to be called "Kinani," the invincible one, something almighty that is greater than and above everything. This same group of extremists accused him of selling the country to the RPF and the Batutsi, because they thought he was making too many concessions in the negotiations. In their minds, simply to have accepted to
negotiate and allow the RPF to join the government was already too much of a concession.13

This is what I was referring to when I asked if you saw Habyarimana in a different light than the rest of his party. They took a much more extremist stance than he.

Yes, but that doesn't necessarily mean he wasn't an extremist. He may have approached the situation with more intelligence and tact, but he was still an extremist. His approach was different, but the ideology was the same.

Habyarimana was most likely a target of the extremists, yet you can understand that when the inquiry began, you were

among the suspects. After all, you had many good reasons to want to eliminate him.

Well that's a different issue. We weren't targeting Habyarimana as a person. We wanted to remove the system, which included Habyarimana, but we never believed that getting rid of the individual would be the key to abolishing the system. Nothing in our actions,
thinking, or statements shows Habyarimana as our target. Our focus was on the system as a whole.

Yet, he was the personification of the system. He was your enemy.

Indeed, that was implied in what I said. He was part of the system, but he wasn't the system. And, returning to your point that there was a tactical difference between Habyarimana and the party, as they had the same ideology, removing Habyarimana would have done nothing to change the party and the system. It would not have allowed for any progress to be made. So in strategy and planning, we never would have targeted the man. It would have been a mistake, in no way beneficial to our goals and what we were trying to achieve.

The war was not aimed at Habyarimana. Our war was aimed at the system. This is an important distinction. As far as our innocence is concerned, tactically speaking, who would remove the leader and then leave the entire extremist group behind? It doesn't make any sense.

Now pushing their argument even further, when the head of the RPF was killed in 1990 by Rwandan government forces,

would it have been justified for the RPF forces to turn against the population and start a massacre because they had lost their leader? Because, that is what
Habyarimana's government forces did: they started to massacre the population once they lost their leader.

Finally, why does the killing of Habyarimana raise so many more questions than the killing of Fred Rwigyema, the head of the RPF? Why is one murder more questionable than the other, or conversely why is one seemingly more justified than the other?

If nothing had occurred on the evening of April 6th, if President Habyarimana's plane, instead of being shot down, had peacefully landed at Kigali airport, would the genocide have taken place?

The genocide would have continued because it had already been present, creeping its way into our society since 1959. From that year on, a part of the Rwandan population, the Batutsi, had been the systematic target of discrimination, ostracism, and often slaughter conducted by the ruling power. You are speaking to someone who lived in exile for thirty years because his family had been chased out of Rwanda, as had tens of thousands of our fellow countrymen. In a way, this ordeal turned out to be a chance for me, because it allowed me to stay alive. April 6th was nothing but a pretext for them to take it to the next level.

To the best of your knowledge, what are the deep causes of the genocide, and why was there such widespread participation among the civilian population? What drove so

many Rwandans to become murderers? Was it the culture, a tradition of obedience to authority?

Once again, historical context needs to be taken into account. The genocide that took place in 1994 has a long history. If you take the definition of genocide—people targeted and killed on the basis of who they are—then this began decades ago. It started in 1959. As it has occurred repeatedly in our history, it becomes a question of numbers. How many people have to be slaughtered for it to be acknowledged as genocide? For people who claim the RPF was responsible, I would like to ask: under what circumstances and for what reasons did I become a refugee in 1961? What happened in 1962, 1966 and 1967? Why were so many people exiled in Burundi, The Congo, Tanzania, and Uganda? How did that come about?

When you dig deeper into our history, you realize that what happened is a result of Belgium's colonizing politics and policies. Belgium and the Catholic Church divided society into ethnic groups. In fact they "ethnicized" the people and the politics of our country, dividing and categorizing people where before there was no divide. They issued identity cards establishing Bahutu, Batutsi or
Batwa identities from the father's side. Whether in school, church, or business, they told one group they were more privileged than the other, and they granted specific privileges and rights to one group but not the others. This logic, these divisions, played a large role leading up to the reasoning that resulted in the 1994 events.

But that doesn't explain why the genocide was so popular and widespread among everyday people…

Politics. Once again, when looking at history, when you have an ideology called Hutu power, when there is a history of identifying people by their physical traits, and then basing politics and ideology on ethnicity, you are planting the seeds that will allow you to later reap views serving certain politics—politics of hatred.

This ideology had decades in the making. So those in power simply used what they had already built on these foundations. On the radio, on television, in newspapers, the discourse was an extension of what had already been drummed into the population—one ethnicity was superior to the other, and the other had to be eliminated. The "other" is evil. The other, this "foreigner" is coming back to take what is rightfully yours—your land, your livelihood—and they will oppress you.

As a matter of fact, these people owned nothing that could possibly be taken away from them, but they were ignorant. The powers that be played on this ignorance and manipulated this form of innocence. The population was made to believe that they were different, they were Bahutu, the majority, and that they thus had a birth-given right to everything and therefore should rise against those who were coming from the exterior to try and dispossess them of their rights. If you are dealing with illiterate and poor people, and have kept them immersed in such a dogma, then they will be conditioned to believe whatever propaganda you henceforth feed them.

So it was a "popular" genocide, in the sense of being carried out by the common people. The difference between the Holocaust, and the genocide of the Batutsi in Rwanda, is that Rwanda happened before the eyes of the world, live.

Everybody in the international community, including the Catholic Church was aware of what was taking place. The international community had the opportunity to stop the genocide in Rwanda and they didn't. Was it blindness, or complicity?

It was outright complicity. And once again, if we look within the context of history, we realize that the nations who had the power to prevent the genocide were the same
that created the atmosphere that led to genocide in the first place. The time, effort and erroneous scientific research conducted, such as trying to prove that different people were of different races and thus should have different prerogatives, was spearheaded by the Belgians. All of this was carried out to achieve specific outcomes. So when the outcome they had hoped for finally came about, why would they be the ones to stop it? The colonizer was involved in various kinds of inappropriate acts, including murder.

Complicity is a loaded word…

I'm not using it lightly. I'm interpreting indisputable historical facts. The Belgians issued ethnic identity cards in the 1930s based on their "scientific" research of a "superior" race, the Hamitic race. They excluded certain groups from positions of power and favored other groups. They influenced and encouraged people, based on their ethnic identity, to hate each other. And then, in the 1950s, when they realized that one ethnic group, which was formally considered an underclass, could better serve their needs, they turned the tables, suddenly favoring and privileging this new group. These are indisputable facts. They preached hatred. Incidentally, in the

1950s, the Rwandan monarch, King Rudahigwa, was murdered in
Burundi while attending a summit given by the Belgians. Nobody to this day has ever felt the need to open an investigation trying to elucidate the mystery of this murder. The Belgians are the main suspects, as they were dissatisfied with King Rudahigwa who didn't bend to their will. They wanted to bring another group to power. You can interpret these facts however you like, but the facts themselves are indisputable.

Don't you think a more specific term would be responsibility rather than complicity? There is a fair share of responsibility among François Mitterrand, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and Kofi Annan. Even Pope John-Paul II.

As far as I am concerned, there are elements of both complicity and responsibility.

How do you explain then that twenty years later we are still waiting for the mea culpa of the Catholic Church, the Vatican?

Personally, I don't understand it. This does say a lot about the world we live in. We have seen the Catholic Church apologize for many things, wrongs they have committed elsewhere, whether in America, Australia, or Europe, where the Catholic Church had covered-up the wide-spread
abuse of children and paid hundreds of millions of dollars in damages and compensation in the United States for child abuse committed by priests. The Pope himself went and apologized. He traveled to Australia for the same reason. But here, I dare say, there is a level of racism at work: in the name

of what is okay to apologize for crimes elsewhere, but not to apologize to Africans?

And this same pope, John-Paul II, had visited Rwanda in 1990. He even accepted, during his visit, to bless the Habyarimana's private chapel...

