

Rwanda's Forgotten Years

Reconsidering the Role and Crimes of Akazu 1973–1993

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Abstract

The narrative on the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda has become remarkable in recent years for airbrushing the responsibility of those at its heart from the tragedy. The figure of President Juvenal Habyarimana, whose 21-year rule, along with the unofficial network based around his wife and family, the *Akazu*, has been largely marginalised. Yet to understand April 1994 requires a far longer-term understanding. Those responsible had grown their power, influence and ambition for decades inside every part of Rwandan society after seizing power in their coup of 1973; they had established personal and highly lucrative bonds with European and North American countries, financial institutions and the Vatican, all of whom variously assisted with financial, political, diplomatic and military support from 1973 into 1994. This chapter seeks to outline how *Akazu* built its powerbase, influence and ambition in the two decades before 1994 and the failure of its international backers to respond to repeated warning signs of a tragedy foretold.

Keywords

genocide – Akazu – Habyarimana – Parmehutu – Network Zero

The official Independence Day celebrations that got underway on Sunday 1 July 1973 came as Rwanda teetered on the edge of an expected coup. Eleven years after independence the one party regime of President Grégoire Kayibanda was imploding. Hit by economic and political stagnation, notably the damaging failure to share the trappings of power with those outside his central

regional support base, Kayibanda's future was bleak. During the previous months he had thrown his support behind the ethnic scapegoating of the Tutsi minority in an effort to deflect blame for his own regime failures. The tactic had worked when he first seized power, unifying the Hutu majority against the '*inyenzi*' threat. But times had changed. Kayibanda's fate and that of his regime was sealed by his failure to validate the vaulting ambitions of the northern officer corps in his army. He underestimated the danger posed by General Juvenal Habyarimana, his defence minister and head of the army and Habyarimana's close friends and allies from the Bushiru region in the north of the country: highly ambitious young officers like Major Aloys Nsekaliye, Lieutenant Colonel Alexis Kanyarengwe, Major Sabin Benda, Major Laurent Serubuga, Major Laurent Simba, Major Théoneste Bagosora and Captain Elie Sagatwa.

Four days after Kayibanda's final speech to the nation given at the Independence Day event, his 11-year rule came to an abrupt end. On the evening of 4th July Habyarimana, allied with ten 'comrades',¹ launched a swift and decisive military coup. By the following morning Kayibanda had been arrested along with hundreds of his family, politicians and military, most from the centre and south of the country. Habyarimana, in a message to the nation, declared that 'enemies of peace' who had in previous times 'disturbed public order by sowing discord and dividing the country into regional groups', had been overthrown. The National Guard, headed by Habyarimana, had taken control as it could no longer tolerate this atmosphere or 'keep its arms crossed'. Ending by announcing 'Long Live Peace and National Unity,' the new military regime set about establishing what was, for most Rwandans, a carbon copy of what had gone before during the past 11 years. The significant difference this time was that the ruling clique was a Hutu one from the north rather than the centre and south.

Born on 8 March 1936 to deeply religious parents – his father was a Catholic catechist at the imposing red brick parish church in Rambura, near Gisenyi – Habyarimana had initially been educated at Nyundo seminary before switching to medical studies at Lovanium University in Zaire. Unrest and anti-foreigner sentiment forced him to quit and return home where his impressive physical build and Hutu ethnicity led to his swift recruitment by the Belgian

1 The 11 were Major General Juvenal Habyarimana (Gisenyi), Lieutenant Colonel Alexis Kanayarengwe (Ruhengeri), Major Aloys Nsekaliye (Gisenyi), Major Sabin Benda (Ruhengeri), Major Epimaque Ruhashya (Kigali), Major Fabien Gahimano (Gisenyi), Major Jean-Nepomuscene Munyandekwe (Gitarama), Major Laurent Serubuga (Gisenyi), Major Bonaventure Buregeya (Gisenyi), Major Bonaventure Ntibitura (Ruhengeri) and Major Aloys Simba (Gisenyi). Only one (Ruhashya) was a Tutsi, and only two (Ruhashya and Munyandekwe) were not from the northern prefectures of Ruhengeri and Gisenyi.

colonial authorities. In December 1961 Habyarimana passed out of military college as number 001, becoming the very first officer in what was to become the new Rwandan national army. A hard worker, with army discipline reinforcing his tough early life grafting in the fields with his father, Habyarimana spoke excellent French, dressed immaculately and was an imposingly tall and well-built figure. Never one to suffer fools gladly, and with an explosive temper, a major political and personal weakness was acute indecisiveness. His ambition for power and wealth was matched, like his predecessor Kayibanda, with a failure to act decisively to avert disaster. Ultimately though, his biggest strength was to become his greatest weakness: his family. In August 1963 Habyarimana's marriage to local girl Agathe Kanziga gave him what he needed most to succeed – a relationship with royalty. Her direct lineage to the Hutu Bushiru kings, allied with her father Gervais being both a former sub chief and now a wealthy owner of a textile business, was from the start a source of power and political strength. With Agathe came close family members: her brother Protais Zigiranyirazo, known as 'Monsieur Z', and cousins Elie Sagatwa and Seraphin Rwabukumba.

Habyarimana faced multiple challenges on seizing power. Despite promises to unify the nation regardless of ethnicity or region, the northern clique that backed the new president continued Kayibanda's anti-Tutsi discrimination. The former president's Parmehutu party was banned and Habyarimana's own single party, the MRND (National Revolutionary Movement for Development) took its place. It was not just a matter of having a new one party state: there was the need to make sure hearts and minds were quickly 'recalibrated'. The sole radio station, Radio Rwanda was given over to lengthy ballads rejoicing in the president's goodness and fatherly affection for his people as well as his hard work on their behalf. The press such as it was – the weekly regime newspaper *Imvaho* ('news') and Catholic weekly *Kinyamateka* – reported purely on state success stories and Habyarimana's accomplishments. All communes were instructed to hold weekly '*animation*' events. This significant propaganda tool was designed to push the Habyarimana brand into the lives of every citizen. The assembled populace would spend the afternoon dancing and singing, reciting poetry and stories with the sole aim of extolling the president and the state. Everyone was expected to wear a button lapel badge with Habyarimana's smiling face upon it. Catholic archbishop Vincent Nsengiyumva, who served on MRND's central committee, proudly wore his badge alongside his crucifix. It was difficult to know whether his loyalty was to his earthly saviour Habyarimana or his spiritual one.

