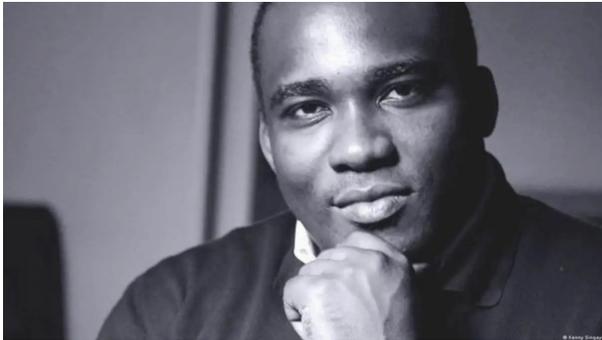


Jean-Luc Habyarimana and the Genocidal nostalgia

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Jean-Luc Habyarimana, son of former President Juvénal Habyarimana. INTERNET PHOTO

When genocidal ideology reappears, it rarely announces itself with guns or machetes. It favors orchids, nostalgia, moral posturing, and the comforting language of “human values.”

On 13 January 2026, one of Kinshasa’s propaganda relays, Onésha Afrika, published a piece with the captivating title; “The Legacy of Orchids: Exclusive Interview with Jean-Luc Habyarimana.” For anyone who studies genocide ideology and denial, the article is not merely revealing; it is educational.

One almost feels duty-bound to thank Jean-Luc Habyarimana—not for his objec-

tives, but for his candor. He says aloud what genocide ideologues usually express in code, whisper, or strategically ambiguous. He performs denial not as absence of memory, but as conviction.

What follows is not outrage for its own sake. It is a dissection. Because genocidal discourse does not function through crude lies alone; it works through moral inversion, selective nostalgia, theological naturalization of racism, and the recycling of grievance as political entitlement. Jean-Luc Habyarimana’s interview offers a textbook case.

Ideology as character, exile as alibi

Jean-Luc Habyarimana declares: “I am a man of convictions, slow to form them, but unwaveringly loyal once my mind is made up.”

At face value, this is meant to signal integrity. In reality, it is a confession. Not conviction as a virtue. Conviction, in genocidal ideology, is not the outcome of ethical reflection but the refusal of ethical revision.

As Hannah Arendt observed in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), the danger lies not in fanaticism alone but in thoughtlessness—the incapacity or refusal to interrogate one’s own premises.

Jean-Luc is approaching his 50th birthday. Yet he boasts—indirectly—of beliefs formed early and never revised. At 18, he reportedly wished to shoot at the already assassinated Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana. That is not adolescent excess; it is ideological early socialization. Gregory Stanton’s stages of genocide remind us that indoctrination precedes participation, and moral certainty often predates physical violence.

Seen in this light, his later trajectory—membership in Jambo Asbl, fellow feeling for or support of the FDLR, and relentless genocide denial—is not surprising. Conviction here is not moral strength; it is ideological rigidity sanctified as character.

What Jean-Luc presents as moral steadfastness is, analytically speaking, a closed epistemic system. Scholars of extremist belief systems note that such actors invert doubt into vice and rigidity into virtue. Once “conviction” becomes an identity rather than a conclusion, evidence no longer functions as a corrective but as a danger.

This explains why genocidal ideologues often narrate their biographies as stories of early awakening: the earlier the belief, the purer it appears. In this logic, growth is betrayal and change is treason. Jean-Luc’s self-portrait therefore does ideological work: it immunizes him against accountability by recasting moral stagnation as ethical heroism.

Jean-Luc Habyarimana claims: “My exile

is not a choice. It is a condition for survival. I left Rwanda because my security and my rights as a citizen were no longer guaranteed—a reality that, far from improving, has hardened over time.” This is one of the most revealing sentences in the interview, because it contains two discourses in one, layered to mislead.

Historically, his family fled Rwanda on 9 April 1994, the very day the *genocidaires’* interim government—headed by Théodore Sindikubwabo—was sworn in. If exile was indeed “a condition for survival,” the threat did not come from the Rwandan Patriotic Army as *genocidaires* and their supporters allege. It came from within the genocidal camp itself, amid factional struggles over responsibility for shooting down the presidential jet.

