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'It's so difficult to live with what we know'

In 1994, around 800,000 people were massacred when Rwanda's Hutu majority turned against the Tutsi community. One of the worst atrocities took place in the town of Kibuye, where 21,000 were killed in two days. A decade on, Chris McGreal, who reported on the genocide at the time, returns to the town to talk to the survivors - and the killers living among them

On April 17 1994, Madalena Mukariemeria stepped forward to die. "The killer was a very big man. He had this huge club full of nails and sharp pieces of metal. He was such an expert he could kill with just one blow to the head. I wanted this man to kill me. People had been dying in such terrible ways and he would do it quickly," she says.

A few hours earlier, the Roman Catholic priest here in Kibuye, her town, had climbed into the pulpit to address the thousands of Tutsis who sought protection in his church. Ten days earlier, away to the east in the capital Kigali, the murder of the country's Hutu president had fired the signal flare for genocide. The man in the pulpit in Kibuye, Father Boniface Senyenzi, was also Hutu, but he had thrown in his lot with the terrified families under his care and promised he would share their fate.

The men and women crammed in among the pews thought themselves lucky to have made it to the church, which traditionally offered sanctuary in such times. Madalena and her friends agreed that Kibuye's governor, Clement Kayishema, would protect them. He was a doctor, after all, and had for many years been director of the local hospital. But the voices on hate radio were ever more disturbing. The war with Tutsi rebels was really a war against all Tutsis, they said. The Tutsis in your midst are spies and collaborators. The Tutsis want to enslave you and steal your land. The Tutsis must die.

"The graves are half full. Who will fill them?" asked the notorious Radio Mille Collines from Kigali.

In the capital, the bodies were already piling up. The killing began a little slower in Kibuye, isolated to the west among lush, rolling hills on the banks of Lake Kivu. But in time this place would come to be known as the "purest genocide" because of its high concentration of Tutsis, and because - though civil war was its backdrop - that fighting was far away: this was simply a slaughter of civilians.

The first to die in Kibuye was a Tutsi agronomist named Bigirimana. A few days later word reached the church that it was Dr Kayishema who had settled an old score by demanding the man's head. It was skewered on a pole in the middle of the town's only roundabout. Tutsis came flooding in from the hills - driving their cows and dragging their goats, or by canoe over sprawling Lake Kivu - with accounts of armed gangs moving from house to house, killing and raping and looting. They told how the police and army refused to help them.

Father Senyenzi looked to Dr Kayishema for help and reassurance but all he got from the governor were demands for the Tutsis to move to the town's stadium. The Hutu militia, the "interahamwe", made an appearance outside the church armed with spears, clubs and machetes. The first day, they taunted the refugees. The second, they snatched a young girl and carried her off. She was butchered next to the roundabout.

Over the following days, the police and army watched passively as young Tutsi men manned barricades around the church to beat off the attacks and teenage girls gathered rocks as ammunition. Father Senyenzi was disturbed by the ever more threatening tone of the notes that arrived from Dr Kayishema, including one that warned the Hutu priest to save himself and abandon the Tutsis.

The final note came on the morning of April 17. The father read it and then addressed his final congregation which, sensing doom, had declared that it would rather die in the church than move to

the stadium: "These are your last hours. Prepare yourselves to be received by God. Prepare your hearts to be received in heaven."

People gathered by denomination - Catholic, Adventist, Pentecostal and Muslim - and prayed. Madalena and her children held hands. Not far away, Louis Rutaganira clutched his wife and kissed his daughters. "I knew these were our last minutes. I wanted to believe, to have hope that we could all escape, that there would be a miracle. But as much as I tried to believe, I knew it wasn't true and I wanted to cry out to stop this from happening to my children. I thought: why are we praying? We should be shouting at God," he says.

Outside, the interahamwe were joined by police and soldiers. As this mob approached, it sang:

"Let us hunt them in the forests, lakes and hills
Let us find them in the church
Let us wipe them from the face of the earth."

Madalena spotted several of her neighbours' sons among the militia. "Some had masks. Some painted their skins with oils and earth. There were soldiers and police. Some people tried to run towards the lake but they were cut down."

The militia burned tyres at the church's heavy wooden doors to smoke out the condemned into the path of swirling machetes. A barrage of grenades and gunfire cut down many who remained inside until the interahamwe burst through, chopping at the living and the dead. Madalena ran for the back door with her father.