This illustrates exactly what I am referring to. It goes beyond responsibility. It implies a certain extent of direct involvement, whether by omission or commission, but a direct involvement nonetheless.

You once said in reference to Israeli Jews: "They can understand us better than anyone else." Could you elaborate?

When I said that, it was in reference, naturally, to the genocides that both they, and we, have suffered. I was speaking of persecution, suffering, the will to survive, nothing more. Yet, that's already so very much.

How would you qualify the French Operation Turquoise of July 1994? As a humanitarian operation or a desperate attempt to save a client regime?

It was clearly from the first day a military attempt to save a client regime. It prevented the RPF from taking over the whole country. They weren't just protecting those who were running from the RPF. They were also protecting those who had just been murdering Rwandans.

But the French claimed to be saving lives, several thousand Batutsi lives…

Where? Because, in fact, the Batutsi were for the most part located outside the "safe" zone occupied by the French troops. Therefore no Batutsi lives could have been saved in the area in which Operation Turquoise was based and operating. The majority of Batutsi were outside of this zone, and in any event, they had already been slaughtered. The only Batutsi left were escaping to the Congo. So which Batutsi were they supposedly protecting? In fact the last of the Batutsi were in Bisesero and they were abandoned, left to be murdered.

You call the genocide "the genocide of the Tutsis of Rwanda." Don't you run the risk of forgetting, or minimizing, the murder of many moderate Bahutu such as Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, who was prodemocracy?

Yes, moderate Bahutu were murdered. But that wasn't genocide. It cannot be defined as genocide. We have recognized that Bahutu were killed, and that there were people who stood up for the truth, against their fellow Bahutu who were behind the genocide. But the fact that they were assassinated doesn't make it genocide. It was murder, and that is a different matter. A genocide is the planned and calculated extermination of a specific ethnic, tribal, or religious group. It is not a civil war. In Rwanda, one group was exclusively targeted, the Batutsi. The Bahutu who were killed in 1994 weren't slaughtered as part of the genocidal machine, but for other reasons. Everybody can understand this.

Nowadays in Rwanda, there is the "NDI UMUNYA-RWANDA" (I AM RWANDAN) campaign, but there are mixed reactions to this campaign. What is its real purpose?

Its actual purpose is very simple. It is to give Rwandans the chance to understand who they are and to forge a common identity that brings them together instead of pulling them apart. It is as simple as that. Some people
may have a different opinion, which they are entitled to. But it's up to us to communicate the purpose and usefulness of this initiative. We are aware that there is a certain level of opposition, but in fact there are fewer people opposed to it than we had anticipated.

Critics say you are forcing Bahutu to apologize in the name of the community…

No, that is misconstruing the process. We are giving the opportunity, to those who wish to seize it, for there are many who have wanted and have not had the opportunity to do so; we are giving them the opportunity to beg forgiveness. But no one has been forced at gunpoint.

It's not like in Mao's China, when people were coerced into public confessions and self-denunciations…

No, this is a situation that is quite specific to Rwanda, inspired by local tradition based on community justice, such as the Gacaca, village assemblies, presided over by elders, which were traditionally used to settle village and family disputes.

Many of your critics believe that you use the genocide for political leverage and as a guarantee destined to force Rwandans to unite around you out of fear. How do you respond to these accusations?

Those assertions have been made mostly by people who have made a profession out of their obsession with criticizing us. We live and we will live with it. For in the end: was there, or was there not a genocide that took place in this country? If there wasn't, then we are liars and manipulators. If there was a genocide—and there was— with all its absolutely devastating human, social, economic and political consequences, then we are not instrumentalizing it. In fact, it's quite the opposite. The genocide has forced us to spend the greater part of the last twenty years repairing its harmful effects. When making this type of remark, they insult us, sometimes without realizing it, because they do not

understand us. We are a proud people; we stood up to absolute evil without anyone's help. Today, how can anyone imagine that we would instrumentalize the memory of this barbaric episode in order to draw benefit from it? To inspire pity? Sympathy? We don't need the world's pity or sympathy. We have fought with our meager resources to reconstruct our country. For the rest, a million souls died here. We shall never cease to honor their memory.

On July 4, 1994, the first RPF patrol entered Kigali and you took over a country that had been completely shattered morally, politically, and economically. There was no government, nothing. The eyes of the International community were set upon you. Yet, when you entered Kigali, you had a conviction that is still yours today, twenty years later: the international community is misguided, truly ignorant of the situation at hand, often malicious and entirely lacking in moral integrity especially when it is expressing itself through human rights groups, the international court of justice, the United Nations and other similar entities. It's Rwanda against the world. Much has been said by the same world that was silent during the genocide.

Is this what you had in mind when you entered Kigali? And if so, did it forge your political personality and beliefs?

Yes, that is correct. Self-determination, the willpower to do whatever we can on our own, to rise from our ashes and achieve whatever we can. That is what has helped Rwanda regain its dignity.

Roméo Dallaire, the Canadian general who led the UN forces in Rwanda during the genocide, holds you in high regard and is quite outspoken about it: he says that he
has the same admiration for you that he has for General Rommel, or for the British generals who led the armed forces in India. Are you flattered?

That's his assessment. I can't be flattered personally, for it was a combination of circumstances and coincidences that forced me into leading the battle. I think, in fact, that General Dallaire meant to pay homage to the way we liberated Rwanda.

Is there any pleasure in warfare?

There is great pleasure in fighting for justice, including, when required, taking up arms.

In 1994 you were 36 years old, the commander of a victorious army. You had the power to name yourself president. Why didn't you seize this opportunity?

There are many reasons. When I analyzed the country's politics, I came to the conclusion that I needed to play a different role. Nothing ever destined me to become president. I was happy being a fighter, even a leader by fighting for my freedom and rights and those of my countrymen. I wasn't fighting to become president, and this was an important point to make. In my mind, it didn't
matter who would be president as long as we collectively agreed who would take on that position. Within the RPF, taking into account other factors as well, this idea wasn't on our agenda.

But I suppose you had the conviction that you had earned the right to shape the country?

Indeed, through my actions, involvement and commitment, one could say that I had earned this right. But, it all went much further than holding a ceremonial position. It was all a matter of figuring out what was best for the country.

Yes, but having said that, you were the vice president and the minister of defense. The real power was in your hands… For many observers, you were the president.

Not by design, however, more by default. Although I was convinced somebody else should be president, it didn't mean I could change the way people perceived me, or their opinion of me based on what I had done. What was within my power was to not do what was expected of me. So, I chose not to be president. However, I could not change the impression they had of me.

From the time this government was instated, most observers and diplomats felt that President Bizimungu and Prime Minister Twagiramungu were just figure heads. When foreign ministers and diplomats came to the country, they asked to see the Vice President.

It wasn't the way I originally envisioned it. It was the way people chose to see the situation and how it turned out.

And you were comfortable with this arrangement?

Yes. Otherwise why would I have refused the presidency? From a personal standpoint, if I had really had the ambition or

had wished to be president then, I would have been. But I had wanted to play other roles at the time. At one point, I had even thought of leaving politics altogether. When we were making the decisions about who should play what roles, I told people from my party that they should put other names forward. I wasn't ready to be part of the government; I wanted time to do other things. Actually I wanted to go study and live my life. But as soon as I said that there was an uproar in the RPF, as well as from the government here and abroad wondering if I had a hidden agenda. They couldn't understand how I could refuse the position. So I had to drop the idea of stepping aside to prove that I was still loyal to the cause.

Among many of the problems you faced, two were particularly significant. First was the phenomenon of the commonly known revenge killings in which some of your soldiers were involved. Can you honestly say that you did everything you could do to prevent those killings? After all, you have said that "we are not saints."

Nobody is a saint in this world. I am not, nor do I want to be, that is clear. Fewer soldiers than people think were involved in such killings. What I will say is that I was reassured, as you should be, that there were so few revenge killings. The fact that the revenge killings were isolated and not widespread is not an accident. The rationalization, indeed justification for people who were already armed to take revenge out of anger once they discovered that their entire family had been wiped out was very strong. We could easily have lost another million, if not more! But it did not happen. We prevented it from happening; that is what should be understood. Nothing was left to chance.