Here denial operates through victim-perpetrator reversal, a mechanism extensively analyzed by Stanley Cohen in *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (2001). The family of power flees not because genocide is unfolding, but because proximity to its orchestration is dangerous. Exile rhetoric is a staple of post-genocide denialism. It allows former elites to recast loss of impunity as persecution and judicial scrutiny as existential threat. In this narrative economy, survival is no longer biological but political: survival means surviving justice.

Jean-Luc’s phrasing deliberately erases chronology, flattening April 1994 into a timeless danger allegedly emanating from today’s Rwanda. Such temporal collapse is strategic. It dissolves cause and effect, replacing them with perpetual victimhood, a key emotional

resource for genocidal nostalgia.

When he says that “the reality has hardened,” what he is really describing is not repression. He is lamenting accountability. Reality has indeed hardened—toughened against denial, against nostalgia masquerading as grief, against the theatrical lamentations of those who confuse the loss of power with the loss of peace.

His next sentence is therefore crucial, because it exposes the entire architecture of genocidal afterlife discourse in one breath: “Every day, Rwandans from all walks of life contact me—contact us—to express sympathy for our family, but above all their nostalgia for a time when human life had value, when peace was not a slogan but a lived reality.”

This is denial dressed as sentimentality, ideology softened into a child’s bedtime song. The phrase “Rwandans from all walks of life” is not descriptive; it is incantatory or hypnotic. It functions the way “the people” functions in populist authoritarian speech: a vague, unverifiable moral chorus summoned to replace evidence. No names, no social markers—just an imagined national low sound of approval whispering into the ear of the heir.

But let us be thoughtful. Among these daily callers, these carriers of nostalgia and sympathy, one can be certain of who is absent. There are no survivors of the Genocide Against the Tutsi dialing Jean-Luc Habyarimana to reminisce about the good old days. There are no widows of Nyamata, no orphans of Murambi, no families whose loved ones were hunted, raped, mutilated, and exterminated

under the authority of the regime his family embodied and financed. The dead do not feel nostalgia for the boots and grenades that crushed them.

The social world evoked here is not Rwanda; it is a closed echo chamber of perpetrators, accomplices, fugitives, and ideological cousins. Birds of the same feather indeed flock together—especially when the nest itself is a crime scene. One need not speculate excitedly. Jean-Luc’s sister was married to the son of Félicien Kabuga, the genocide’s principal financier. His uncle Protais Zigiranyirazo is a known *genocidaires*.

His aunt, Sister Godelive Barushywanubusa, fled Gacaca justice and remains a fugitive. These are not peripheral associations; they are genealogies of power, money, and blood. When Jean-Luc says “our family,” he is not invoking kinship in the sentimental sense; he is invoking a political clan whose collective trauma is not loss of life but loss of impunity.

And what exactly is this “time when human life had value” that inspires such longing? This is where the statement crosses from denial into weird farce. A regime that institutionalized ethnic quotas, orchestrated pogroms, normalized exile, criminalized Tutsi existence, and finally planned and executed the extermination of over a million people is retroactively crowned a golden age of peace. This is not the usual historical revisionism; it is moral necromancy.

In his book: *Politics and the English Language* (1946)—George Orwell warned against a political language designed “to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable.”

Jean-Luc Habyarimana goes further: he makes murder sound nostalgic. Peace, in this lexicon, is not the absence of violence but the absence of resistance. Under the leadership of his father Juvenal Habyarimana, human life had value, apparently, as long as it was hierarchized, counted, and disposable. This is classic genocidal logic: life is sacred—provided it belongs to the right category.

The sadness and frustration he reports are simply the emotional residues of a defeated supremacist and genocidal project. These are the tears of people who woke up in a Rwanda where Tutsi are no longer hunted, where the state no longer belongs to one artificial ‘racial’ faction, where history resolutely refuses to forget. Their pain is not the pain of injustice endured, but the pain of injustice interrupted.

This is why the statement matters so much. It is not anecdotal; it is diagnostic. Jean-Luc inadvertently provides a perfect ethnography of genocidal nostalgia. The callers are not mourning victims; they are mourning loss of relevance. They are grieving the collapse of a racial order that once guaranteed them moral innocence, political privilege, and metaphysical certainty.

To call this “psychological numbing” is generous. It is more accurately a pathology of entitlement, where the loss of domination is experienced as existential trauma. That Jean-Luc presents this pathology as national sentiment is not accidental. He no longer denies the crime outright. He mourns the inconvenience of its remembrance.