As this 'social revolution' got into full flow in the mid 1970s, Habyarimana sent his ambassadors around the Foreign Ministries of Europe and North

America to reassure the international community that Rwanda was very much open for business. His diplomatic envoys insisted the coup had been a necessary, but bloodless, event. Rwanda, under Habyarimana, could be relied upon as a peaceful, prosperous and steadfast ally. Unlike Kayibanda who avoided foreign travel where possible in favour of a quiet family life at his small residence outside Gitarama, Habyarimana and Agathe positively flourished when mixing with presidents and world leaders. Trips to Brussels and Bonn, Washington and Paris were to be fully enjoyed, with state banquets, shopping trips and a chance to relish the luxury living Rwanda was yet to welcome.

France rewarded Habyarimana with a new presidential plane and military pact. King Baudouin of Belgium and wife Queen Fabiola became firm family friends. Peter Molt from the Rhineland-Palatinate and Charles Jeanneret from Switzerland became high profile and highly paid presidential advisors. The World Bank and IMF were happy to throw money at the 'Switzerland of Africa' as it was regarded, with precious little analysis or due diligence. Outrages such as the World Bank's notorious GBK project that ran for seven very lucrative years from 1980–87 were allowed to take place.² Instead of protecting the last remaining natural forest in the centre and north west of the country and its indigenous inhabitants – many of them Tutsi and Twa – who had lived there for generations, the lavish new international funds were quickly 'repurposed'. Virgin forest was cut down, the local inhabitants expelled and huge cattle ranches carved out. Agathe, Z, Seraphin, Serubuga, Habyarimana and the regime clique were the beneficiaries.

On 21 May 1979 the effort to assert Rwanda's significance on a regional and indeed world stage was rewarded as the 6th Franco-African summit took place in Kigali. Habyarimana played host to 24 francophone leaders and the French president Giscard d'Estaing. There was a notable Rwandan absentee from this major event: Grégoire Kayibanda. Within days of his 'bloodless' coup Habyarimana had rounded up hundreds of the former president's supporters – diplomats, military, politicians, ministers and some of his family. Over the coming months they were tortured and brutally murdered. Kayibanda's wife Véridiane (Diane) died from a 'mystery illness' while under house imprisonment. On 15 December 1976 her husband was murdered in his own home, probably by Sagatwa and on orders from the presidency. There was no

2 See *Isibo*, 'Those who seized the Gishwati Project were aping Kinani', No. 70, 25 September 1992; World Bank, Project Completion Report, 'Rwanda, Integrated Livestock and Forestry Development', (Credit 1039-Rw), 12 April 1991.

state funeral; the man who had presided over Rwanda's independence was swiftly and unceremoniously buried in a small plot in his own garden.³

The disappearance of such a number of high profile individuals failed to alert western allies to the far darker side of the regime they were feting with political and diplomatic plaudits and financial largesse. The Archbishop of Kigali, André Perraudin, a close friend and mentor to Kayibanda, along with some Rwandan bishops, made half-hearted requests to visit the political prisoners on behalf of their families. These were unsurprisingly rejected: the prisoners had long since been killed.

The speed with which Habyarimana's authoritarian regime was able to control and corrupt all aspects of Rwandan life can best understood by examining the political tracts that began to appear in Kigali in 1979, only five years after the coup. The first tracts accused Laurent Serubuga the deputy army chief of staff and Pierre-Celestin Rwagafilita, deputy head of the Gendarmerie, of breath-taking corruption, embezzling public funds, counterfeiting money, insatiable greed, wild ambition and 'hopeless and mediocre capabilities'.⁴ Later tracts went further targeting Habyarimana for his greed, listing his recent and lengthy property, cash and luxury car acquisitions around the world. They questioned how the president had more offices of state than even the infamous ruler of the Central African Republic, the self-proclaimed Emperor Bokassa. Both *Umuganda* and *animation* were ridiculed, while the lavishing of funds purely on Habyarimana's northern homeland to the detriment of the centre and south was highlighted as highly damaging to national unity. It was interesting to note the tract written by Kayibanda's former MDR-Parmehutu party attacked the president not just for personal abuses and also for being too soft on the Tutsi. Accordingly he should immediately to 'restore the values of the Muhutu before their anger bursts out.' In fact Habyarimana, despite promising ethnic unity, had moved to disenfranchise the Tutsi minority from all areas of public life to such an extent that during the late 1970s and 80s they were almost unnoticeable. They would be tolerated but nothing more. The only exceptions were businessmen like Valens Kajeguhakwa who were allowed to make money only because *Le Clan* could enrich themselves by effectively seizing a considerable part of the profits.

3 For accounts of Kayibanda's death see Andrew Wallis, *Stepp'd in Blood: Akazu and the Architects of the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi*, Basingstoke, (Zero Books 2019), pp. 71–74.

4 The first tract appeared on 7 March 1979, and was in the form of an open letter from the National Bank's governor Jean Birara.

In April 1980, already under pressure from these unprecedented public attacks, an alleged coup attempt by two disgruntled military officers was uncovered. Former head of intelligence Théoneste Lizinde and the powerful ex interior minister Alexis Kanyarengwe were said to be trying to recruit others to overthrow Habyarimana. Lizinde had fallen out with Agathe, with his very public ambition coming into direct conflict with that of the first lady. There could only be one winner. Having failed to gain asylum at the Libyan, American and Vatican diplomatic missions, Lizinde was arrested. Kanyarengwe, who was tipped off, fled to Tanzania.