"As he went out he was hacked and immediately killed. So many people running out the door were killed, but somehow the blades never caught me. I kept running all the way to the lake. There was a crowd of us but at the lake there were more militia. So we turned and ran to the nuns' home," she says. "I didn't know where to hide, so I went to the cellars."

Young women were hauled into the undergrowth and gang raped, among them a girl called Rahel, whose attackers then gouged her eyes out. She begged to be led to the lake so she could drown herself but there were too many militiamen down by the water and she bled to death.

The survivors

Dr Kayishema marched into the church when the bulk of the killing was done, gripping a sword. One of the militiamen hauled a half living man to his feet and the doctor finished him off. He came across a small child. It wasn't making a sound, but its tiny body was wriggling. Kayishema brought his sword down on it three times. The child's murder might never have been recorded but for Louis Rutaganira, who lay under it pretending to be dead.

"I saw my wife, who was still alive. They had cut off her legs and arms and left her to bleed to death. I never saw my children again. I don't know how they died," he says. "I lost so many people in the church; brothers, uncles, cousins. I calculated and made it 86."

After the slaughter, the church became one of the safest places to hide. The rotting corpses kept the militia at bay and Louis buried himself under the bodies.

"At night I would creep down to the lake to drink and eat bananas and sneak back into the church and hide under the bodies before dawn," he says. "On the first night, there were some wounded children in the brush, crying out all night. The crying attracted the interahamwe. They picked up the children and smashed them against the wall."

A fortnight after the killing, a bulldozer was brought in to dig a mass grave. Louis made his escape to the Bisesero hills, south of the town, where the only organised Tutsi resistance of the genocide was getting underway.

After the church, the murder squads moved on to the nuns' home where a child's cries gave away Madalena's hiding place. Dozens of Tutsis were lined up and driven towards the large Hutu man with the club. Madalena watched with gratification how expertly the killer at the front of the line wielded the monstrous instrument, felling each person with a single powerful blow as the club swung without interruption. The victims barely made a sound.

"I stepped up for my turn to die. The man raised the club, then a policeman stuck his gun in the way. I grabbed the policeman and said: 'If you are not going to let him kill us, please kill us with a bullet.' Others were saying the same thing. But he said: 'No, I have plans for you. We will kill you later, but for now you must walk'."

Eleven thousand people were murdered in and around Kibuye church on April 17 1994. The next day, Dr Kayishema led the slaughter of about 10,000 people in the town's stadium.

A decade on, Madalena has not changed her view that it would have been better to die under the swinging club. The killers are back on the streets of Kibuye and the survivors of the genocide are divided on what it means.

The genocide in Rwanda lasted 100 days and claimed about 800,000 lives. The shock waves spread far beyond the borders of the tiny Central African state, dethroning Mobutu Sese Seko after Rwanda's army marched across Zaire to avenge his support for the Hutu murderers. Gnawing guilt at western indifference to the genocide - one high-ranking Rwandan official told me that British diplomats at the UN reacted to his pleas to stop the slaughter as if he were talking about the killing of ants, not people - laid the foundation for Africa's first international tribunal in the Hague mould and provided the backdrop for Britain's military intervention in Sierra Leone four years ago.

Bill Clinton and Kofi Annan, who was head of UN peacekeeping at the time, offered half-hearted apologies for their failure to save the Tutsis, premised on the lie that they did not know. That was further than France was prepared to go over its military support of the Hutu regime. More recently, the tables have turned with critics of Rwanda's Tutsi leadership accusing it of subsequently overseeing an orgy of killing, rape and plunder in eastern Congo.

But for many of the survivors, the genocide lives on. Madalena's tiny home is decorated with religious pictures even though she refuses to go near the church any more. She gestures at a painting of Christ on the cross. "I believe Jesus was crucified, crucified like the Tutsis."

Now 52 years old, she has an open face, bright eyes and a schoolgirl giggle. But her expression switches suddenly to wrenching sadness as she tells how her sister-in-law and a dozen members of her family who survived the slaughter in 1994 were butchered three years later by Hutu militiamen who crossed from Zaire.

Madalena took in six orphans from her extended family, bringing them up alongside her own four children. Almost all the girls and women in the family were raped, and one of the adopted children died of Aids. The others show no signs of HIV but do not know for sure.

