

## Fraternity, Martyrdom and Peace in Burundi: The Forty Servants of God of Buta

Jodi Mikalachki

Follow this and additional works at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/jgc>



Part of the Aesthetics Commons, Africana Studies Commons, African History Commons, African Languages and Societies Commons, Anthropological Linguistics and Sociolinguistics Commons, Catholic Studies Commons, Christianity Commons, Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons, Cultural History Commons, Digital Humanities Commons, Ethnic Studies Commons, Folklore Commons, Holocaust and Genocide Studies Commons, Inequality and Stratification Commons, Intellectual History Commons, Liturgy and Worship Commons, Missions and World Christianity Commons, Oral History Commons, Other Anthropology Commons, Other International and Area Studies Commons, Place and Environment Commons, Politics and Social Change Commons, Practical Theology Commons, Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons, Race and Ethnicity Commons, Regional Sociology Commons, Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons, Rural Sociology Commons, Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons, Social History Commons, Sociology of Culture Commons, and the Sociology of Religion Commons

---



Catholics & Cultures

VOLUME 6 | ISSUE 1

# *Journal of* GLOBAL CATHOLICISM

FALL 2021

## ENCULTURATION, INCULTURATION, and AGENCY Burundi, Argentina, and the Philippines

### ARTICLES

- Mathew N. Schmalz / Editor's Introduction
- Jodi Mikalachki / Fraternity, Martyrdom and Peace in Burundi: The Forty Servants of God of Buta
- Gustavo Morello, SJ / Catholicism in Context: Religious Practice in Latin America
- Antonio D. Sison / Manila's Black Nazarene and the Reign of Bathala



COLLEGE OF THE  
Holy Cross

Cover image by Arnulfo Fortunado



JODI MIKALACHKI

## Fraternity, Martyrdom and Peace in Burundi: The Forty Servants of God of Buta<sup>1</sup>



**Jodi Mikalachki** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Burundi's Institute of Applied Pedagogy in Bujumbura. She has written extensively on gender and nationalism. Her current project focuses on nonviolent responses to grief and loss in post-independence Burundi. Her essay, "Narrating Violence in Burundian Genocide and Civil War Literature: Pacifique Irankunda's Playing at Violence," appeared in *Emerging Trends in Eastern African Literatures and Cultures* (Galda Verlag, 2020). She has also translated two Burundian works engaging with the nation's cycles of political violence: Zacharie Bukuru's *We Are All Children of God: The Forty Young Martyrs of Buta–Burundi* (Paulines Africa, 2015) and Antoine Kaburahe, *Hutsi: In the Name of Us All* (Iwacu, 2019).





“I think not only of the need to remember the atrocities, but also all those who, amid such great inhumanity and corruption, retained their dignity and, with gestures small or large, chose the part of solidarity, forgiveness, fraternity.”

—Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1. Altarpiece in the Sanctuary of the Martyrs of Fraternity of Buta, Burundi, by Moïse Liwali (1998). Photo by Jodi Mikalachki.

On April 30th, 1997, during Burundi’s 1993–2005 civil war, Buta Minor Seminary was attacked at dawn by a large armed force. Ordered at gunpoint to separate by ethnicity—*Hutus over here, Tutsis over there!*—students in the senior dormitory chose instead to join hands and affirm their common

1 I am grateful to the Africa in Oxford Initiative for a travel grant to conduct secondary research for this article and to the Newhouse Center for the Humanities at Wellesley College for a fellowship that allowed me to complete it. Comments from conference participants at The Oxford Research Center for the Humanities, the IRIIA Center for Multimedia Heritage in Kigali, and the Symposium on Genocide and Human Rights Research in Africa and the Diaspora at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago were also helpful. At the University of Burundi, I am particularly grateful to Professor Melchior Mukuri of the History Department for discussion and feedback on writing-in-progress and to Dr. Audace Mbonyingiro, Chair of the English Department at the Institute of Applied Pedagogy, for his encouragement of my research. My greatest debt is to those who granted me interviews, particularly survivors of the Buta massacre and parents of the martyrs. Father Zacharie Bukuru, whose award-winning book on the Buta Martyrs is the foundation of all research on the subject, has been an invaluable guide. I am also grateful to Brother Emmanuel Mbonyingiro of Mary Queen of Peace Monastery at Buta for interpreting interviews conducted in Kirundi.