Yet there were military trials, conducted in secrecy.

No, there weren't secret trials. Every case was public knowledge. Maybe they weren't particularly publicized, but nothing was conducted in secrecy.

But there was a perception, right or wrong, on the part of some Rwandans that the new government tolerated a certain amount of excesses from its soldiers. Can we conclude that this was the origin of the split that eventually occurred between you and Bahutu politicians from the RPF like Seth Sendashonga, Faustin Twagiramungu and later Pasteur Bizimungu?

I don't agree at all with this interpretation. If there had been the slightest will to allow killings of any kind to continue, it would have happened on a very large scale. There was great anger, as I mentioned, and reasons that could have been used to justify revenge killings. But it didn't happen and I don't believe that Bizimungu or any politician in particular was directly responsible for its prevention. If the revenge killings had been allowed, they may have even died themselves; there would have been numerous victims. However, they had no hand in what prevented this.

So these politicians used this argument to rally a certain anti-RPF sentiment?

Yes, it is simple and straightforward. If the desire to permit revenge killings was there, it would have happened on a massive scale. No one would have been able to stop it.

However, the question people should be asking themselves instead is, what is the reason why it didn't happen?

The second issue was the huge refugee camps filled with Bahutu militias in the former Zaire. Why and how did you make the decision to dismantle these camps? They were paramilitary camps.

Yes, but if you take a look at how we dealt with the situation you will see that we were very selective. We made sure all the civilians were repatriated and even the soldiers who wanted to return were given the opportunity to do so. We aimed to separate—and we did so—those who were in the camps conspiring to wage war against us from the majority of innocent civilians, who were mostly brainwashed, but whom we knew we could turn around and give another chance. That's the action we undertook. Once again, as the camps were militarized, we could have used this as a pretext and justification to go in and kill everyone, but we chose not to. There were actually more militarized camps than refugee camps. Our stance had always been to make a distinction, and not to confuse the refugees with the military.

But many civilians were killed in the crossfire…

Sadly, yes, every day. That is the reality of warfare, even modern warfare, despite all its modern equipment, technology and science...

You have always refused that members of your army and your party be brought before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, which has been charged with judging war crimes committed in 1994. Why?

The ICTR judges crimes of genocide and our combat in 1994 was to free Rwanda from those perpetrating the genocide. Therefore there is nothing in common, no possible comparison, no parallel to be established between them and us. In Nuremberg in 1945, it was the Nazis who were judged, not those who vanquished them, and it would never occur to anyone to deplore this. For the rest, there is not a single offence committed by our men that hasn't been penalized, at times in the most severe way possible. Yesterday, today, or tomorrow. Everyone knows what took place here, during and after the war. Those who were court martialed for pillage and plunder, rape, assassination or any other act of violence were without hesitation sentenced to being shot. We were even accused at the time of being too heavy-handed with our own men.

But there was another ambitious goal in the campaign that took place in Zaire in 1996. It was to overthrow Mobutu, because unless the head of this neighboring state was changed, it would still have been a safe haven for your enemies. Isn’t that correct?

Yes, in a way. I would once again like to make a simple correction. I have seen how the Congolese say that the problems in the Congo began with the Rwandan invasion. But let me remind you of a historical fact: the first invasion between the two countries occurred in 1990 when Congolese troops supporting Habyarimana’s forces invaded Rwanda and advanced to Gabiro. Not the other way round. The Congolese troops were the first to invade Rwandan territory. That’s a historical fact. Mobutu became embroiled in all of this. He had been helping the militarized camps, and they were

benefiting from his generosity. He was enabling them to regroup and rearm in order to attack Rwanda.

Is that why President Museveni and you made a secret alliance with the Congolese rebellion leader Laurent-Désiré Kabila?

That's not entirely correct…

Yes, but why did you make this choice? Kabila was a very controversial personality and moreover two years later he turned against you. I suppose he suited your needs?

Yes, he was a controversial personality, but the only alternative and a lesser evil. At least that was what we believed then.

The RPF offensive which took place from the end of 1996 until June 1997 has been qualified by experts as one of the most remarkable military campaigns in modern African history. Are you proud of this achievement?

Frankly, I wouldn't qualify it in those terms because it is very far from my personal perspective. Our military combats and struggles, the wars we fought, were waged out of necessity. I am not proud to have had no other choice but war; but we had a problem to solve, and this was the only way to solve it. So the issue isn't about being proud of our military exploits. We overcame a terrible situation that we had to face the best way we knew how.

Afterwards, what went wrong with Laurent-Désiré Kabila? In retrospect, do you feel that you were unable to manage the

aftermath of the victory, or that Kabila was the wrong man for the part?

No, this isn't related to how we managed or mismanaged our so-called "victory." Simply because essentially, this was not our situation to handle. This was a Congolese situation and depended on many factors and people over which we had no control. Our purpose was to stave off any problems stemming from the DRC that were directly putting our population in danger. The outcome, what you refer to as a "victory," was indeed terribly mismanaged by others. I believe this is a reflection of the failure of others—those who were to govern Congo after the war. So yes, in that regard, it was a Congolese failure, including the failure of Kabila who took control of the government. But your question alludes to our associating with Kabila during the war, and therefore taking responsibility for his actions. We cannot be responsible for Kabila's flaws, or any other mistake on the part of the Congolese. Should we have chosen somebody else? Truth be told, it is irrelevant in that I am not qualified, as a human being, to judge or even identify people's flaws and above all I am not in a position to choose the Congolese leader.

But you were the one who put Laurent-Désiré Kabila into power. Don't you regret having trusted him?

I have never in the least trusted that man and I had even less to do with putting him in power. We helped him
though, that much is true. But to a certain extent, he had been forced upon us. You have to remember the context of 1996-1997: Mobutu was supporting those who had perpetrated the genocide and had taken refuge in large numbers in Zaire, while, as far as we were concerned, we

were supporting an alliance of countrymen who wished to remove the dictator and rebuild their country. Our objective was twofold: putting an end to the immediate threat of those perpetrating the genocide, and making a sort of long term investment in our future by encouraging a government in Kinshasa that would not threaten Rwandan security. For the latter, it was up to our Congolese partners to choose a leader; Kabila became a self-proclaimed leader in Lubumbashi. Personally, I had never met him before these events took place. He lived in Tanzania, and some of our allies in the region heartily recommended him. Our responsibility in the making and coming to power of Laurent-Désiré Kabila is only secondary. This said, it is true that we were mistaken about him. We should have read what Che Guevara wrote about him.

And as for Kabila's son, Joseph, who came to power after his father's assassination in January 2001, what was your opinion of him as a ruler? You and your army chief of staff, James Kabarebe, knew Jo Kabila, you were acquainted with him…

Well, I wouldn’t say we knew him any better than many other Congolese people, or any better than they knew us. Yes, we knew his father, we knew him, but this again, was a Congolese matter. He was chosen more or less on the basis that he was Kabila’s son. They could have chosen Kabila's wife, or uncle—for there were many uncles in their government at the time—but they chose his son, which is neither our concern nor our responsibility. We weren't involved and only knew him much in the way others know us, as public figures.

You became President of Rwanda on April 22, 2000, after having acted as the Vice President. What were your thoughts on inauguration day? Did you tell yourself: I've finally achieved my goal? Did you feel that you had a right to the presidency and now you were finally in your place?

You know, many things that have occurred in my life, and in the history of this country haven't come about because I felt I had a preordained right to them. I have worked very hard, but towards different goals, and acceding to power was never a goal to which I aspired, in spite of what people may think. It is almost as if circumstances had converged to put me in one place or another at a certain moment. Power as an end in itself has never been
my goal. I didn't seek it. But I have found myself in places and situations where there was a job to do, so I rolled up my shirtsleeves and got down to work to the best of my ability.

But ambition is not a sin…didn't you want this power?