The stinking cells of Ruhengeri prison were soon filled with known and assumed enemies of the regime. Here in the '*cachot noir*' ('black coffins') the prisoners were held incommunicado, tortured by electric shocks and savage beatings, and left to rot. Show trials of those assumed to have written, published, read or seen the tracts or be part of the coup took place. Article 16 of the penal code, for those deemed to have 'incited people against the authorities,' was almost impossible to defend against – not least because there was no legal representation for the accused. The sight of Habyarimana's powerful brother-in-law Z sitting behind the judges passing notes as to how the proceedings should proceed was hardly reassuring. Lizinde was sentenced to death on 25 November 1981 though the sentence was not carried out after intervention from Amnesty International who heralded him as a prisoner of conscience.⁵ Less fortunate were 43 'common' criminals whom the regime executed in September 1982.

The 1980s was a halcyon decade for *Akazu*. This term, which described the 'little house' or close family group around Agathe, did not come into common public usage until the late 1980s. However, *Akazu* as the pinnacle of a rhizomeous unofficial network was an actuality from the early days after the 1973 coup. Known also as *Le Clan de madam*, it reflected Agathe's ambitions and that of her family to use the country as a private source of wealth, power and prestige. Brother-in-law Z, with no previous administrative experience, was made prefect of Kibuye shortly after the 1973 coup, and one year later, in November 1974, was handed the most lucrative of all state offices when he became prefect of Ruhengeri. Cousin Seraphin, despite his dire education record and no financial experience, was given the job of controlling foreign exchange at the National Bank of Rwanda, while Elie Sagatwa became head of intelligence and Habyarimana's shadow, patrolling and monitoring not just those who wanted to

5 There is some irony here, given Lizinde was personally responsible for widespread and appalling human rights abuses that took place during the mid 1970s in his role as head of the National Intelligence Services.

see or communicate with the president but also the president himself. Noel Mbonabaryi, Habyarimana's aged uncle, also known as 'the godfather,' became director general of employment. His nickname of *Conshoma* or 'give me a kiss' was extremely apt given his predilection for making young pretty girls 'earn' any employment they had come to him to request.

The State tea franchise OCIR was given to Michel Bagaragaza. This near neighbour of the presidential couple,⁶ whose wife was related to Agathe, later explained to genocide investigators the methodology and makeup of *Akazu*. He described how *Akazu* relied on appointing others lower down the societal chain to carry out tasks that it was unable to do itself. To be recruited into this lucrative and powerful network was not down to intelligence, skills or ability, but a person's ethnic and regional background. Hutus from Bushiru and later, as the circle widened, from the northern prefectures of Gisenyi, Ruhengeri and Byumba, were the ultimate beneficiaries of this clientage. By May 1991 of the 62 directors of the main banks and public concerns, 42 came from this region. By contrast, the southern prefectures of Butare and Gitarama could boast only 4 directors each. Needless to say none were Tutsi or Twa.

Both inside and outside his prefecture of Ruhengeri Monsieur Z was the dominant figure, seeing to the appointment of loyal 'Zedist'⁷ individuals who could be relied upon to reflect his decisions first, and those of president, people and country a distant second. To fall out with Z because he had taken a fancy to your wife or property or even for refusing to support his football team, Mukungwa FC, could prove fatal. Z surrounded himself with a number of protégés who would become vital links within *Akazu*: men like Ferdinand Nahimana at the University of Butare, which had a campus in Ruhengeri, Minister of Public Works, Joseph Nzirorera and Augustin Bizimana, head of the state Pyrethrum concern (OPYRWA).

The 'outer' rings of *Akazu* reflected every level and part of society, each owing allegiance to those above them in the structure up to the family itself. No part of society was free from its sinister influence. For example, to start a business, 'meant the need for a loan and to get such a loan you needed to pay off a member of this circle around the President with either shares in the

6 Bagaragaza lived 4 km away from the Giciye residence of Habyarimana, and only 2 km from Z's mansion.

7 This term was one used by Christophe Mfizi to describe the system of influence that Z established throughout all sectors of society including the military and intelligence services. See Mfizi, Christophe, 'The Zero Network, (B): Destroyer of the democracy and the Republic in Rwanda (1975–1994)', Consultation report written on the request of the Office of the Prosecutor General of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, 2006.

company or a percentage of the profit or money up front.⁸ State enterprises were awarded not on the basis of past performance or business acumen but to those who could be trusted to funnel profits, foreign grants and influence back to those who put them in office.⁹

Members of the predominantly northern-based first officer batches that had trained with Habyarimana dominated the senior military ranks. Notable were Laurent Serubuga and Pierre-Celestin Rwagafilita, both intensely loyal to *Le Clan* and their own bank balance. Beneath them were individuals like Bushiru neighbour Colonel Aloys Nsekaliye who became Education minister and the first Rwandan franc billionaire. Others such as Théoneste Bagosora, Anatole Nsengiyumva, Sabin Benda and Aloys Simba were equally ambitious to use their military careers to further their vaulting ambition. The state of the Rwandan army, the FAR, during the 1980s was a microcosm of all parts of society; its strength was fatally undermined from within by corruption, nepotism, regionalism and poor leadership that made it totally unsuitable for any combat operations.

During the late 1970s and 1980s the Rwandan people were controlled both by the one party authoritarian state of MRND/Habyarimana and by the unofficial parallel structure of *Akazu*. In 1974 Habyarimana had directed that the vital post of Bourgeois (mayor) would from now on be one appointed by the president rather than the population in an individual commune as had been the case under Kayibanda. While Habyarimana may have officially selected the 143 bourgeois as a major conduit linking the regime with the mass of those they were meant to represent, with their remit to monitor, command and enforce presidential directives and desires, bourgeois such as Laurent Semanza (Bicumbi), Jean-Baptiste Gatete (Murambi) or Juvenal Kajelijeli (Mukingo), owed their far-reaching power and wealth to '*le Clan*.'