And that, precisely, is why this passage is the most important in the entire interview.

It is here that denial stops pretending to be confused and reveals itself as nostalgia with a body count carefully edited out.

This is denial in its purest form—not silence, but affective reconstruction. Nostalgia is not memory; it is ideology wrapped in sentiment. Svetlana Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001)—distinguished between reflective nostalgia and restorative nostalgia, the latter seeking to rebuild a mythic past while erasing its violence. Jean-Luc’s nostalgia is restorative and racialized.

Nostalgia here performs a dual function: it anesthetizes moral judgment while mobilizing grievance. By aestheticizing the past, Jean-Luc invites readers to sympathize before they think. Scholars of propaganda note that emotional resonance often precedes ideological persuasion. Once the reader mourns a fictionalized past, they become receptive to its political restoration. This is why nostalgia is so central to genocidal afterlives: it converts perpetrators into miserable witnesses of a lost Eden, thereby laundering historical responsibility through sentimentality.

Ideological façade

Jean-Luc Habyarimana insists that his “engagement” with Rwanda is not ideological but moral. This is a familiar maneuver. Ideology, after all, the one he holds dear, has a bad reputation—especially when it has already led to mass graves. So it must be laundered, rebranded as duty, preferably parental.

Thus he declares, with solemn gravity: “As a father, I refuse to pass on to our children a legacy of normalized injustice, confiscated memory, and exported regional conflicts.”

The irony here is not subtle. Everything Jean-Luc claims to reject is precisely what he reproduces, transmits, and embalms. Confiscated memory? He denies the specificity of the Genocide Against the Tutsi. Normalized injustice? He yearns for a racial state. Exported conflict? He supports forces like the FDLR, whose very existence destabilizes the Great Lakes region.

The legacy his children are most likely to inherit is not justice but carefully curated ignorance. They will grow up fluent in hate speech, allergic to facts, and profoundly shielded from the reality that their paternal grandparents were not tragic patriots but Interahamwe. They will never be told that their father's childhood home was not a family residence but a genocidal command post—a site from which death orders radiated before French forces exfiltrated the family to safety. Memory is indeed confiscated in this household—not by the Rwandan state, but by denial.

Genocidal discourse often cloaks itself in the language of parenthood and futurity. As scholars of discourse note, invoking children is a way of moral laundering: hatred is reframed as protection. The parental pose is among the most cynical tropes in extremist rhetoric. By invoking children, Jean-Luc disarms criticism in advance: who would oppose a father acting “for the future”?

Jean-Luc's parental rhetoric is therefore not about protecting children; it is about protecting lineage. The future he imagines is one in which history is rewritten to preserve familial innocence. This is denial's most familiar form: not public propaganda, but do-

mestic pedagogy. The genocide is distorted, diluted, externalized, until it becomes an unfortunate misunderstanding that happened around the family—never because of it.

When he claims that compatriots constantly ask him to “intervene,” to “draw the world's attention,” we are firmly back in the register of classic Hutu-Power messianism. “This permanent connection with my people anchors me in reality,” he says. This is a classic imagined constituency, a technique used by demagogues to substitute anecdotes for legitimacy. “My people” here is not the nation; it is the ethnicized political subject of Hutu-Power ideology.

Reality, here, is defined as a closed circuit of ethnic affirmation. “My people” does not mean citizens; it means the imagined moral community of the aggrieved Hutu—eternally wronged, perpetually disregarded, forever entitled to rule. In his seminal work *Imagined Communities* (1983)—Benedict Anderson warned that nations are imagined communities. However, genocidal movements imagine something far narrower—a racial community sanctified by grievance.

What is striking is not the claim of popular support but its vagueness. No numbers, no institutions, no verifiable mechanisms—only voices, whispers, and constant contact. This ambiguity is deliberate. It allows the speaker to occupy the symbolic center of a community that cannot be empirically challenged. In genocidal discourse, legitimacy flows not from consent but from presumed ethnic authenticity. Jean-Luc positions himself as vessel rather than agent, thereby evading responsibility while claiming authority.

This is not engagement; it is political ventriloquism. Anonymous voices speak, and Jean-Luc interprets. Emotional bonds are transmuted into “moral responsibility,” which conveniently resembles inherited authority. One hears the unmistakable echo of his father’s reign: the leader as translator of ethnic suffering, the nation reduced to a single grievance narrative, dissent dismissed as foreign manipulation. The difference is cosmetic. The grammar is identical.