No, it is not a sin to be ambitious, but it wasn't power that interested me, and I certainly do not lose sleep thinking about it! I just want to live my life. But there is the life you live by choice, and then there is the life you lead as a result of external circumstances. The way people see me, evaluate my capacities or want to see me is in their power, not mine. It is their decision.

Three years later, in 2003, you won the election with 95% of the popular vote. In reference to most Western style governments, this is a very high percentage. Would you say that this election planted the seeds of misunderstanding between Rwanda and the Western world? A

misunderstanding about democracy, dignity, and human rights that continues to this day?

I think it is very dangerous to draw conclusions out of context. And I loathe to believe that the West doesn't have the analytical capacities to understand the particularities of Rwanda. One should immerse oneself in the history, culture, and politics of a country before drawing any conclusions. But before getting to the specifics of this election, and its supposed contradiction, I would like to point out a more serious contradiction. Before we came to power, before the genocide, Habyarimana was running the government under a single party as life-long president, without elections or any other form of popular validation. Yet, the same West you are referring to sang the praises of this "Rwandan model." Today, we are in a completely new phase, entirely different from former regimes, which were praised and supported by the West. We've had to face and overcome a horrific upheaval, which we did, to establish and achieve this new phase and yet we are being criticized.

Specifically about the election, we should additionally be talking about the turnout. The turnout was 96 or 97%. So the question to ask is why do Rwandans come out in such high percentages to vote? Why is this question never asked? What does it mean that Rwandans turn out in such high percentages while the West and its so-called democracies have such small turnouts? The turnout today in Western democracies hovers between 40–50%. In some places in Africa, such as Burkina Faso, it is even lower, 31%. So therefore should this be the new standard? How is a voters' turnout ranging anywhere from 30% to 50%

more democratic than a 97% turnout? Is 97% anti-democratic? In France, in 2002, why did no one question the fact that Chirac won by 82%? Did this mean that France became a dictatorship?

What I am trying to point out, is that this logic is difficult to justify. And if I may, when taking into consideration what the Rwandan people have experienced and witnessed during their history and the genocide, you can never underestimate the impact it has had on the population. The country was more or less dead. We have come back to life. You have no other comparable phenomenon in the world today. Perhaps Somalia may be considered as similar to a certain extent, but for different reasons… I cannot recall in recent times when the world has witnessed a situation remotely close to ours.

Now, we have worked very hard to create unity and trust among our citizens, speedily taking our country into a democratic process, which did not exist priorly. Elections are merely a part of this process. What motivates Rwandans, what works on their psyches and what is on their minds is very different from other parts of the world by which the West wants to gauge us. So once again, context is extremely important and when people miss the context, when they take events out of their environment, they miss the whole picture. Therefore, a high voter turnout, or being elected by a high percentage of the suffrage
is not something to be concerned about when considering Rwanda as a specific example.

Do you think there is a universal definition for the word democracy; for human rights?

I don’t think so. Once again, context needs to be taken into account. In Rwanda for example, let’s take into consideration the Rule of Law. Reconciliation, which means bringing people together, and speaks about unity. Addressing gender equality and rights. Empowering the people through information and communication technology so they can communicate with each other and the world. The investments we have made in health and education, the government structures that have been instated. Decentralization, where people at the local and community levels take responsibility for their affairs. How can one consider all this as adding up to a lack of democracy? When you empower people for their social and economic development, it follows that they have a voice, and are able to choose their leaders. And they do choose their leaders. They choose parliament, their local leaders, their mayors and so on. They choose the president. Interestingly, our citizens don’t have the same complaints as outsiders do on their behalf. Doesn’t that tell an intriguing story?

People apply different standards; in fact, there seems to be a double standard. And let’s take the example of the next presidential election in 2017, because this is apparently the burning question of the moment. If everyone is convinced that we are not a true democracy, then why are they wasting time asking what will happen in 2017? Their predetermined assumption answers their very question.

The point is, they are imposing their understanding onto a context they do not fully understand. When they say democracy is based on freedom, doesn't that also include the freedom for our country's citizens to decide? If the West wants to decide for us, isn't the West taking away our freedom

and interfering with our democracy? Another question that must be asked: who wrote the constitution? It didn't just appear out of thin air. The people wrote it and enforce it. So why would they change it? The assumption the rest of the world is making is not a logical one. There is a basic contradiction in the West's assumed standards and the vision the West has of these standards when applied to our situation.

In Africa, democracy can't be ordained by decree, it has to be built, prepared...

Let's say there is a universal model of democracy, let's call it the Western model. After all, the Rwandan people's aspirations, in terms of freedom, representation, and prosperity aren't different from that of other people's. But a model is not like a ready-to-wear item of clothing. It needs to be fitted to who's wearing it. Once again, we have our own history, our own traditions and a specific social organization that has been deeply traumatized and severely maltreated by the tragedies of the last century, and the genocide in particular.

All these specifics imply a rhythm of construction and a democratic architecture that are our own. Sometimes Rwandan society is described as a blind, gregarious society ruled with an iron hand by a sort of power that has come right out of George Orwell's 1984. That's nonsensical. I'm not a doctor who writes out obligatory prescriptions for what the people must or must not do while holding them by the throat. Those who, from the outside, depict us as a sort of brain-dead hive of activity don't respect us and don't deserve our respect. We are open to any and all advice concerning democratic transition, on the condition that it is made in good faith, but

we don't like being given instructions, and even less being given orders.

Democracy is not an abstract theory. It is the product of an explicit and precise context. Look around you: there is not one unique form of democracy, but different democratic systems that range from constitutional monarchies to direct representation. A democracy must reflect the aspirations, history, and culture of the people within which it is attempting to take root; otherwise it is bound to fail. This is what we are trying to accomplish in Rwanda.

Have you already decided to modify the constitution so that you can run again for President in 2017?

Well, this follows in the same vein. It's the people's constitution. The people who wrote it, who put it there are the only people who have the right to change it. I alone cannot change it. I participated in the writing of the constitution, but that in no way gives me the authority to change it. So why has this non-issue become "my" issue? Why have I been accused of wanting to change the constitution? This has nothing to do with me.

Therefore, what happens in 2017 is not my issue either—at least not mine alone. Maybe the people should be asked the question: why is there talk of changing the constitution? Why would they want to change it? It makes no sense to keep asking me this question when in fact it does not concern me—it is not up to me to change the constitution, and changing the constitution isn't a particularly good thing.

Additionally, if you read the constitution the answer as to whether or not I can run in 2017 will be provided. So why do journalists keep asking me what I plan on doing? Why are you accusing me of something that hasn't happened yet? At least wait until 2017 and see what happens—accuse me then if there is something to accuse me of. The point is, it is out of the question for me to change the constitution. It is the people's constitution.

Over the last twenty years, the rhythm of reforms in Rwanda has been extremely fast. Would you say that impatience is a virtue?

I do believe that a certain impatience for things that shouldn't be there in the first place is a good thing, indeed a virtue. But impatience should be managed. It highlights the difference between idealism and realism. One may be idealistic and as a result, want results instantly. But is it truly possible to obtain the said results today? Maybe in reality one must work hard for five or ten years to obtain these results. And that is realism. Impatience is something that is exercised between idealism and realism, so as to strike the right balance between them.

You've said that development is a marathon that must be run like a sprint. What do you mean?

Development combines the idealism and realism I have been referring to. Development is working towards an idea that one wants "now." But then the reality of the situation, as well as what is actually required to achieve what one wants, comes into play. These two things must be balanced. So development is a marathon, because the reality is that

development takes time. It's a long, hard journey with ups and downs—periods of fatigue and periods of exhilaration. But this reality is driven by one's idealism. You can't snap your fingers and instantly do away with the reality of a situation; but you do have the ideal—the end goal in mind. If you are driven by the ideal, but you are able to recognize and work with reality, then managing this reality will help you to embrace it and get there. So, the marathon is the long journey we take towards development, it is reality. But we are driven by an ideal, and this ideal allows us to sprint forward; it motivates us; it helps us to achieve our goals and manage reality. You have the ambition; you have the drive; you have ideals that are checked by the fact that this process is a marathon; this is reality.