Survivor organisations estimate that two-thirds of Tutsi women who were raped are HIV-positive. One-quarter of all Rwandan children are orphans because of the genocide, war and Aids. Nearly one-third of all households in Rwanda are headed by women because so many of the men were killed.

Another of the orphans taken in by Madalena, Savera Mukasharango, was 15 years old in 1994. Two years ago she was walking through Kibuye when she came face to face with the man who murdered

her father. "After that she went and threw herself in the lake and drowned because of the pain of seeing him," says Madalena.

There are about 1,000 Tutsi survivors living in Kibuye town. Today they are outnumbered by the number of freed killers on the streets. "They live in the neighbourhood. They drink in the bars. We saw what they did with our own eyes. We live in fear because they are free," says Madalena.

The government began releasing the genocidaire nearly two years ago. The nation's jail population had swelled to 120,000 and the established court system would have taken more than a century to try them. So the authorities revived a system of traditional courts - gacaca - designed to provide village justice with restitution through community service.

All but the worst killers - those who organised the slaughter, or were particularly noteworthy in the scale or brutality of their atrocities - are eligible for release if they confess their crimes, apologise to the families of their victims and agree restitution. The freed prisoner must also go before the gacaca courts as a witness against other genocidaire.

More than 25,000 killers have been released. Tens of thousands more are expected to follow. In Kibuye, 1,740 of the murderers are back on the streets. Many of the Tutsi survivors see their expressions of remorse as little more than a cynical move to win release.

"Some write us letters saying, 'You can help us to get out of prison.' They don't want to talk about the people they killed. They say 'for what happened', never for 'killing your family'. They think that is confessing. One came to my husband and offered him a cow to forgive him. It's like a bribe," says Madalena.

"Truly if somebody comes to us and says 'Forgive me, I killed', saying the truth, there is no way not to forgive that person. But these people see us, the survivors, as the people in the wrong, as the people trying to finish them by putting them in prison ... You can meet them in a bar and a word slips out - why did I let you live?"

The killers

Madalena reels of a list of freed killers. One, she says, is renovating a hotel in the next street. He is called Pascal Parasi. "He is a child killer," says Madalena. "I see him all the time in my street. It is very painful."

Parasi is a small, wiry man of 36 wearing a torn red vest with a Marlboro cigarette logo. He begins by lying. "Myself, I didn't kill but I went with a person who had a grenade. There were four of us in that group. I was there with the killers," he says.

Parasi's eyes dart about. He tries evasion again but, when it is suggested that the authorities must have a record of his confession, he mumbles a part of the truth.

"I accept that I killed a child. He was 13 years old. It happened when one of the others threw a grenade at three children. It killed two of them but it only injured the boy. The one with the grenade ordered me to finish him off and that's when I did it. I chopped him," he says.

As the conversation progresses, Parasi admits that he was the one who threw the grenade and that no one ordered him to kill the surviving boy with a machete. He says he does not know the names of any of his victims.

Parasi was sentenced to 15 years in prison. As a condition of his release, he agreed to pay compensation of 32,000 Rwandan francs (£36) to the father of the teenage boy he murdered. He did not have the money so his mother handed over a piece of land instead.

"I never had the heart of a human at that time. Now I know I did something wrong. I didn't admit it to reduce my sentence. I wasn't dishonest. My heart was convicting me, making me feel that I'm guilty for what I did."

Another former prisoner, Francois Ndangamira, spent seven years in jail before confessing that he clubbed two young sisters to death. The Catholic church brought the 37-year-old builder together with the aunt of the two girls.

"Before they came, they brought a letter asking me if really what I'm saying is from the heart, if I'm truly sorry. After, they came and we met face to face. They forgave me because they could see I am really sorry for that thing I did," he says.

But ask him the names of the two girls he murdered and he doesn't know. All he can say is that they were eight and 12 years old.

The children's aunt, Adria Mukarukaka, is among the last survivors in her family. She says the girls were called Marie Yankuufe and Beatrice Yamfasufe and is not surprised that their killer does not know their names.