His accusation that Rwanda today “rests on a tragic instrumentalization of the genocide,” producing what he calls “memorial apartheid,” is not intellectual critique but ideological counter-memory. This concept is carefully designed to wipe out asymmetry. As genocide scholar Deborah E. Lipstadt, author of *Denying the Holocaust* (1993)—has long argued, denial today rarely denies death; it denies meaning, intent, and responsibility. Jean-Luc does exactly that.

Perpetrators and victims are folded into the same moral category, history flattened into competing sorrows. This is not reconciliation but moral laundering. The genocide becomes a rhetorical resource rather than a crime with architects, financiers, and executioners.

The use of emancipatory vocabulary “apartheid” is above all contemptuous. It seeks to appropriate the moral capital of anti-racist struggle in order to undermine genocide remembrance. This transposition depends on erasing power relations: those who organized violence recast themselves as marginalized mourners. Such discourse is persuasive only if historical asymmetry is

obscured—precisely the outcome denial seeks to achieve.

When Jean-Luc insists that a “part of the population” is deprived of the right to mourn its dead “massacred in the 1990s,” he performs the central trick of contemporary denial: transforming those killed during war, judicial pursuit, or the collapse of a genocidal regime into equivalent victims of extermination. Here, intent disappears. Planning evaporates. Responsibility dissolves. What remains is grievance without guilt.

His account of the RPF’s October 1, 1990 invasion is straight from the Hutu-Power catechism. No refugees. No decades of exile. No institutionalized discrimination. Just a peaceful Rwanda cruelly disrupted by power-hungry invaders. History is amputated at the moment it becomes inconvenient.

Every clause has been answered by decades of scholarship, ICTR records, and archival evidence. Yet denial persists because, as Zygmunt Bauman observed in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989), modern evil is bureaucratic and repetitive. It thrives on rehearsal.

Repetition is not redundancy; it is strategy. Each reiteration normalizes the lie, especially when presented in polished, interview-friendly language. The aim is not to convince experts but to exhaust public attention, creating the illusion of controversy where there is scholarly consensus. This is denial as noise production.

Finally, we arrive at the savior fantasy: “The day will come when exiles return... to Rwanda on just, humane, and sustainable foundations.” The language is almost humanitarian. One half expects a donor conference

to follow. Yet beneath the velvet lies the old steel: return, re-foundation, moral cleansing. Jean-Luc does not imagine himself as a citizen returning home, but as a redeemer arriving to correct history.

This is not a moral duty. It is eschatological politics, where the heir of a genocidal order recasts himself as its ethical alternative. The tragedy is that denial, when polished and paternal, still finds microphones.

Jean-Luc Habyarimana's dream of Rwanda crowned with "a republican army" that "protects the people" deserves to be read not as political vision but as linguistic archeology. Every word is borrowed, hollowed out, and repurposed to disguise a racial project. In the lexicon of Hutu Power, "republican" never meant civic neutrality, constitutional loyalty, or the protection of citizens as equals. It meant something far more lethal: an army of the majority, for the majority, against the designated enemy within. When Jean-Luc says "the people," he is not speaking of Rwandans; he is speaking of Hutu—those counted, recognized, and protected under the old racial accounting system.

History does not leave room for ambiguity here. The army his father presided over was already "republican" in this sense: ethnically filtered, ideologically disciplined, and operationally integrated with militias. The Interahamwe did not emerge in opposition to the army; they functioned as its back up limb. To invoke a "republican army" today is therefore not reformist nostalgia—it is a regression, a yearning for a time when uniforms and machetes spoke the same language.

Obscenity

Unable to defend this vision on political grounds, Jean-Luc Habyarimana does what genocidal ideologues have always done: he summons God. "One cannot undo what God has established. Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa constitute Rwanda's identity."

This is not theology; it is racial fatalism baptized in scripture. The paraphrased biblical echo—"What God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6, Mark 10:9)—is disturbingly misapplied. A verse about marriage is conscripted to sanctify colonial racial taxonomy, as though Belgian ethnographers were apostles and identity cards were sacraments.

This is not merely blasphemous; it is obscene. Here racism is naturalized and sanctified. God becomes the guarantor of ethnic hierarchy. This is what genocide scholars call cosmic legitimation. It reduces God to an ethnic registrar and turns genocide into the defense of divine order.

