

I visited Rwanda to meet and learn from fellow Christians who are trying to heal their country's wounds by providing for the physical and spiritual needs of those around them. Now, I hope to be one of those many voices who describe what it is like today for a country that was once ruled by chaos and evil – and whose citizens haven't forgotten.

I arrived in Rwanda on July 3, 2005. As we rode from the airport to the Anglican guest house, I discovered something which made me feel an odd kinship with the country: the next day would be a national holiday, just as it was in the United States.

On July 4, Rwandans would celebrate their liberation 11 years ago from the grip of mass killings, when Major General Paul Kagame led the Rwandese Patriotic Front army into Kigali. Kagame is Rwanda's current president.

After we visited the Kigali Memorial Center the next morning, seeing graphic exhibits about genocide and hearing interviews with orphans, I began to look at this beautiful country in a new way. There is an undercurrent of sadness and distrust, but also of determination that the horror would never happen again.

In Rwanda, almost every person you see is either a victim or a perpetrator. Within the category of perpetrator, you have four further categories,

who planned the killings, those who carried them out, those who pointed to where victims hid, and those who looted dead peoples' homes, stealing everything from furniture to livestock to the clothing off a person's body.

Barely anyone escapes responsibility. Nobody is unaffected.

Gacaca

The Rwandan government has a system for identifying the guilty. Every week, communities of ten households get together for gacaca, a neighborhood hearing where people testify to what, and more importantly who, they saw.

The hearings model after the traditional system of reconciliation within villages. Because of the small network of people involved in each gacaca, accountability is strong. It is less easy to get away with lies, denials or false accusations.

Emmanuel Kolini, Archbishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Rwanda, estimates that realistically, it would take 200 years to bring all of the perpetrators – everyone from slaughter masterminds to chicken-stealers – to justice. This is not the point.

"All they are trying to do is encourage people to tell the truth," Kolini said. "There cannot be reconciliation, there cannot be trust, there cannot be true love in Rwanda if the truth is not spoken."

Bishop
Geoffrey

province in southwestern Rwanda also believes gacaca is vital to the health of Rwandan society.

On a recent Sunday at a small church in the village of Bugatama, he preached about the importance of telling the truth at the hearings.

Rwubisisi even brought up an old debate about what Hutu and Tutsi noses look like, trying to put it to rest once and for all. Making any distinction between Hutu and Tutsi is a touchy subject nowadays in Rwanda; it reminds people of a division that

Rwandans feel was arbitrarily created by foreigners.

Background to the Conflict

The idea that Tutsis came from Ethiopia into Rwanda is a strictly European notion, said Rev. Nathan Amooti of the Episcopal Diocese of Kigali.

"In our oral tradition, we don't have anything like that," Amooti said.

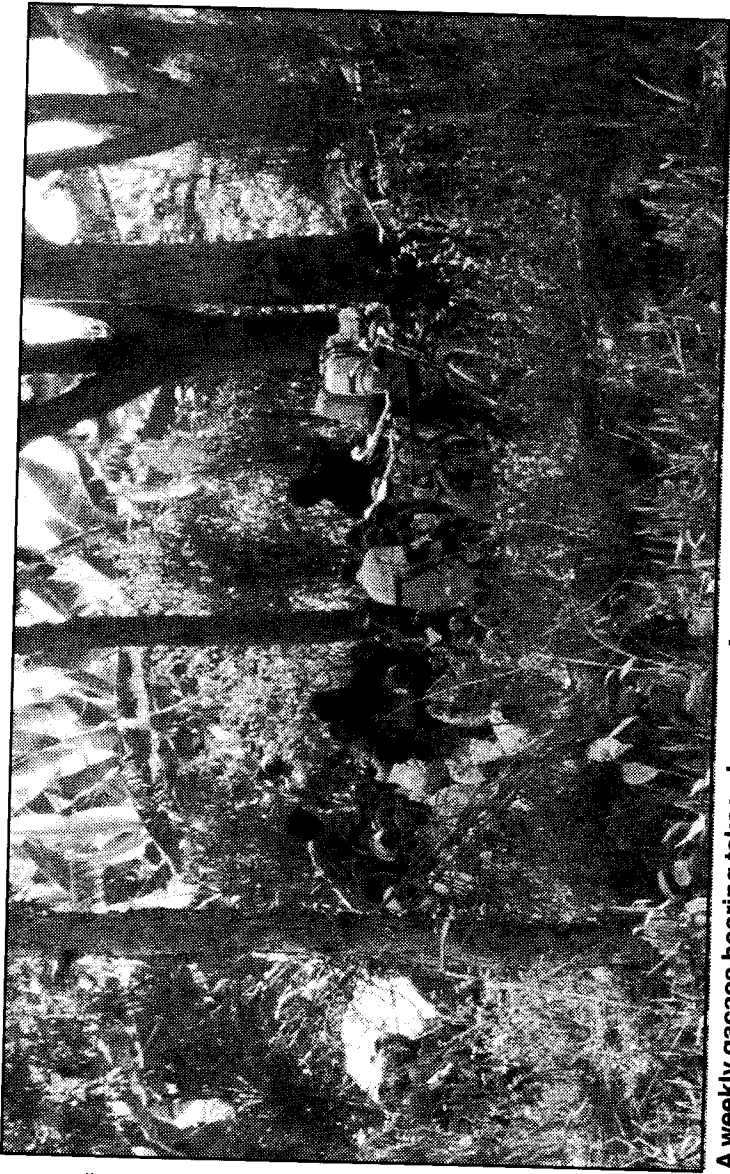
Philip Gourevitch, author of *We Wish To Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, details the origin of the

between Hutu and Tutsi remained porous."

Before the Belgian and German colonists came, Amooti said, "we had the same culture, 100 percent. The same religion even. It was one religion. Even the gods we worshipped, the ancestors, everything was the same."

So how did Hutu and Tutsis become pitted against each other? In part, the theory of superiority of one tribe over another worked well for the German, and later Belgian colonists who came to Rwanda in the 1890s.

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A weekly gacaca hearing takes place one afternoon in a community outside of Kigali, Rwanda.