Ndangamira says he and the aunt meet regularly. When they do, he is effusive. "We have become good friends now," he says. "She has forgiven me completely." The girl's aunt shakes his hand but does not look him in the eye, and as soon as he has stepped out of earshot, she says: "He didn't kill only two. He killed at least six in my family and others too. He killed my two brothers, the wives of my brothers, my nieces. I did not forgive him because I think he is sincere, I forgave him because the church told me to."

Why does she not tell him herself? "You just have to be quiet. What can we say? They know who we are and we know who they are," she says.

The Catholic church is at the forefront of pressing the guilty to confess and the survivors to forgive, but it has yet to acknowledge its own role in the transformation of so many churches to extermination centres.

A few weeks after the massacre in Kibuye, the Catholic congregation filed in to what had been Father Senyenzi's church, for Sunday mass. A few feet away the half-buried bodies gave off the sweet, nauseating stench that was by now familiar across much of Rwanda. The worshippers feigned ignorance. One woman spat that it was a lie anyone had been murdered. She declined an invitation to step a few yards to her left and cast an eye over the sloping ground spotted with bones stripped by dogs and washed by rain.

Another worshipper confessed that there had been a lot of killing but he was adamant that the dead were rebels who holed themselves up in the church. Father Senyenzi was hiding them, he said, that was why he had to die too.

Some of the faithful had tried to scrub away the blood that painted the walls and floor but the torrent had worked its way too well into the crannies and there was no escaping the smell. The worshippers prayed holding their noses or with cloths pressed against their faces.

The new priest, a Hutu, offered no prayers for his murdered predecessor. Father Jean Francois Kayiranga previously officiated at a parish in the east of the province but needed a new church, having ordered his own to be bulldozed with 2,000 Tutsis inside. He was not a lone criminal within the clergy. Many priests and nuns were courageous - about 200 of them were murdered - but others were at the forefront of the killing. In Butare, a group of nuns poured the petrol used to immolate Tutsi women. Other nuns led children by the hand to the waiting interahamwe. Father Wenceslas

Munyeshyaka was to be found at his church in Kigali with a cross around his neck, a pistol on his hip and a list in his hand from which he announced those selected to die.

The churchmen

A year after the genocide, the Pope set the line that is maintained to this day: the church cannot be blamed for the crimes of individual priests and nuns. "The church lost its children, and some of the church's children were doing the killings," says Kibuye's parish priest today, Gaudens Murasandonyi, a 33-year-old Tutsi. "But the church does not have responsibility for what happened. It did not cause the killings. If priests were involved they were responsible as individuals, not as the church."

Many of the survivors think differently. "I blame the church with all my heart," says Madalena. "During the massacres in 1973 we went in the church to hide and nobody came to kill us. In 1994, everybody thought the church would be safe again but that is where we died. That archbishop, Vincent Nsengiyumva, was in charge. He never did anything to stop the killing. He could have said nobody must kill anybody in the church, but he did not."

The Catholic church in Rwanda was deeply compromised by its myriad of ties to the Hutu regime. The archbishop, Nsengiyumva, had been a member of the cabinet until the Pope put a stop to it in 1990. At the height of the slaughter, he was living in a compound with cabinet ministers and army chiefs who were directing mass murder, yet he barely raised his voice in protest. Towards the end, he watched silently as the interahamwe led away 16 people, including four priests, seven monks and a Hutu nun who were battered to death with a hammer. Through the genocide, the archbishop kept up his weekly broadcast on Radio Rwanda. In one of them he praised Muyeshyaka for his "good work". In June 1994, Nsengiyumva and 13 priests were captured and shot by Tutsi rebels.

No less compromised was the Anglican archbishop, Augustin Nshamihigo. He had been an obscure military chaplain elevated to the inner circle of Rwandan power. When the killing started, Nshamihigo spent his days in convoluted reasoning as to why he would not condemn the genocide or its organisers.

When, five weeks into the killing, leading Catholics and Protestants finally issued a statement condemning murders on all sides - a dubious document because it effectively equated deaths in war with the extermination of Tutsis - the Anglican archbishop refused to sign even that ambivalent statement. Rwandans took this as an endorsement of the killing.