Theological language is particularly potent because it forecloses debate. If God has decreed hierarchy, disagreement becomes heresy. In this theology, equality is sacrilege, national unity is rebellion against God, and citizenship is an affront to creation. This move relocates politics into the sacred realm, immunizing it from ethical scrutiny.

Historically, such sacralization of identity has accompanied some of the worst mass crimes, precisely because it converts human prejudice into divine necessity. Once difference is declared sacred, hierarchy inevitably follows. This is why Jean-Luc warns that

abolishing ethnic categories “has never created equality; it has merely shifted lines of domination.” Meaning: the wrong people are no longer on top.

What he laments here is not injustice but the loss of an efficient system of exclusion, discrimination, persecution and extermination. The past he romanticizes is one where domination was clear, legible, and bureaucratically enforced—where identity cards did the moral work of deciding who lived and who died. His nostalgia is consequently not abstract; it is administrative. It longs for the return of a state capable of sorting bodies with precision.

His admiration for Burundi follows the same logic. He praises the “honesty” of recognizing components of society, presenting ethnic arithmetic as realism and unity as denial. But what he calls honesty is simply the institutionalization of suspicion. Burundi’s tragic cycles of violence are not the result of insufficient ethnic recognition but of its overpoliticization. Jean-Luc’s model of peace is one in which citizens are first counted, then governed—never trusted.

For him, national unity is anathema because unity dissolves inherited entitlement. Unity says you are no longer guaranteed power by birth. Unity demands accountability. Unity threatens dynasties built on grievance. Differences, by contrast, are “noble” because they are beneficial. They can be mobilized, ranked, weaponized.

The final irony is almost awful. In the staged interview, Jean-Luc claims that his father was ready to embrace the Arusha Peace Agreement. Yet it is the Arusha Accords

which decreed the abolition of ethnic identity cards—those very instruments that extremists of Hutu Power despised precisely because they obstructed extermination. Identity cards were not symbolic; they were logistical tools of genocide. To hate their abolition is to mourn the loss of an efficient killing infrastructure.

Jean-Luc cannot have it both ways. One cannot praise Arusha while resenting its most humanizing provision. One cannot invoke God while defending colonial racial hierarchies. One cannot dream of a “republican army” while yearning for an ethnically purified force.

The Stench Beneath the Orchids

Why orchids? Because denial today is aesthetic. It seeks beauty, refinement, poetic melancholy. But beneath the orchids you find the same ideology that justified mass murder.

Jean-Luc Habyarimana did not misspeak nor exaggerate. He revealed. His interview is not a deviation; it is a continuity—of family, ideology, and political ambition. Jean-Luc Habyarimana is not inventing a new Rwanda; he is attempting to resurrect an old one—washed in scripture, perfumed with nostalgia, and presented as moral renewal. But history remembers what he wishes to reestablish. And Rwanda, having survived it, has chosen never to go back. Irreversibly.

The tragedy is not that Jean-Luc fails to see this. The tragedy is that platforms still

pretend his discourse is legitimate debate rather than what it truly is: the polished afterlife of genocidal thought.

Let us be mercilessly clear. Jean-Luc Habyarimana is not a misunderstood exile, a nostalgic intellectual, or a persecuted conscience. He is the heir to a political tradition soaked in blood, now embalmed in metaphor. His orchids are not symbols of peace; they are funeral decorations placed over an unrepentant grave. He speaks of human values with the serenity of someone who has never had to account for whose humanity counted and whose was declared surplus.

There is something almost bitter sweet in watching a man invoke God, children, peace, and morality to defend a worldview that collapsed under the weight of its own crimes. His

rhetoric resembles a museum of old-fashioned lies: carefully lit, carefully curated, and utterly detached from reality. Rwanda moved on. Survivors rebuilt. Perpetrators were judged. History advanced. Jean-Luc remained behind, polishing old slogans like heirlooms, convinced that repetition might resurrect relevance.

What makes this spectacle obscene is not merely denial, but entitlement—the assumption that the world must once again indulge genocidal nostalgia as “another perspective.” No. There are perspectives, and there are post-mortems of ideology. This interview belongs to the latter. And no amount of orchids, however exotic, can perfume the unmistakable stench of denial forever.