In the church, Archbishop Vincent Nsengiyumva became Agathe's personal confessor and would attend the presidential family at their residence daily. The bishops appointed by Habyarimana, all Hutu, were notable for their unrelenting support for the regime. During the 1980s the Rwandan bishop's conference made no mention of corruption, human rights violations or the ethnic and regionalist prejudice that disenfranchised large numbers of the population from jobs, education or state support. Instead they acted as a mouthpiece for

8 Katarwa, André, interview with the author, June 2012.

9 For example, Alphonse Higaniro at SORWAL, Denis Ntirugirimabazi at the National Bank (BNR) and Pasteur Musabe, the brother of Théoneste Bagosora, headed BACAR (Continental Bank).

the regime. The three Pastoral letters of 1990,¹⁰ issued before the October invasion of that year, reiterate Rwandans should be grateful for the good things the regime has done for them such as giving the people roads, newspapers and MRND. The bishops take issue with those who complained that due to their ethnic origin, they had been refused a job or a place at school or that the judicial system had been unfair to them. It was a remarkable show of unity, not with the teachings of Christ, but with those of *Akazu/Habyarimana*.

In 1989 a public scandal shone a light on how ethnic prejudice had infiltrated the highest levels of the Catholic Church so that it had become merely another secular part of the regime's control over the country. The aged Tutsi bishop of Butare, Jean-Baptiste Gahamanyi, who had been appointed in 1961 just before independence, had put forward the intelligent, reserved and hard working fellow Tutsi priest Father Felicien Muvara to be appointed as his new assistant bishop. Those with deep-seated ethnic prejudices within the regime regarded the appointment with horror. Bagosora and the wife of Colonel Nsekalije intervened to insist to Habyarimana that such an appointment was impossible. All men might be equal in God's eyes, but to them Tutsi's were to be tolerated and exploited at best, and certainly not promoted. False rumours of personal impropriety were quickly spread about Fr. Muvara, allowing Archbishop Nsengiyumva to have the bishop-to-be called to Rome where he was pressured to 'resign' just days before his elevation to the episcopacy was due to take place. Soon afterwards, the rumours were shown to have been malevolently made up, though no apology was ever given to Muvara.¹¹

The whole sordid affair illuminated how Church and State had become one in their ideology and rationale. Habyarimana, unlike his predecessor, had moved to ensure he had total control not just of the Catholic Church's leadership, but also over the Protestant churches in the country. The Anglican's, with Archbishop Augustin Nshamihigo, a former army chaplain in charge and the Presbyterians under Michel Twagirayesu, a member of the MRND prefectural committee in Kibuye, were both frequent visitors to the presidency and acted as loyal propaganda mouthpieces in their own churches for the regime, even during the 1994 genocide.

In an oral society where widespread illiteracy and poverty meant few outside the capital read a newspaper – and only a few thousand read one there – the pulpit represented the way 'news' came down to the peasantry. Control of

10 See the Episcopal letter issued in February 1990 entitled 'Christ our Unity,' and two further letters in May and August of that year.

11 Muvara returned home from this crushing disappointment to continue life working as a parish priest. He was murdered during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

the churches was of vital importance. When Pope John Paul II was persuaded to visit Rwanda in September 1990 – still the only time a pontiff has come to the country – it was an immense public relations coup for *Akazu*, and was treated by them as such. The Pontiff was treated to an audience with *Akazu*'s finest soon after his plane hit the Kigali tarmac, with endless photographs taken with Z, Noel, Sagatwa and Agathe. His presence was held as divine justification for the regime's hold over its people.¹²

The head of the state information bureau (ORINFOR) during the late 1970s and 1980s was Christophe Mfizi, who had the unenviable job of trying to put a positive spin on the regime that he served. He was replaced in December 1990 by Z's protégé Ferdinand Nahimana after years of being threatened by *Akazu*. Mfizi's highly acute, intellectual and analytical mind set him far apart from the bulk of those in power, most of whom had failed to finish secondary education. He had become highly disillusioned with *Akazu*'s insidious and rampant corruption that was threatening to capsize the country by the late 1980s as famine and economic collapse took hold. In 1992, from the safety of Paris, he published an open letter to Habyarimana entitled 'The Zero Network'. He later told investigators: 'In about 1987 I got the first signs about the existence of a kind of well organised group of people in the top levels of Rwanda... I believe that their goal was to keep the power within the small group around the president and his wife... I called the group *Reseau Zero* (Network Zero) where the Z comes from Zigiranyirazu Proteus. I believe that this man played a very big role in this group. I do not know how big this *Reseau Zero* was. That depends on what level you look at. It was bigger than *Akazu* that is sure. I believe that different kinds of people were members of the *Reseau Zero*: businessmen, politicians, prefects, bourgmeisters, heads of governmental organisations and departments, journalists, military and even religious people and so on. I believe they all had some kind of importance, useable to the president's family at a certain level.'¹³

Mfizi's open letter informed not just Rwandans but the international community – especially regime supporters in France, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland and the Churches – that this network were effectively running the state for their own ambitions. He blamed 'a hardcore of people who have methodically pervaded the entire national life at the political, military, financial, agricultural, scientific, scholarly, family and even religious levels. This clique considers the country as a company which they can legitimately derive maximum benefit from, and this justifies all types of policies... it is the Zero Network that has stoked ethnic and regional divisions to hide its hidden agenda