2 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, accessed October 18, 2020, [Vatican.va](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html), 249. [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html).

identity as children of God. Over the next four hours, they fell to gunfire and a grenade. During this chaotic assault, as attackers moved in and out of the dormitory, able-bodied students bound the wounds of their injured classmates, carried them to safety and listened to their final words. Dying students chanted psalms, prayed the rosary, and made peace with God and their classmates. Several were heard asking God to forgive their assailants. Ultimately, forty students were killed and twenty-six others seriously wounded. By the time of the students' funeral Mass two days later, their solidarity had begun to turn the massacre into a triumph—a poignant victory of fraternal love over the ethnic manipulation of the civil war. At the partial lifting of mourning ceremony twelve days after the attack, the term “martyr” was first used publicly to describe the fallen students when local Bishop Bernard Bududira announced his intention to build a sanctuary to the Martyrs of Fraternity of Buta. Personally financed by Saint John Paul II, the sanctuary was completed a year later. It quickly became a pilgrimage site for Burundians and international visitors, drawing tens of thousands a year, some walking or keeping vigil all night in the bitter cold of the mountainous interior to honor the memory of the Martyrs of Fraternity. Testimonies to the effectiveness of the martyrs' intercession are abundant. Commemorative Masses draw hundreds of worshippers in Burundi and abroad; between four and five thousand participated in the twentieth anniversary Mass at Buta in 2017. In 2019, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints opened its investigation of the Forty Servants of God of Buta, together with a Burundian priest and three missionaries who also bore ultimate witness to the love of Christ in the face of genocidal violence. Their collective cause has been postulated as the Martyrs of Fraternity of Burundi, invoking the phrase that has popularly designated the Buta seminarians since their death in 1997.

In this article, I discuss the testimony of the Martyrs of Fraternity Buta as an example of nonviolent masculinity rooted in fraternal love. The Buta seminarians' witness to fraternity is particularly remarkable in that it was offered during a civil war that mobilized young men and youth for violence, often targeting schools. Though not immune to the ethnic manipulations of the civil war, the Buta seminary community drew on Burundian cultural values and practices to re-align qualities often associated with warlike masculinity, including courage, fortitude, solidarity and



perseverance. I explore this passage from politicized aggression to fraternal love in the ongoing story of the Buta martyrs, which includes the seminary's program to foster a culture of peace in the early years of the civil war, the students' testimony to fraternal love during the 1997 attack, and Burundian accounts of the continuing importance of their witness in the reconstruction of the nation. Drawing on fifty interviews conducted from March 2018 to February 2021 with survivors, parents of the martyrs, neighbors, religious leaders and other Burundian intellectuals, I examine how Burundians understand the significance of the Buta martyrdom to their own country and the world.<sup>3</sup> As the global Church increasingly opens to the witness of martyrs in Africa,<sup>4</sup> the Buta story is of great interest, highlighting the role of African Catholics and Catholic institutions led by Africans in addressing genocide. The Buta seminarians' sacrificial witness to fraternity demonstrates the effectiveness of enculturated African Catholicism in mobilizing youth to resist genocidal manipulation and inspiring others to transform its legacy of division and trauma. As surviving student Nicolas Nyabenda, now a priest and professor of philosophy, asserts, "the martyrdom of Buta is the fruit of an educative process built on human values and Christian values."<sup>5</sup>

The October 2020 release of *Fratelli Tutti*, the Papal Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship, renders the story of the Martyrs of Fraternity of Buta all the more valuable to a communion seeking to contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity without borders. Though it testifies to the universal human value of fraternity, the witness of the Buta martyrs is deeply rooted in Burundian culture and history. As I explore their story, I focus on the intersection of Burundian cultural values and practices with the Christian tradition of martyrdom, both in preparing the seminarians' witness to fraternal love and in framing the ongoing reception of their testimony in Burundi. In particular, I consider the

3 Almost all interviews were conducted in French. I use my own English translations for quotations. Interviews in Kirundi were interpreted into French, which I have translated into English for quotations, examining the Kirundi original where possible.

4 The 2018 canonization of the Martyrs of Algeria has reinforced the more established veneration of the Martyrs of Uganda, officially recognized since 1964, and contributes to a growing recognition of the collective witness of African martyrs in the Church's calendar.