After the genocide, a priest showed me a yellowing document written in 1972. It was a plea by a group of young Hutu priests to the white archbishop of the time to purge the Catholic church in Rwanda of Tutsi "domination". The letter derides Tutsis as cockroaches and accuses Tutsi priests of failing to recognise the Hutu "victory". Eleven priests and religious leaders signed the letter, among them Andre Havugimana, who was a young curate in 1972 but rose to become secretary of the Episcopal Conference, the third highest position in the church in Rwanda. At his office in Kigali, Havugimana was long on reasoning, saying the document was written in a spirit of "justice and charity", but he had difficulty explaining why it described Tutsis as cockroaches, a word so frequently applied to the doomed by their murderers in 1994.

"I admit that some people can get hurt by that, but that was the language of the day. At that time it could be understood in the context of the country's history, but, I admit, today you can't use words like that," he says.

But he too declines to concede that such views within the church may have some responsibility for creating the climate for genocide.

After the killing, the Catholic church shielded priests and bishops implicated in the slaughter and helped some of the most notorious to flee abroad. Among them was Father Hormisdas Nsengimana,

who survivors describe as a particularly cruel killer at his parish in Nyanza. The church gave him a new parish in Cameroon.

Before the end of 1994, the doors to Kibuye's church were bolted. The holes ripped by bullets and grenades through the wooden pews, stained-glass windows and corrugated iron roof remained as a testament to the slaughter. Bloodied handprints on the walls of the priest's rooms behind and above the church, and the macheted metal doors of the toilets peeled away like banana skin, were untouched. Children played with human bones as if they were sticks from the forest.

The government wanted to preserve Kibuye church as a memorial, as it has done in other towns. The bishops resisted, fearing that Catholic churches across Rwanda would become monuments to genocide. A compromise was reached. A memorial to the murdered thousands, whose bodies were slung among the hillside trees and buried in a deep pit near the church doors, was built around the mass grave. A plaque proclaimed that 11,400 people died there. Skulls and bones were propped up inside a glass case, providing a backdrop to a carving of Christ at crucifixion.

The bishops returned to reconsecrate the church in 1997 and services resumed. But many of those who survived the massacre refused to pray there. Louis Rutaganira joined the American evangelist Pat Robertson's church, Assemblies of God. "I cannot go back to that church. It betrayed all of us. The Catholic church has never apologised for supporting the killers," he says.

Madalena returned briefly. "At first I went again and I was OK with it. Later on, I was taking mass and I looked at the man holding the cup. I imagined he was one of the killers. He wasn't. I looked at the church and I kept seeing the bodies. It all came back. I couldn't stand it. I went home and I didn't go back," she says.

Other survivors defected from the Seventh Day Adventists, the Anglican church, and other denominations tainted by the genocide. There was one exception. Islam found new adherents because the imams refused to draw a distinction between Hutu and Tutsi, and called on Muslims to oppose the killing. It was the only practising religion in Rwanda uncompromised by the genocide.

Among the myths eroded by the passing years is that all Hutus welcomed the murder of their neighbours. Few of the survivors in Kibuye would have lived without the help of Hutus - many of them strangers - who risked their lives to subvert the killing.

The gendarme who stopped Madalena from being clubbed to death outside the church had no intention of killing her, despite what he told the interahamwe. Four policemen led the line of survivors to safety through the corpse-ridden brush. "We heard a child cry out for help. We were furious because it was shouting and we thought it would bring the interahamwe. I thought to myself: 'Shut up child. Shut up or die,'" says Madalena.

A policeman found the boy covered in blood but not wounded and put him in the line. "They took us to a safe house and I looked at the boy we had found in the bush," says Madalena. "I hadn't been able to see him before because it was dark. It was my son. That is the worst moment of the genocide, when I realised I had wished my son to die."

Hours later, her two daughters arrived having been hidden by a woman in the roof of the nuns' home behind the church.

The good Hutu

But hiding was difficult in such a small town. "Three days later, the interahamwe came and captured me and my two daughters. They stripped me naked and said they would do whatever they wanted with me until I died. Some of them said I should just be cut to pieces. Others said they would throw me in the same grave as a girl who was a beauty queen. They raped her and threw her in the grave when she was still alive.

"After they had finished with me, one of the men hit me and threw me in the pit with the bodies but another dragged me out. I was covered in blood of that woman, the beauty queen. One of my daughters arrived. She was naked and in a similar state. They gave the order that the men should continue with the programme. They did whatever they wanted with us."

Madalena and her family were again saved from death by the intervention of a Hutu, this time a member of the interahamwe who knew them well, Johan Gasarasi. He told them they could buy their lives.