12 The visit of John Paul II was from 7–9 September 1994.

13 Christophe Mfizi interview with ICTR investigators, March 1996, Paris.

and interests'. In Mfizi's analysis, both Habyarimana and his MRND party were now just working tools of this 'Zero Network,' unable to function, reform or work to the benefit of the people they were meant to represent.¹⁴

Mfizi differentiated between *Akazu* as the small family group around Agathe, and the much wider, multi-layered 'Network Zero' that they had built throughout every part of society. Other contemporaries, such as Bagaragaza and Jean Kambanda, referred to the whole mafia-like group as *Akazu*, with its inner and outer core structures. 'Before that [multiparty politics that began in 1991] no one could dare mention it [*Akazu*] ... can it be said that they knew? Yes, they knew. But at that time when they were still all-powerful, they were not called *Akazu* because no one coined the word yet. People only noted what they did. They didn't seek to conceal what they were doing. And people knew on what doors to knock to get favours from the regime. When the word '*Akazu*' was used with the advent of [multiparty] pluralism, they obviously were irritated... because it was not a word with a positive connotation. It was always associated with abuse so it didn't do them proud... it was like concentric circles. There is the very tiny circle that was the *Akazu*. But there were other circles around it'.¹⁵

Journalist Epimaque Habimana summarised the popular view about *Akazu* and its role in the country: 'The country's first lady, Agathe, at whom fingers are pointed, is indeed very family conscious. Her brother [sic] Colonel Sagatwa is the President's private secretary. The other is known more particularly by the letter 'Z' for to call him by his real name, 'Protais Zigiranyirazo' would make many a Rwandan tremble. So 'Z' and Seraphin Rwabukumba, the former's cousin, are the main actors in a vast network of political and financial racketeering that caused, in the year 1989–90 alone, a loss of state revenue to the tune of 5 billion Rwandan francs (\$60 million). *La Centrale*, which is a huge commercial company headed by Mr Seraphin Rwabukumba, alone holds more than 50 import licenses. Thus, it is at the centre of all the politico-financial scandals. A drug trafficking network involving J [ean] Pierre, the President's first son, and the Director of the tea board, Mr Michel Bagaragaza, thrives with the complicity of the customs department at Kigali airport. Boxes containing cannabis, labelled as tea for export, are regularly exported to patented agents in Europe or America under everyone's nose'.¹⁶

It was one thing for *Akazu* to generate and increase power and wealth. Of equal importance became protecting its assets from threats outside and inside

14 Mfizi, Christophe, "The Zero Network': Open letter to the President of MRND", (Kigali: Editions Uruhimi, July–August 1992).

15 Kambanda, Jean, interview ICTR investigators, September 1997.

16 Habimana, Epa, 'Vérité d'Afrique Impamo', No. 2, 26 August 1992.

the country. After Lizinde's 'coup' attempt failed – though in reality this had never amounted to any kind of real danger – *Akazu* took preemptive action during the 1980s against those it felt threatened their dominance or greed. The most notable casualties were all close to the president himself and suffered for being seen as possible rivals to Agathe's own family. The brutal murder of Habyarimana's close friend Colonel Stanislas Mayuya on 19 April 1988 came as the result of this officer being declared by the president as his 'dauphin'. Mayuya, a capable, hard working but above all moderate officer who was well respected within the army, posed a clear risk to Z's and Agathe's ambitions should he inherit power. His brutal murder was still being talked about years later – albeit in secret as to be heard mentioning the name of the former Colonel could lead to charges of treason. The contract killing was blamed on a number of scapegoated individuals, including three senior officers¹⁷ accused of planning a coup. Though imprisoned, they were never brought to trial and were eventually released. Whether Habyarimana knew and was persuaded to action this murder by *Akazu* or whether Mayuya was murdered by them without his knowledge, the killing showed by 1988 the president had lost control of power, if indeed he had ever been fully in charge. Real power in the country lay elsewhere. The editor of Hutu extremist paper *Kangura* Hassan Ngeze explained at his later trial: 'in 1988... they [*Akazu*] have the bank. They have the money. They have the army; they have power... When Mayuya was killed by *Akazu*... It is just a small group, not only – not even from Habyarimana, just from his wife, just from his wife. Because Habyarimana – the wife of Habyarimana, the people who are close to Habyarimana's wife killed Mayuya.'¹⁸

The murder of Dian Fossey, the American gorilla naturalist who had the temerity to try to block *Akazu's* attempt to exploit the Volcano National Park for their own considerable profit, showed a similar disregard for presidential authority. Habyarimana had made great public play about how his government fully respected the need to preserve this national resource. Fossey too, for several years, had tried to stop the exploitation of the gorillas and the park for commercial gain. Yet with the valuable growth of tourism to the area, as well as smuggling routes for drugs and minerals at stake, her murder in December 1985, with Z the chief suspect of future investigations,¹⁹ was seemingly inevitable. A colleague within the gorilla preservation movement noted 'She was

17 Colonel Anselme Nkuliye Kubona, Major Mathias Havugintore and Lieutenant Colonel Deogratias Ndiwami. For a full account of Mayuya's death see Wallis, *Stepp'd in Blood*, pp. 137–151.

18 Hassan Ngeze, witness examination, ICTR-99-52-T, 26 March 2003.

19 See, for example, Gordon, Nicholas, *Murders in the Mist: who killed Dian Fossey?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton), 1994.

standing in the way of certain individuals making money. Whether it was because they were making money through the illegal bush meat trade or the gold smuggling trade or someone's aspirations to turn Karisoke into a tourist camp and make a lot of money that way, if you stand in the way of someone who is ruthless who wants to make a lot of money then it's not that surprising that she was killed'.²⁰

A variety of regime critics also paid the price in the 1980s for questioning the rampant corruption, nepotism and regionalism of the regime. Abbé Silvio Sindambiwe, the editor of the Catholic newspaper *Kinyamateka* was threatened by the feared intelligence services, the SCR and warned to desist from publishing faintly critical articles. On 7 November 1989 he was murdered in a trademark road 'accident.' When Félicula Nyiramutarambirwa took her campaign for the rights of women, orphans and the mentally disabled to the World Bank, threatening a highly lucrative income from this body, she too was murdered. As was former health minister Francois Muganza who had unwisely fallen out with Habyarimana's family. Hundreds of members of religious minority groups, such as the Jehovah Witnesses, were rounded up and imprisoned for refusing to take part in *animation*. They were accused of state subversion and attempting to overthrow the regime.