Rwanda has become something of a case study for recovering societies. In 1994, you had to start again from zero. Would you say you wanted to create your own model? And that was to create a new country and a strong state, as soon as possible? Is that correct?

Absolutely. There is no doubt about it. We, naturally, had many ideals but reality has always kept us in check. We wanted to move forward as quickly as possible, but the reality was that helping a state to rise from its ashes is a marathon process. So you have to strike the right balance.

Would it be true to say that you are a committed nationalist?

That is an understatement. It is true, very much so.

You are a republican in the original sense of the word. However, you also seem to wish to rekindle past values and

ideas from Rwanda's pre-colonial history. Is this in contradiction with a democractic system? For example, ITORERO,14 a traditional value system schooling individuals on numerous aspects of Rwandan culture including volunteerism, communal work and community service dates from pre-colonial times.

There is no contradiction. Once again, it is a matter of context, and definition. To reform does not imply blindly shunning everything from the past including what works. Reform means building on aspects that suit and serve your vision. The future you want within the framework of today's realities. You must keep what is good and reform what doesn't meet current standards. This is what it means to reform. And reform, or revolution, or any process of change doesn't take place in a vacuum. It takes place within a culture which has its own traditional values and norms—things you cannot ignore. But you can shape and reform these traditions and norms to fit in with your vision.

Democracy is about people; so what would democracy be if you didn't take into consideration the people's norms, values, traditions and culture? All of this must be taken into account, but may also involve areas that are not compatible, so you aim to keep that which suits your vision. There are no strict definitions. People who are unaware, or do not have the relevant knowledge of local tradition and culture may see contradictions, for their perception and understanding is shaped by the prism of their own culture. Rwanda can't be Rwanda without its own traditions. They are the foundation we build upon.

Westerners tend to consider their own democratic model as the only viable one. However, if you instate democracy as an inflexible model in our countries, Rwanda or other African countries, that model can only become an alien imposition, creating an anomalous situation, which is neither suitable in the eyes of the West nor something complete or appropriate for our people. Our country is not supposed to become the West. We are different. There are common values we share, and therefore from that point of view we do belong to the same "club." Yet, we've had to make a democracy that is our own, one which suits Rwandans and takes our culture and values into account. Reform and development were never meant to destroy who we are.

Concretely though, wasn't ITORERO, which I understand is a traditional educational and moral institution, also used by the RPF as a sort of mobilization tool?

Traditionally ITORERO is a mobilization tool for Rwandans, not specific to the RPF. It has always been used to mobilize all Rwandans as citizens, regardless of their background.

But can it be politically oriented…?

Yes, but it doesn't need to be political. And as it is all inclusive, it wouldn't be used specifically as a tool for political mobilization. ITRROREO is not an RPF invention. It wasn't created by the RPF, but has always been deeply rooted in Rwandan society. The RPF is only 26 years old. ITORERO is centuries old. So it is much more a part of Rwanda than a part of the RPF. The RPF, however, has been astute enough in its policies to understand that we can leverage positive traditional values and practices to help instill and promote in

the Rwandan people's minds things such as their self-worth and pride…shouldn't that also be part of our motivation, part of our development process? Mobilizing Rwandans around a well-known tradition to help drive forward the development process is something that is readily applicable and helps us to achieve our goal. It is wholly appropriate.

Rwanda is often referred to as being a homogeneous society, one that is particularly consistent. The reflection is often made that if well managed and well conducted, Rwandan society could go very far…on the contrary, if poorly managed it could reach new lows.

I'm not really sure what people mean by homogeneous, or if they do it is only in the superficial sense. As with any society, there are both positive and negative aspects so overall management does matter. Rwandan society is homogeneous to the extent that we speak the same language, we have the same culture, etc. There is nothing wrong with that. But we do have different beliefs, as individuals, and as groups. So homogeneity only goes so far to a certain superficial level, and stops with the individual. It is not something we had to work towards to achieve, we already all spoke the same language, we have traditions and cultures that we share in common. But with reference to modern societies, that which determines the future and people's lives may not necessarily be seen as homogeneous.

Earlier, you spoke to me about being a believer in the republic. This is a great departure from the feudal system of beliefs on which our pre-colonial government was based. But today, there are Rwandans who believe we shouldn't be a republic and don't see anything wrong with a monarchy. It is

a minority view of course. But once there was a time when it was the majority view. No matter which view is the majority, what matters is how you govern and manage these differences for the greater good of society, so that society can progress. So yes, I agree, it
does boil down to how well everything is managed. Like anything else. A poorly managed situation will collapse.

Ethnicity is officially banned in the new Rwanda. Do you think that Rwanda will become the first post-ethnic nation in Africa? Is it your goal?

A post-ethnic society means you have transcended ethnic differences, have moved on and are above them. That doesn't mean they have been entirely obliterated. There are still people who wish to see themselves differently, but the important idea is transcending differences to unite as a nation. This is our profound wish and I believe we are on the right path. Not 100% there yet, but well on our way and working towards union and developing our country.

Is the word reconciliation between communities adapted to your situation? Until the generations have been entirely renewed, doesn't non-violent coexistence better apply to Rwanda than reconciliation?

Non-violent co-existence is just one aspect of reconciliation. Reconciliation means creating an understanding between different groups with diverging opinions, when those differences are harmful to society. In my mind
reconciliation has a broad definition. It means reconciling differences for the greater good. It acknowledges that you started from a conflictive situation and you are working

together to improve it. Whatever the differences may be or may have been, reconciliation means taking a look at the underlying causes of differences that had negative consequences, as well as anticipating further negative consequences these differences may have on living peacefully together. You must create an understanding. You study underlying causes and strive to alleviate the effects.

In Rwanda today, nobody speaks officially of Bahutu or Batutsi, but in reality everybody knows who is a Muhutu and who is a Mututsi.

I have the impression, once again, that this is a cultural misunderstanding about what we mean to achieve here in Rwanda. It is difficult for me to understand outsiders' obsession with things being "official." Whether our differences are "officially" recognized or not is not what we should be focusing on. However, whatever our differences, can we have a common project to advance together taking advantage of our differences and what each has to bring to the table to help establish a common good? Can we focus on that instead of fighting about our differences?

This is the foundation on which we want to build our country. We're saying: who cares if you are different from me and I am different from you? Can we, instead of looking at what divides us, look at how we can bring our energies together to build this country? For if you get lost in trivialities, such as officially recognizing terms like Muhutu or Mututsi, you lose focus on the common project. Whether you are a Muhutu or a Mututsi is a matter of personal concern. But when we are talking about the development of a country as a whole, and driving it forward for each and every one of its citizens, what

do these differences matter? Especially to outsiders. Why does any of this matter to those outside of Rwanda, when they do not apply the same observation to themselves, in Europe for instance?

Another subject is the women of Rwanda and their rising status. Your emphasis on equal rights projects is particularly striking. Why is this issue so important to you, and what motivated you to put such emphasis on this part of the progress you've accomplished?

Women make up 52% of the Rwandan population. It seemed entirely natural to me that every citizen counts. We are building a new country; therefore, we can't possibly ignore 52% of the population! Everybody should
be part of the rebuilding process. Secondly, we also believe in women's rights and the importance of women in our society. Frankly, if I were a woman, I would have waged a war a long time ago to liberate women, as I did to liberate my country. If oppressed women should wage a war, I would readily smuggle ammunition to them, for it would be a justified war.

It seems that many men in Rwanda complain in private. They feel they are dominated by women and that Rwanda has become a matriarchy.

Well, they should keep that to themselves! In the past, women have been denied education, business opportuneties, and the ability to speak in public. On what grounds?

The rising status of women results essentially from new laws and quotas, but is it accepted as a permanent cultural shift by society as a whole?