The militiamen dragged Madalena to her bank and told her to empty her account. There was 35,000 francs in it. She was allowed to return to live in hiding in the ruins of her home but the killers were back before long demanding more cash. Madalena sent a note with a child to the bank asking for a loan. There was not much prospect of it being repaid but the note fell into the hands of a young Hutu cashier, Theoneste Nzigiimana, who withdrew 20,000 francs of his own savings and handed it to the child to give to Madalena.

In the coming weeks, Theoneste was to hand over a lot more cash, even taking out loans, to help 10 Tutsis and their families buy their lives or escape the slaughter.

"I was seeing the leadership was doing things that weren't good, so in my heart I knew it was wrong," says Theoneste. "These are people we used to share things with, living together, marrying each other, working together. And now they were hunted and they could not get money. Some needed it to get boats to escape. They would send notes and I went to where they were hiding, in the roofs of houses or in the sorghum fields. If they had money in their accounts they signed and I gave it to them. If they didn't have money I found it somehow."

Theoneste has kept one of the notes written by Madalena. "She wrote to me on pieces of paper saying that her life is at an end and any time she might be dead and if I can get money it will help keep her alive for a few more days. I thought I may never see her again, I must help this woman. It was everything in my account," he says.

Among the others helped by the bank clerk was Louis Rutaganira, who had fled the church for the hills of Biseseero. After that he slipped away to the forest where he was able to send Theoneste a note asking for cash to hire a dugout to take him across Lake Kivu to the Zairean island of Ijwe. But Louis was among the lucky few. By early May 1994, almost all the Tutsis in Kibuye were dead. Dr Kayishema was rewarded with a visit by Rwanda's new prime minister, Jean Kambanda, whose predecessor was murdered on the first day of the genocide. He congratulated the citizens on defending themselves from the "inyenzi" (cockroaches) and told them to keep up the good work.

A few brave voices were raised in dissent. A doctor, Leonard Hitimana, demanded that the prime minister do something to help children at the hospital who had survived the killing. Kambanda stayed silent. Dr Hitimana was sinisterly warned to mind his health by his erstwhile colleague, Dr Kayishema, and within hours the children were dead.

A fortnight later, President Theodore Sindikubwabo made a similar visit. He told a crowd packed into the town hall to give themselves a congratulatory round of applause for their good "work". Everybody clapped.

By then, Dr Kayishema's efforts had turned to culling the thousands of Tutsis in the Biseseero hills, about 40km south of Kibuye town. No one is sure how many died in Biseseero but they number in the thousands. Many were murdered after the arrival of the French army under a UN mandate to create a "safe haven". The French commander in Kibuye declined to remove the roadblocks manned by the interahamwe on the grounds they were necessary for civil defence. He also took Dr Kayishema's word that he was fighting Tutsi rebels in the hills and allowed the slaughter of women and children to continue for another fortnight.

But the French army did provide a safe haven for the murderers, assisting Dr Kayishema and many of his cohorts to slip away to Zaire when the killing was finally over.

Ask the murderers why they did it and almost all say because their leaders told them to. Ask them what reason there is to think they won't do it again and they say because Rwanda now has better leaders. From that, many of the survivors conclude that another genocide is all too possible if the wrong people came to power again.

For the first time since the Germans colonised Rwanda there is a government that does not promote a message of ethnic superiority. Talk of Hutu and Tutsi is discouraged; the classification erased from identity cards. The new governor of Kibuye, the man who now sits in Dr Kayishema's office, is Deo Nkusi.

"When I arrived in Kibuye I would describe it as a place built on a cemetery and on the top of the cemetery there arose an orphanage," he says. "Changing people here is like bending steel. The people were bent into one shape over 40 years and they have to be bent back. If we do it too fast we will just break them. We have to exert pressure gradually."

The brave decision to begin the gacaca process has forced widespread acknowledgement by the murderers of their crimes when before there had only been denial. But shaping a new Rwanda does not yet extend to trusting the majority with political power.

Rwanda's Tutsi president, Paul Kagame, won last year's election with 95% of the vote in a country where nine out of 10 voters are Hutu and a decade ago many of them would willingly have killed him. Even his foreign supporters concede the ballot was rigged, although they say he would have won anyway because Kagame brought security to Hutus who paid a price for the crimes done in their name. Two million fled Rwanda to die in their tens of thousands of cholera on the volcanic wastelands near Goma, or starved on forced marches through Zaire only to return to the squalid hell of Rwanda's prisons.