Habyarimana's own brothers, Télésphore and older brother Mélane, who offered him important personal support away from Agathe and *le clan*, were both killed in car 'accidents' at the start and end of the 1980s respectively. Their independent advice to the president was a direct threat to *Akazu*. The result of their deaths, and that of Mayuya, left Habyarimana completely surrounded by his wife and her powerful family with little, if any, independent support of his own to call on.

Even church critics, rare as they were, could not avoid the consequences of making enemies with *Akazu*. The Canadian priest Father Francois Cardinal had publicly questioned the flagrant embezzlement and corruption of *Le Clan*. His religious order, the Brothers of Christian Instruction, ran a college in Habyarimana's home village of Rambura. The Brothers were expelled from here on the excuse that foreign funding was be used to build a new school on their premises and they relocated to Kigali. In the event the foreign money for the school disappeared. Father Cardinal, who had made the scandal public, was murdered on 29 November 1992. Armed men, some in military fatigues,

20 Ian Redmond, interview in 'Gorillas revisited with David Attenborough', BBC television, transmission date 6 December 2012.

broke into the home of the religious and shot him dead. A later investigation²¹ pointed to Sagatwa being behind the theft of the money and the killing. Fr. Cardinal's murder, and that of the nun Sister Antonio Locatelli, shot dead after telling Radio France International about genocidal massacres the regime was orchestrating in Nyamata, was greeted with silence by Habyarimana's international support base. The Canadian government, like that of Germany, Belgium, France, Switzerland and the IMF/World Bank, refused to launch any inquiry or stop funding a regime that was killing its own people.

By the late 1980s, a famine in the south of the country and the sharp decline in world coffee prices was having a devastating effect on the lower strata of society. For the first time the regime and its *Akazu* network were subject to critical voices, some in the European media and Rwandan diaspora, others in new journals like *Kanguka*, *Isibo* and *Umurangi*. In Germany, Jean Shyirambere Barahinyura, whose wife had been incarcerated in Ruhengeri prison after being accused of involvement in the 1979/80 tracts, published a highly damaging book entitled 'Juvenal Habyarimana: 15 years of tyranny and treachery.'²² It was hardly a surprise to see Rwandan intelligence operatives make the trip to Frankfurt to 'persuade' him to cease publication immediately, and he was granted German police protection as a result. Needless to say, inside Rwanda, to own the book or be known to have read it was regarded as a matter of high treason.

As the political and military threat to the regime became acute from late 1990, *Akazu* reacted by impressing on Habyarimana the need to keep his international backers on board at all costs. As with the early 1960s when '*inyenzi*' attacks had been fully exploited by Kayibanda for internal political gain, so the October 1990 RPF invasion was used to unify the Hutu majority that had splintered after years of regionalism and corruption had alienated vast parts of the southern and central population from MRND. The invasion gave the regime the excuse to arrest, disappear, imprison and kill those it felt threatened its power. From October 1990 the strategy was planned and targeted discrimination and dehumanisation of the Tutsi population, denouncing them *en masse* as 'enemies' of the country.²³

21 Kinyamateka editor Fr. André Sibomana, interviewed in 'Hand of God, Hand of the Devil', Documentary by Téléfilms, directed by Yvan Patry, (Québec) 1995.

22 Barahinyura, Jean Shyirambere, 1973–1988 *Le Major-General Habyarimana, Quinze ans de tyrannie et de tartuferie au Rwanda*, (Frankfurt: editions Izuba), 1988.

23 On 21 September 1992 army Chief of Staff Deogratias Nsabimana made public part of the findings from a commission set up by Habyarimana, and chaired by Bagosora, to identify the chief threats to national security. It reported that the enemy and its supporters were to be found among 'Tutsi refugees, Tutsi within the country, Hutu dissatisfied with the

One of the most disturbing aspects of *Akazu's* rise in the 70s and 80s was the failure of the international community, and especially those countries closest to the regime, to analyse and censure the regime for crimes, corruption and discrimination that were known to them. While the South African apartheid regime was regularly condemned at this time in the west and subject to severe restrictions due to its ethnic targeting and human rights abuses, the same system in Rwanda found those in power benefiting from regular foreign donor generosity. There was no pressure put on Habyarimana to remove ethnic-targeted quotas and anti-Tutsi rhetoric that grew exponentially after the 1990 invasion. On 9 January 1991 Belgian journalist David Coppi noted in *L'écho* that sources within the country had told him Habyarimana was moving towards eliminating the Tutsi population in a 'veritable genocide'.²⁴ This article was published soon after the massacres of Tutsi in Kibilira in October 1990 left hundreds dead. Three weeks after Coppi's report new genocidal massacres took place targeting the Bagogwe Tutsi.

During the coming three years Rwanda was riven by well organised, planned, financed and executed genocidal massacres that saw thousands of Tutsis murdered, women raped, homes burnt to the ground and possessions and cattle taken. During much of this time foreign money continued to pour into *Akazu's* deep personal coffers, and into the regime, in effect allowing it to retain power. It was not until early 1993 that the World Bank curtailed its funding, much of which Habyarimana had diverted to pay for a vast expansion of the army and continuation of the war and security clampdown. France continued to provide military personnel and trainers, weapons and finance to the regime up to and beyond 1994, while German, Swiss and Belgian assistance was on going until 1993. The Vatican meanwhile remained silent on the genocidal killings, with only a few dissenting clerical voices heard from within the ranks of the Rwandan bishops. Most, like Archbishop Nsengiyumva chose to ignore the killings altogether and laid the blame for the near anarchy reigning in the country solely at the door of the RPF.