Well, I can guarantee you that 52% of society accepts this shift! And of the remaining 48%, there are at least 20% to 28% who agree with us. So altogether we have a rather strong majority of supporters.

Your determination to break with habits of corruption has been widely praised. Do you think that corruption is a fatal disease that is particularly prevalent in Africa?

I'd like to point out that corruption is not exclusive to Africa. Corruption is found in every country on the planet! Yet, due to weak institutions, whether traditional or modern, and the level of development, corruption has been more pronounced here than elsewhere, to the extent there are people who come to Africa to exercise corruption because it is easy to take advantage of such weak institutions. You'll find that "African" corruption actually involves players from all over the world. Therefore, we must build stronger institutions that are immune to corruption.

You won't find anyone here who is favorable to corruption. But people are more or less forced into it, because if survival means exercising some level of corruption that the system is willing to turn a blind eye to, then it will continue to flourish. But that doesn't mean the people like it or are favorable to it.

There is no corruption-free society…

No, no society has found a way to fully prevent corruption, yet we can do our part to fight corruption, to fight and minimize it. Strong measures must be put into place
to make people understand that if they are involved with corruption, they will have to pay the consequences and won't

be able to do it with complete impunity. Corruption is very costly. It hinders development. Money that has been earmarked for health institutions that instead ends up in people's pockets has a direct negative effect on public health. In Rwanda we want and have viable health institutions.

We've been fighting to make sure that the money goes where it belongs instead of ending up in the wrong hands...and pockets. We are committed to severe punishment and cracking down on corruption. But it will always be there, so you have to contain it, minimize it and be ready to take action. The majority of Rwandans have since integrated a culture of responsibility, which has transformed their mentality. Education has played a very important role, as have the strict measures we have taken to fight against this phenomenon. Wherever you may be, whatever function you may occupy or position you may hold, there is no impunity in Rwanda. In this area, as in all the others, our leadership must be absolutely exemplary.

Nobody can dodge it?

Nobody. What is important for us, Rwandans, is that this struggle is not the affair of one single man—myself, in this instance. It's the entire system that works against corruption. We have multiplied awareness campaigns, created the Ombudsman office that handles this specific problem, increased prison sentences and penalties and publicly released the names of those who are guilty to shame them. We still have some way to go and there remain nests of corruption that need to be eradicated. But for a country that started from zero in this area, we have made remarkable progress.

Is money important to you, personally?

Not personally. And certainly not for money's sake. I just need enough for the basics, the minimum works for me. Now let's talk about money in a societal context. If you have the ambition of achieving something for the well-being of people, of society, then money as a means to achieve that is very important. Money plays a major role in one's independence.

Almost 40% of your budget comes from foreign aid, which you have at times qualified as "poison." How can you be independent in these conditions?

We appreciate foreign aid, naturally, all the more so because we do know through which objective criteria we
have earned it. However, its use in return for political control is something we refuse. Our daily combat is hence to bring together, stage after stage, the conditions that will allow us to finally do without it. Real independence is a gradual process. On the one hand, this aid is precious; on the other, those who grant us this aid are hoping that we won't be able to do without it. It's a contradiction that we can only overcome through work, determination, and a clear vision of our interests, which means of our objecttives.

Please understand me: I am an advocate of using these funds only with a strict control by the financial backers. A verification that there is no waste or corruption is the very least to be expected and I believe that in this regard Rwanda is exemplary. We can account for each and every dollar spent and we do so. But when those who contribute aid want to transform themselves into lesson givers, and decide on behalf of the Rwandan people who their leaders are or what their

future ought to be there is a problem. The reasons that led to the suspension of aid to Rwanda in 2012 had nothing to do with what this help was destined for: economic and social development. Private investors and those from the world of finance judge us without bias, just on who we really are: a reliable and serious country, truly in the process of taking off—we're bankable. That's not so common.

Another problem is population growth. With more than 400 habitants per square kilometer, Rwanda is nearing suffocation. Is there a solution?

It is at once a great challenge, and a great opportunity. If, in twenty years, our population growth rate has decreased from about 10% per annum to less than 3%, it will not be through coercion, which is entirely unproductive in our culture, but by combining education and persuasion. The message is simple: adapt the size of your family to your resources, only have children when you can provide them with food, care and an education. Nearly 70% of Rwandans are under 30. As long as we massively invest in health, employment and education, this is not a handicap; it's a wonderful opportunity.

You once wanted to be a pilot, but in your next life, after being president, do you see yourself as a successful business man or a gentleman farmer? Money is important after all, you live in a capitalistic society...

Yes it is important, but not as an end in itself. After serving my country as president, I would like to continue to serve my country in another capacity. Realistically it will take money in order to do so, whether it is to travel across the country to meet people and work with them, or

to help communities forge new paths, the reality is that all of this takes money. So money is not important in itself, but as a means to achieve a goal, it certainly plays an important role. If I were to earn money as a businessman, I would use that money to achieve other things. In a community, or as an individual, there is also the notion of pride and dignity that comes into play. One wants to feel that they have worked to achieve something.

Handouts are not personally rewarding compared with earning money through innovation, ingenuity and an entrepreneurial spirit. One wants to feel that what they have obtained is a product of their personal effort. That is the positive merit of capitalism. There are many negative sides, especially when earning money at all costs infringes on someone else's rights. Furthermore, earning a lot of money as a result of one's hard work is only a first step. What truly defines someone is the purpose he or she chooses for that money afterwards, whether it has been used to serve a greater positive cause.

Do you own properties outside of Rwanda?

No, I do not.

Any bank accounts outside the country?

One thing I would like to make clear: our children are studying abroad. So we opened bank accounts for their daily expenses, as required to handle financial matters abroad. However, that is the extent of our foreign bank accounts.

And as far as I know, your relatives and your family are completely absent from public life. That's very different from most African countries, are you aware of this?

My relatives live a decent and quiet life. They receive no favors.

Is their absence from public life a choice, a political decision, or just by accident?

It's clearly a combination of things that also corresponds with my personal beliefs and perspectives. I don't believe that my relatives deserve things beyond any other ordinary citizen. Not to disqualify them as my relatives—I love, respect and associate with them. I simply don't believe in special favors. I wouldn't hesitate to use my private and personal means for their benefit but everything has a limit. I will not use my power to deprive someone else of something so that my relative may have it instead. However, as long as it remains within the
boundary of my personal wealth, meaning that I can personally afford it, I will help my closest relatives to live a decent life. I make sure that my mother doesn't lack anything she needs to live decently. But this is constrained by what I can personally afford.

Would you like to see your children in politics—indeed, maybe even one of them succeeding you to the presidency?

Rwanda is not a monarchy, and this type of practice, nepotism or the hereditary transmission of power, family favoritism, that's just not the way we do things. What I hope for my

children is quite simple: That they decide their future for themselves. They are no different from other Rwandans.

In reference to traveling abroad, I remember a journalist once asked if you felt there was a contradiction between the level of poverty in Rwanda and the luxury hotels in which you were staying. You replied that as a man who once fought in the bush, you had no lessons to receive.

Exactly. What I meant is that this journalist was completely mistaken when questioning my integrity on this issue. Fancy hotels don't matter to me, and a man like me, who has lived in the trenches and gone without food
should not be judged on how he is living his life. I of all people know what matters and know very well that my life is not about luxury hotels. It has also been about survival, living in war conditions. There should be no concerns or false impressions of that kind about my integrity.

In reference to this particular incident, it was someone who was working for me who made the travel arrangements, somebody from Canada, who was also the one who decided to complain to the press about where I was staying, which happened to be where he booked me! As the people who work with me know, I never pick which hotel I am staying in. I show up where I'm told. I have no idea how they ended up choosing this particular hotel. Another interesting question here is that I was told that I was staying in a hotel "above my standard, above the standard of my country." Okay, I have no problem with that. I've slept in the trenches, so any hotel would suit my needs. However, who ought to decide which standards apply to me, and incidentally to my country?

Two decades after the genocide, what are your main priorities? Mouths to feed, minds to educate, roads to build, rights to defend?