Francois Ndagamira, the man who clubbed two young sisters to death, has a "Vote Kagame" election poster on his living room wall. Yet Kagame was concerned enough to effectively bar the leading opposition candidate, a former Hutu prime minister, Faustin Twagiramungu, from the election for "divisionism" - appealing to Hutu nationalism.

The first president after the genocide, another Hutu, is in prison on the same charge after trying to launch a new political party.

To some, this is evidence that Kagame is little better than the fascists who went before. But while the survivors may be willing to tolerate the killers back on the streets as a step toward constructing a new Rwanda, the fear and trauma are still too raw for them to entrust their safety to the hands of Hutu-controlled government.

"If Kagame had lost the election, I would have left the country the same day," says Madalena. "If I had stayed until night, I would have been dead." Dr Kayishema was arrested by the international tribunal while hiding in Zambia. At his trial, he shamelessly denied his crimes and claimed he had been a prisoner of the Hutu extremists, not their leader in Kibuye. He was not alone in rejecting culpability.

The tribunal has been hugely successful at laying its hands on the men and women who oversaw the slaughter. Few have shown any sorrow. Jean Kambanda, the prime minister who visited Kibuye to praise the killing, pleaded guilty to genocide but rejected the opportunity to apologise. Most of the accused maintain the fiction that the Tutsis were victims of a spontaneous bloodletting provoked by the murder of President Habyarimana. Dr Kayishema is serving a life sentence in an air-conditioned cell at a UN facility in Mali, which makes him luckier than his younger brother who has spent nearly a decade in Rwandan jails so overcrowded that the inmates sleep in shifts. In Kibuye, Gregoire

Musabyimana arrives to talk dressed in the standard prison uniform of shocking pink shirt and shorts, dulled by dirt.

"I didn't kill anyone. I have nothing to feel guilty about," he says. Asked if there was a genocide, he hesitates. "For me it was a war and people on both sides died. Both Hutu and Tutsi died. But later on the Hutu had the upper hand and they killed all the Tutsis. I don't know why," he says. Their father had been a leading Hutu extremist and functionary in Kibuye 40 years earlier. Would he have approved of the war against the Tutsis? "My father would have been on the side of defending the Hutu," says Musabyimana. Theoneste Nzigiyimana, the bank clerk, is uncertain about whether his fellow Hutus are to be trusted today. "They discovered that what happened wasn't good, that it had a very bad outcome. Some were killed and some had to go to prison. But even with the leadership at the moment, it's not certain that it won't happen again," he says.

"The government says we are all Rwandans and we must not have Hutu and Tutsi in our heads but I think there are still many people who think like that. It will take a very long time to stop it but we must try."

The survivors differ, their thinking shaped by their experiences after the genocide. For Madalena, there has been continuing death and suffering but Louis Rutaganira remarried and passionately wants to believe in a better Rwanda for the sake of his three young children.

"Because of good politics, the nation is learning. Even the prisoners are confessing, saying what they did and asking for forgiveness.

If you have someone who comes to you and pleads and says 'I've done something wrong', even writes letters, there's something that it shows. It shows that someone wants to change. Someone is not bad forever. People change," he says. "It takes us who have suffered to be heroes and learn to live together so our children can grow up without the ethnicity in them. Ten years is not enough to drive this thinking out of a person but our children will be different."

Others have made different compromises. Agnes Mukariukaka is a Tutsi. Her husband, Vedaste Sengorore, was a member of a Hutu death squad. Shortly after the genocide, Agnes told how her husband had saved her while killing others. She moved in with a Tutsi army captain. A decade on, the couple are back together after Sengorore was released. Agnes now says he committed no crime.

"He didn't do the killings. I made a mistake. He was just a driver," she says. "There is no point in thinking about the past or the future. I only think about today. There is no point in talking to people. I only talk to God."

Madalena says that mostly she wishes she had not been saved by the gendarme. "Surviving is not what we wanted to happen. Life is not something to be happy about. It is so difficult to live with what we know and what we see."

No one really survives a genocide. A decade on, what is most striking is that so many of the Tutsis left in Kibuye have found the strength to go on living.