While such international supporters decided to deny or disregard the mounting evidence of state organised terror, a growing number of opposition journals inside Rwanda, despite constant threats and violence against them, made plain the state of the country. Numerous cartoons were published that vividly

current regime, the unemployed within Rwanda and abroad and foreigners married to Tutsi women'. In effect, all Tutsi and moderate Hutu opposed to the regime. See: Bagosora Commission report, marked 'Secret: The Definition and identification of the enemy', undated, Military I, ICTR-98-41, prosecution exhibit 13.1, K1020477.

24 Coppi, David, 'Rwanda: Détenus politiques et étudiants suspects sous la menace d'un "plan d'éliminations" systématique', *L'écho*, 9 January 1991.

portrayed Agathe, Z, and *le Clan*, as well as Habyarimana, as bloodthirsty thugs, monsters or avaricious killers. A number of publications depict Habyarimana as a priest, his cassock covered in blood, giving communion or encouragement to 'his *Akazu*' as they murder Tutsi and political opponents. The satirical paper *Nyabarongo*, in one acutely observed cartoon, portrays Habyarimana standing at the head of a conference table, announcing 'I have done all I could.' Gathered around were those labelled '*Akazu*' – Agathe, Mathieu Ngirumpatse (MRND president), Joseph Nzirorera (MRND secretary general), Seraphin, Rwagafilita, Serubuga and Z. Underneath and around the table are hundreds of skulls labelled 'Tutsi'.²⁵

One of the few international critical responses to the rapidly downward spiral Rwanda was on by autumn 1993 came when Belgian Senator Willy Kuijpers published an open letter to the Rwandan leader. It was the result of months of investigations he had undertaken, including visits to the country itself. The letter exposed 'the activities of an occult group called '*Akazu*' or '*Reseau Zero*'. The senator noted that 'In view of the serious allegations made against you (Habyarimana), with regard to the numerous instances of human rights allegations in Rwanda and the systematic plunder of Rwanda's meagre resources involving your family,' Habyarimana should 'make a commitment to stop perverting the democratisation process and put an end to political assassinations, persecution and other acts of intimidation of which leaders of the democratic opposition are victims.'²⁶

With the very real prospect of losing power, wealth, position and possibly their lives, the stakes for *Akazu* from 1990 were clear. The fate of Kayibanda and his supporters was not one Agathe and the family had any intention of sharing. Whereas during the 1970s and 80s the all pervasive security and intelligence services of Sagatwa, Augustin Nduweyezu and Pascal Simbikangwa had been able to quell dissent swiftly and quietly, the strategy and tools to remain in power changed markedly when faced with far more powerful internal and external threats in the early 1990s. The advent of the *interahamwe* and Hutu hate radio RTLM were products of their time. They heralded a new extremist strategy to head-off an extreme threat. With the military in the hands of Serubuga and Rwagafilita to 1992, and then, with its most powerful units coming under the control of *Amasasu* – Bagosora, Nsengiyumva, et al, the success of a peace process that would inevitably involve some form of compromise and power sharing was treated as treason.

25 *Nyabarongo*, No. 13, March 1993.

26 Kuijpers, Senator Willy, 'Letter to President Habyarimana', 2 October 1993.

Where was Habyarimana in all this? Never quite the fully paid up extremist of those around him, he was a president for the good times only, who delighted in the trappings of power and wealth, but failed to understand or adapt to the rapidly changing political and military pressure post 1990. He presents as a rather pathetic figure in his last years in office. He had taken part, with *Akazu*, in the planning and organising of the genocidal massacres that killed thousands of Tutsis, as the international commission of inquiry and the UN report of 1993 duly noted.²⁷ He had helped promote and fund both RTLM and 'his' *interahamwe* and publicly used his position to give them impunity from prosecution by the moderate multiparty government of Dismas Nsengiyaremye from April 1992. Yet Habyarimana ultimately was another victim of *Akazu*. His political and personal indecision, the breakdown of his marriage to Agathe after years of being bullied and overruled by her and her family, meant his final two years were filled with personal angst and depression. That Habyarimana wanted to find a way out of office – a comfortable retirement away from the enemies who surrounded him – was no secret. Nor was it a secret that he had been threatened by members of *Akazu* – including Bagosora – who demanded he refuse to sign the Arusha Accords and should stand down from office in favour of a far more acceptable leader: for example Z's ambitious protégé Joseph Nzirorera. By mid 1993 Habyarimana had lost the presidency of MRND, control of the military and most importantly, control of his own family.²⁸

Habyarimana became a pawn of a far more dynamic, extreme and unstoppable network. He was more use to *Akazu* dead than alive. From October 1993 the Hutu 'power' movement took the cynical ethnic divisionism that had been used by the regime as a means to unify the Hutu majority and turned it into a policy of extreme, universal, violence. No one who listened to speeches from Froduald Karamira on 23 October 1993 or Justin Mugenzi at Nyamirambo stadium in January 1994, could have any doubt that they saw the only solution to Rwanda's problems as power keeping – for their Hutu extremist 'Power'

27 Report of the International Commission of Investigation [FIDH] on Human Rights Violations in Rwanda since 1 October 1990, Final report, (March 1993); United Nations, Commission on Human Rights, Report by Mr BW Ndiaye, Special Rapporteur, on his mission to Rwanda from 8 to 17 April 1993, (11 August 1993).