We are still driven by our vision: to invest as much as we can and as best we can in our people. Teach them skills so they can obtain employment. Promote knowledge as a driving force of our economy and for people's own well-being. This is a continuous process in progression. We are constantly building on it. Secondly, investing in people also means investing in their health. Health and education are combined for me; you need both to achieve real progress. Stability, security, good governance are all needed to create a safe atmosphere in which to grow and thrive. So it's the people, the institutions that govern, all bound together by security that allow you to reach high levels of achievement, eventually leading to our playing our part in the global community that also has an impact on us. Because we must find our place, integrate ourselves into the global community.

And the development of a more pluralistic democracy?

Yes, within governance, that is how you govern a society, it's what I call good governance.

And what about the role of the media? Because it seems you are very much criticized…

You know, it seems as though these critics are all stuck in a time warp—they think it's still twenty years ago. I frequently hear things reported on the radio, criticism about what is happening here in Rwanda that would make all these critics change their tune!

So you accept criticism, and NGOs? Aren't they a threat to you?

Critics do have a place in our society. However, it is their negativity and unaccountability that can be problematic. Sitting back and looking for something negative to say is a simple job. There is an increasing lack of constructive criticism. Sterile criticism and negativity without constructive arguments behind it does not help a society to move forward.

So here in this country it is possible to criticize Paul Kagame and not to be arrested?

Well, knowing that I am criticized every single day, take a look at how many people are arrested: zero. Every single day someone from abroad complains about intolerance to criticism here. Yet they are free to travel here, to criticize us, and then to pick up and leave with impunity. How does that amount to not accepting criticism?

On January 1, 2014, Patrick Karegeya, Rwanda's former head of military intelligence was assassinated in Johannesburg. Kayumba Nyamwasa, the former Rwandan army chief of staff, also exiled in South Africa, was the victim of a murder attempt. Both were your associates before becoming resolute opponents. You have formally denied any connection with these acts. However, in singling them out as enemies of the State, you have effectively turned them into targets…

They were the ones who declared themselves to be enemies of the State! They said it publically, in the press, before the cameras in South Africa where they'd established themselves,

without any ambiguity; only a few rare media outlets were honest enough to remind everyone of the fact. For them, the only way to achieve their goal is through armed violence. And they took action by sponsoring campaigns of terror, throwing grenades in public places here in Rwanda, which caused deaths and dozens of wounded. What is extraordinary and quite revealing in this affair is the double standard with which the West feels at liberty to judge Africa.

Here, people who promote violence and use terrorist tactics are considered as simple political opponents. However, when it comes to Rwanda, the order we are given is the following: those individuals whom you are fighting and who have sworn to bring you down by every means possible, please, protect them, respect them, don't touch a
hair on their head, nothing should happen to them. In short, we are to understand that only the world's leading powers have the "right" and the "intelligence" to determine who is a terrorist and who isn't, who deserves their fate, and who should be spared. I'm sorry, but I do not accept this logic.

Why has a man like the former General Kayumba turned against you?

He had fought by our side in the battle for liberation. He had been appointed to positions of responsibility. And then, one day, he had to account for his actions. In fact, accounting for one's activities is a fundamental obligation here in Rwanda whether in politics, the economy, or management of a specific department, etc. Sometimes, there are people who refuse to do so. Whether it's pride, or that they've illegally profited from their position or that they have something to hide. Some

believe they are above their own responsibilities. That just doesn't work in Rwanda.

Maybe he simply wants your job.

Really? Why not? But there's a whole procedure one has to go through to sit here, does he realize this? You cannot get this job through treason, manipulation, deception or assassination. I'm not nailed to this chair forever. Someone else will, one day, be sitting in my place. Many dream of it, I'm well aware. But the person who will follow me will already have gone through a series of tests from the Rwandan people. And she, or he, will have to account for themselves.

Is a coup d'état possible in Rwanda?

No. For a simple reason: the system and the institutions that we have put into place, where each person is responsible both for themselves and for others, makes it practically impossible for the government to be taken over by force. The Rwandan house is solid; its foundations will allow it to resist earthquakes of a considerable magnitude.

Who killed Patrick Karegeya?

To those who ask this question while being perfectly aware that this individual openly supported violence and terrorism, my response is the following: terrorism has a price, treason has a price. One is killed as one has killed. Everyone has the death they deserve.

When you repeat that you are well-justified and determined to eliminate all those who you qualify as terrorists,

you know very well what type of reactions you can expect…

Of course. What I want to say is that we won't hesitate to act decisively in the face of terrorism and if the way that we have acted until today, which is with strict respect to State law, doesn't convince the enemies of our people to renounce their terroristic endeavors, we will move on to another, much more serious stage. Regardless of what outside observers or governments may think. Rwanda had the courage, in the name of reconciliation, to abolish the death penalty while its prisons were overflowing with people who had participated in the genocide and certainly would have deserved the death penalty.

Let us be clear: the outside world can criticize or commend us, support us or try and destabilize us, in the very end, the responsibility for everything that concerns our national security falls upon us and nobody else. We defend our stability and our people's security in compliance with the law, knowing that whatever we do in this respect will be scrutinized by outside observers, but that won't stop us from being determined, proactive and resolute in the combat we are leading. Our determination to ensure our security will unfailingly continue. I don't believe I'm telling anyone something they don't already know in repeating this.

It is known that you are against the International Criminal Court. Are you therefore in favor of impunity?

I would like to be understood correctly on this matter. I will not sign the ICC statutes. Not because I am against the principle of international justice, nor because heads of State are above the law, but because I don't trust this ICC. It will

never be in the capacity of this court to render fair and impartial justice. The problem isn't even that until now only Africans have been brought before this court. That's purely incidental. The problem is that, from the beginning, one could see, feel, and detect behind their very selective way of functioning, both an agenda and a political manipulation of the rich against the poor. I am in favor of specific international criminal courts that are under the aegis of the UN, as those held in Arusha concerning Rwanda, those held for Sierra Leone, and the former Yugoslavia. At least these courts have clear mandates and presumably know what they are talking about. But I'm against the ICC's omnipotent and omniscient judges.

What is your dream for Rwanda in twenty years from now, for 2034?

My dream is for a truly stable Rwanda—stable in every aspect. A Rwanda that is prosperous, has achieved a standard of living equal to that of countries who take their standard of living for granted. And for Rwanda to stop needing to be the beneficiary of others' generosity. I want Rwanda to be in a place where instead of receiving from others we can give to others, helping them to achieve self-sufficiency and their own prosperity. That is my dream. A Rwanda that is prosperous, stable, Rwandans who are happy and proud to be Rwandans.

And your dream for Africa?

The same. What I wish for myself, I wish for Africa.

And that the continent be respected by the rest of the world?

Oh yes! Respect, and that the people should be proud and sense their own self-worth.

You don't think it's that way now?

No. Impossible when you are exploited, insulted, and constantly misjudged just because you are struggling every day to make something of yourself.

And do you believe you will see these achievements in your lifetime?

Hopefully. That is my wish and hope and that is what I am working towards.

What is the main feature of your personality?

I take my responsibilities very seriously. I will not have my conduct dictated to me, whether it concerns my country or myself. Respect me, as I respect you.

What quality do you prefer in a man, or in a woman?

Character.

And the flaw that you dislike the most?

Dishonesty.

What is your greatest quality?

Fair-mindedness.

And your greatest flaw?

That of not knowing my weaknesses.

Your greatest professional success?

Having remained who I am.

Your idea of happiness?

Achieving my ambitions.

Your idea of misfortune?

Genocide, knowing that this goes well beyond misfortune.

In another life, what profession would you have liked to practice?

Airline pilot or engineer. Whatever it may be, as a free man.

The heroes you would like to emulate?

I can't think of any.

Your favorite food?

I don't have one. I eat whatever the people I am with are eating.

Your favorite drink?

Water, tea. A half-glass of wine when the circumstances call for it, I sample it more than I drink it.

Do you enjoy it?

No.

What frame of mind are you in at the moment?

Serene. Determined to act in order to build the future. Optimistic, with good reason, for the future of my country, but not blindly optimistic, because nothing is ever built without constant effort.

Do you have a message to transmit to the generation born after the genocide, the so called “Kagame generation”?

This generation does not have the kind of baggage our generation carried. They are new people in a new world—I think they need to take things to the next level, using our country's aspirations as a foundation. They should focus on where we need to be in the years ahead. They need not be burdened by the baggage of the past—poverty, corrupt politics, and all the hardships. But they must also learn from history in order not to repeat its mistakes. To begin with, I always tell young people that they should set out with a clear vision of who and what they feel Rwandans ought to become—a better version of themselves.

We must be careful though, because some young people, instead of learning who they are, and often under the influence of an outsider’s perceptions and misconceptions, veer towards rejection and self-destruction. They do not accept themselves. Self-rejection is not something I wish for my people. They must be able to learn the good things from the rest of the world and filter out the bad, for if they choose

to go in the direction of the latter, they will destroy the future we want for them.

Rwanda is a small country geographically but its tragic past has given it a stature much greater than its actual territory. Would you describe it as having an influence greater than its size?

The way I would describe it, is that Rwanda is a very small country, geographically, with a small economy, but because of the massive problems we have contended with and overcome, we are now known for being a small country with big problems that has found big solutions to handle them. And this is what has made our global reputation. It's not our small size that has given us our name. It's our capacity to address such large-scale problems that has allowed us to make a name for ourselves in the world.

Small size, big problems, big successes. We are not small people, mind you. We are just a geographically small country…

1. Jeffrey Gettleman, "The Global Elite's Favorite Strongman," New York Times, September 4, 2013

2. This refers to the period during which the Belgian government, influenced by the Belgian clergy present in Rwanda, switched their support from the Batutsis to Bahutus and plotted to establish a new governing system in Rwanda, instating Bahutu rulers. 1957 was also the year of the Bahutu Manifesto, written by a group of Bahutu intellectuals and backed by the Belgian clergy, which encouraged Bahutus to overthrow the Batutsi regime and establish Bahutu rule.

Rwanda, formerly a monarchy, was supposed to be led into democracy by the colonizers; however, the Belgians' true interest was in establishing a government they could shape and influence themselves.

3. 19th and early 20th century colonizers adhered to a hypothesis based on scientific racism that considered human beings to be divided into different races—of superior and inferior beings. The Hamitic hypothesis claimed that Batutsi were part of the Hamitic race, one "superior" to other African "negroid" populations. This theory was used by the Europeans to justify support of the Batutsi.

4. Asteria farmed, took care of the family and kept their quarters impeccably clean. She did whatever necessary to help them not just to survive, but to live, with dignity. (cf. Kinzer, e-edition location 272; Crisafulli & Redmond, e-edition location 532, etc.)

5 . Grégoire Kayibanda was Rwanda's first Muhutu president following the downfall of the Rwandan monarchy. His political party, PARMEHUTU, certain members of which had written the Bahutu Manifesto, received support from the Belgian government as well as the Church. He was instated in power in 1962. Juvénal Habyarimana was a Major General in the Rwandan army when he staged a coup against Grégoire Kayibanda.

6. The exiled King Kigeli V Ndahindurwa, King Mutara Rudahigwa's younger brother, who inherited the throne after King Mutara died under suspicious circumstances in 1959 during a meeting with Belgian officials in Burundi.

7. Fred Rwigyema had joined Yoweri Museveni, the Ugandan leader of the rebel forces, in the war against Amin.

8. Godfrey Lukongwa Binaisa served as president from June 20, 1979 to May 12, 1980. Obote returned to power as of 1980. [www.statehouse.go.ug/past-presidents (accessed 15 January 2014)].

9. In his book, Kinzer tells the story how Paul Kagame's wife broke through his shyness and won his heart by inviting him over for a glass of milk, considered a very precious commodity by the Batutsis.

10. Fred Rwigyema and Paul Kagame agreed that Fred needed to stay in place as RPF leader; otherwise it would appear to their forces that he was abandoning the movement right before they were to launch their surprise attack. Fred convinced Museveni to let him stay in Uganda for personal reasons and Museveni, suspecting something was in the works, sent Paul Kagame in his place in order to separate the two men. (see Kinzer, chapter 4, "A glass of milk," Waugh, e-edition section, "Keeping in touch with rebellion")

11. Habyarimana had asked Mitterrand for aid to fight the RPF insurgents. As a result, the French launched the Noroît operation whose official goal was to protect and evacuate foreign nationals living in Rwanda. However this operation was also used to supply arms, helicopters, modern radio devices, military and financial aid to Habyarimana's regime. Their intervention made a decisive difference. (cf. Kinzer, Waugh, French National Assembly's Fact Finding Commission on Rwanda report no. 1271, etc.)

12. Director of African and Madagascan Affairs for the Foreign ministry under Mitterrand.

13. The Arusha Accords, signed on August 3, 1993, allowed for a broad-based transitional government to serve until free elections could take place. The RPF and five opposition parties were given cabinet posts in the transitional government.

14. See National Itorero Commisson Volunteerism Policy Paper http://www.minaloc.gov.rw/fileadmin/documents/Minaloc_Documents/VOLUNTEERISM_POLICY_.pdf

Afterword

African stories get told in easy soundbites, or they don't get told at all. Caricatures and prejudices are not so much asserted, as simply assumed and then recycled, from place to place, time to time, person to person. A finer grade of truth would take up too much space and anyway no one is really interested, or so we're told.

The conventional wisdom is that fast news and short attention spans are a by-product of modern technology—the internet and the wonderful devices we use to access it. Perhaps, but the marginality of Africa in the world's imagination predates electricity. Despite accelerating globalization, our continent is still perceived as a place apart, an alternate dimension of the human experience, at once faceless, passive, and dangerous.

Even an event as significant as the genocide in Rwanda does not escape these expectations. The most visible parts of the story relate to the responsibilities of outsiders in the tragedy. What did they do? What did they know? How do they feel about it now?

These are, of course, pertinent questions, and I am still searching for adequate answers. But the only reason I am still heard commenting about the role of France, Belgium, the United Nations, and other actors is because the question is asked over and over again.

My answers have not changed in twenty years, and I will never stop answering such questions with the full truth, no

matter how uncomfortable. But it is not what I am thinking about. It is not what Rwandans are thinking about. Yet it still seems to be very much on the minds of others, and so we live with it.

There are more important things to talk about, including with those who have yet to find a common understanding of the past with us. We make no demands beyond honesty and mutual respect.

After all, we have lives to lead and futures to build. That is our singular focus. We are grateful for the contributions of our many friends, but responsibility for what happens in Rwanda rests squarely on us. We own our choices, and we own up to our mistakes. For that reason, the part of our story that gets the least attention is also the most important, at least to us: how we came together after the genocide to find solutions to our problems, and what we must do to keep things on track in the years ahead.

The misrepresentation of Africa is no one's fault, except perhaps ours as Rwandans and Africans. After all, everyone ultimately tells their own story, even journalists and experts, and no one is stopping any African from telling the story of our continent, as he or she sees it.

This book, which records some of my conversations with François Soudan over the past fifteen years, can be seen as an exception that proves the general rule. I don't know whether I changed his mind about anything, but then again that was never the point. It has been an open dialogue, conducted in good faith and good humor, about very hard questions, few of which have been definitively settled.

I am grateful for his persistence, and even more for his curiosity and rigor. I hope these interviews are as engaging and informative for readers as they were for me.

Of all the complaints leveled against Rwanda, the claim that we do things in secret is probably the most silly. Everything we do, we do in the daylight. Everything that needs to be said, we say in the open, to each other, in our own way, as Rwandans. In the end, Rwanda only seems inscrutable and mysterious to those who lack the patience, or perhaps the humility, to come sit on the grass with us as equals.

For the rest, I am who I am, because Rwandans are who they are. Everything else follows from that.

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