28 Mathieu Ndirumpatse replaced Habyarimana at the MRND summer conference 1993. The president gave up his post as Defence Minister as part of the power sharing deal, and his position as head of the armed forces went first to Laurent Serubuga and on his forced retirement in 1992, to Deogratias Nsabimana. A number of visitors to the presidential residence commented on how Agathe and her family would lead discussions, debates and policy reviews with visiting guests even though Habyarimana was both head of the household and head of state and would have been expected to provide this role.

faction – not power sharing with moderates and the RPF as Arusha demanded. Retaining authority over the country would involve the elimination of those enemies and traitors (the Tutsi and moderate Hutu) who blocked their way. *Interahamwe* who had initially been recruited, trained and armed to defend MRND's interests against other political parties were now instructed to 'work' alongside these militias in the coming apocalypse. RTLM dj's were recruited not because of previous broadcasting excellence, but because they were ambitious stooges willing and able to communicate the extremist views of Felicien Kabuga, Ferdinand Nahimana, Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, Seraphin and Agathe to the population at large.

In the hours and days after Habyarimana's death on 6 April 1994, *Akazu* moved swiftly to put in place an extremist regime within which it could fully operate to facilitate its main objective – retention of power. While Agathe and Seraphin remained in the country only until the agreed transition of power to Bagosora and his client interim regime was finalised, other core members of the network were already in place to begin the twin tasks of genocide and winning the renewed war with the RPF. For the remainder of the summer Agathe worked hard from her new base in Paris with her existing political and diplomatic connections to support Bagosora, Bizimana, Kabuga, Nzirorera, army chief Augustin Bizimungu and others from the network. Arms deals were set up and finalised while diplomatic and financial support was sought from pro-regime leaders such as Moi (Kenya), Mobutu (Zaire), Omar Bongo (Gabon) Eyadema (Togo), Biya (Cameroon), Gaddafi (Libya) and Mitterrand/Chirac in France. That the planned re-invasion of Rwanda (September 1994–96) in the aftermath of the genocide did not happen was certainly not due to a lack of effort from the network and its international sympathisers. The ex-FAR and *interahamwe*, now based in the UN-funded refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania, were rearmed and trained for the expected attack on the new Rwandan government. They were directed principally from Kenya where Agathe, Z, Kabuga, other *Akazu* and former senior regime figures had taken up residence.²⁹

In their ruling of 15 February 2007, the Appeal Court of the French Refugee Commission [OFPPA] ruled against Agathe's attempt to gain refugee status in the country. In its damning findings, upheld later by the Council of State, it noted 'Mme Agathe Kanziga, widow Habyarimana, had an eminent role in the 'first circle of power' called *Akazu*; that she exercised a de facto authority between 1973 and 1994 but also beyond this date, keeping up privileged links with the caretaker government then with the Rwandan government in exile; that

²⁹ See Wallis, *Stepp'd in Blood*, pp. 485–520.

she evidently tried to conceal her real role and engagement in the country's political life; that her denial of the existence of massacres perpetrated by Hutu extremists on the Tutsi population as well as her denial of all ethnic tension in Rwanda before October 1990 need to be interpreted as the desire to hide her real awareness of the situation in her country; that she was at the heart of the genocidal regime responsible for the preparation and execution of the genocide that occurred in Rwanda during the year 1994; that she cannot therefore validly deny her support for the most extremist Hutu ideas, her direct links with those responsible for the genocide and her real influence on political life in Rwanda'. It noted 'the preponderant influence of the petitioner [Agathe] in the operation of political power as it was really exercised in Rwanda from 1973 to 1994, notably in her role as a hidden coordinator of different political, economic, military, and media circles, and to emphasize also the reality of her preponderant positioning within what has been designated as the *Akazu*, in the sense of a confraternity based on family, business, or other links and involved in the authoritarian exercise of power via structures of organised violence, and finally to decide that she was involved, within these different structures, in the development and preparation of massacres on an ethnic basis between April and June 1994'.³⁰

Akazu changed and developed in the years from 1973 in terms of those who were part of the network and in its operational outcome: from its early years when it aimed at seizing power, wealth and control of every part of the state, to its post 1990 extremist incarnation with new recruits, organisations and structures put in place to protect at any cost the very wealth and position in the country it had so impressively grasped. However, it is during the years 1973–93, when it was able to establish itself throughout every part of the churches and state, military and administration that made possible the 'bringing of the apocalypse' to Rwanda in 1994. The crimes of *Akazu* during these two decades have almost entirely been forgotten and those responsible for the thousands of killings that took place then have gone unpunished. No international tribunal has ever looked at these crimes nor has the international community taken any interest in bringing to justice those responsible who now live comfortable lives outside Rwanda, often in the very countries whose assistance allowed *Akazu* to blossom during its formative years. Just as the Holocaust cannot be understood without reference to the rise of the Nazi party and its anti-semitic ideology and crimes during the 1930s, so the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi can only be understood by reference to its perpetrators and their exercise

30 French Republic, The Commission of Appeal for Refugees, (2nd Division), case No. 564776, Mme Agathe Kanziga, widow Habyarimana, 15 February 2007.

of power pre-1994. In the present climate, as revisionists seek to revise, rework and often deny responsibility for *Akazu's* crimes committed during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, their twenty-year long history of devastation pre-94, which gave them the structure, finance and individuals to unleash the terror, should be afforded the prominent role it deserves.

Biography

Andrew Wallis is a freelance journalist, academic, and author, and a leading expert in the African Great Lakes Region, especially Rwanda. He holds a Phd in Political Science from the University of Cambridge and is a qualified (NCTJ) journalist, with works featured in a wide range of media, including The Times, The Guardian, USA Today, Thisworld.org, CS Monitor, opendemocracy.net, The New Times, ABC-CLIO, The New Jurist, Institute for Public Policy Research and Rwandan, Ugandan and South African radio and television. His current book *'Stepp'd in Blood: Akazu and the Architects of the Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsi'* is the result of seven years of detailed investigative research, uncovering the lives and motivations of the leading perpetrators of the 1994 horror.