5 Nicolas Nyabenda, Letter to the author, November 11, 2018.

Burundian understandings of fraternity (*umuvukano*) and Burundians' associations of martyrdom with the traditional value of *ibanga*, or absolute commitment to a social role or responsibility whatever the cost, and the *intore* or warriors dance that was taught at the seminary and figures in liturgies commemorating the martyrs of Buta. Concepts of *ibanga* and *intore* were historically associated with Burundian military sovereignty and a warrior ethos of noble masculinity. In the Buta martyrdom, however, they express a nonviolent masculinity that displays graceful alternatives to aggression. Woven into an enculturated Christian training at the seminary, *umuvukano*, *ibanga* and the *intore* dance give human particularity to the Buta testimony of fraternal love, both within Burundi and globally. As Francis suggests in *Fratelli Tutti*, "A country that moves forward while remaining solidly grounded in its original cultural substratum is a treasure for the whole of humanity."<sup>6</sup> Anchored in the rich ground of Burundian culture, the Buta martyrs' witness to fraternal love in the face of genocidal violence is indeed a treasure for the global Church and the world.

By exploring the role of Burundian cultural values and practices in resisting genocide, I also address what Patricia O. Daley has described as "a pervasive image of inherent dysfunctionality in African societies" in the scholarly literature on African conflict.<sup>7</sup> Introducing her important study, *Gender and Genocide in Burundi: The Search For Spaces of Peace in the Great Lakes Region*, she argues that the challenge for scholars "is to shift the paradigm on warfare from that belonging to an ideation system which devalues African lives to one whose starting point is the reassertion of the humanity of African people."<sup>8</sup> The Buta story in fact charts a course from the genocidal devaluation of African lives to the reassertion of the humanity of African people, both in the testimony of the martyrs and its ongoing effects. Survivor Nicolas Nyabenda, who was critically wounded in the attack after carrying an injured classmate to safety, observes both these poles in the Buta story: "Given the historical situation and the sociopolitical conjuncture of the country, the

6 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 137.

7 Patricia O. Daley, *Gender and Genocide in Burundi: The Search For Spaces of Peace in the Great Lakes Region* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008), 5.

8 Daley, *Gender and Genocide in Burundi*, 6.



martyrdom of Buta symbolizes on the one hand all crimes resulting from discriminative ideologies. On the other hand, it symbolizes the stripping of self that another may live.”<sup>9</sup> Congolese historian Jacques Depelchin has observed this general paradox in African conflicts. In *Silences in African History*, he contends that “ethics are alive and well within African societies, even among those which, as in Rwanda and Burundi, have gone astray,” suggesting that “the sense of ethics can be highest in the very arenas from which it seems to have completely disappeared.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, one may argue that African societies that have been repeatedly destabilized by political violence may also produce eloquent examples of how to transform these cycles and renew human solidarity. This process conforms to Francis’s concept of solidarity as “thinking and acting in terms of community,” in which solidarity becomes “a way of making history.”<sup>11</sup>

The solidarity of the Buta students in the midst of a genocidal civil war is the more remarkable in that they were completely undefended and vulnerable. Schoolboys fired upon in their beds at dawn, they repeatedly refused to separate into the ethnic identities mobilized by the civil war and forcefully invoked by their armed assailants. The students’ youthful vulnerability figures large both in survivors’ recollections of the attack and in assessments by other Burundians of the power of the Buta testimony. The potential of vulnerability to transform cycles of violence is a central proposition of Judith Butler’s *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, in which the American philosopher asks whether experiences of vulnerability and loss must necessarily lead to violence and retribution. Butler’s extended meditation on vulnerability, mourning and violence is of interest here, not because the Buta story requires a framework drawn from western philosophy, but rather because of how thoughtfully she engages with her personal grief and the collective anger of Americans in response to the national trauma of the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York. The trauma of the Buta massacre is also personal and national. “If we are interested in arresting cycles of violence to produce less violent

9 Nyabenda, Letter.

10 Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African History: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition* (Dar es Salaam: Nkuku na Nyota, 2005), 29.

11 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 116.



outcomes,” Butler posits, “it is no doubt important to ask what, politically, might be made of grief besides a cry for war.”<sup>12</sup> The Buta martyrs’ experience of vulnerability and loss did not, in fact, lead to military violence and retribution, despite an established pattern of reprisals during Burundi’s civil war, especially following school massacres. Their story thus responds to a global need for nonviolent responses to grief and loss. To understand the full value of the Buta testimony, however, it must also be considered as a contextualized example of violence and its transformation in contemporary Africa.

## BURUNDIAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND SCHOOLS

Burundi’s 1993–2005 civil war, during which Buta Minor Seminary was attacked, resulted from three decades of politicizing Hutu and Tutsi identities through state violence and repression. Though Burundi made a relatively peaceful transition to independence in 1962, its political stability had already been undermined by the 1961 assassination of Prime Minister Louis Rwagasore. Widely popular, Rwagasore had collaborated with Hutus, Tutsis, the princely class of *Ganwas* to which he belonged, and Swahili-speaking Muslims to forge a multi-interest party with broad representation. UPRONA, or *Unité pour le progrès national* (Unity for National Progress), the party they founded, would govern Burundi for the next three decades. Rwagasore’s assassination a month after the 1961 elections led to divisions within UPRONA leadership, which took on an increasingly ethnic cast as the “social revolution” unfolded in neighboring Rwanda, driving tens of thousands of Rwandan Tutsis into exile, including 50,000 in Bujumbura alone.<sup>13</sup> By 1965, the social categories of Hutu and Tutsi had been thoroughly politicized in Burundi.<sup>14</sup> A 1965 uprising of marginalized Hutu members of UPRONA, though confined to a single province and quickly put down, was followed by indiscriminate massacres of local Hutu civilians and a general purge of Hutu officers in the armed forces.

12 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), xii.

13 René Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnocide as discourse and practice* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1994), 60.

14 René Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi* (New York, Praeger, 1970), 197–227; Jean-Pierre Chrétien and Jean-François Dupaquier, *Burundi 1972: Au bords des génocides* (Paris, Karthala, 2007), 18–29.



Continuing marginalization of Hutu intellectuals led to another armed uprising in April 1972, when Hutu bands collaborating with mercenaries from Zaïre killed 800-1,200 Tutsis in the south of the country.<sup>15</sup> Though this terrible anti-Tutsi violence was quickly contained and put down in the south, state reprisals were massive, spreading throughout the country and targeting Hutu males in particular, from government ministers to high school students. Between 80,000 and 250,000 Hutus were killed, representing 3.5 to 5% of the country's of 3.5 million people.<sup>16</sup> A further 100,000 or more were driven into exile, where many would spend a generation in UNHCR camps in Tanzania.<sup>17</sup> The United Nations 1985 *Whitaker Report* categorized the 1972 state killings of Hutus as genocide.<sup>18</sup>

UPRONA military leaders ruled Burundi for the next two decades in a single-party system using the party coup as their only mechanism of regime change.<sup>19</sup> In the early 1990s, the government of President Pierre Buyoya, under pressure from international partners, began to incorporate Hutus into the civil service and softened state sanctions against freedom of expression and affiliation, ushering in the 1993 multiparty elections that brought to power Melchior Ndadaye, Burundi's first civilian and first Hutu president. Ndadaye's party, the multi-ethnic but predominantly Hutu FRODEBU, or *Front Pour la Démocratie au Burundi* (Front For Democracy in Burundi), also won a landslide victory in the legislative elections that followed.<sup>20</sup> An attempted military coup was put down shortly before President

15 Chrétien and Dupaquier, *Burundi 1972*, 132-7.

16 René Lemarchand and David Martin, *Selective Genocide in Burundi* (London, Minority Rights Group, Report No. 20, July 1974), 5. Chrétien and Dupaquier calculate that nearly ten percent of Hutu men were killed, bereaving an estimated 70,000 widows and 150,000 to 250,000 orphans; Chrétien and Dupaquier, *Burundi 1972*, 282.

17 Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995), 38-9, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226190969.001.0001>; Daley, *Gender & Genocide*, 174-82.

18 United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, *Revised and Updated Report on the Question of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Whitaker Report)*, Thirty-eighth session, Item 4 of the provisional agenda (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1985/6) (July 2, 1985), 24. In the same paragraph, the *Whitaker Report* also categorizes the 1965 reprisals against Hutus as genocide.

19 Melchior Mukuri, *Dictionnaire Chronologique du Burundi, Vol. 2: 1966-1993, L'Ere des Coups d'Etats* (Bujumbura, Université du Burundi, 2013), 3.

20 Mukuri, *Dictionnaire Chronologique du Burundi*, 373, 380.



Ndadaye's inauguration on July 10, but three months later, on October 21, 1993, the President was abducted and assassinated by officers of the Burundian army. The news of Ndadaye's murder spread quickly to the countryside, provoking Hutu massacres of Tutsi civilians, to which the army responded with indiscriminate reprisals against Hutus. A 1996 report of the United Nations Security Council's Commission of Inquiry for Burundi concluded that acts of genocide against Tutsi civilians had been committed in the four-day period following President Ndadaye's assassination "at the instigation and with the participation of certain Hutu FRODEBU functionaries and leaders up to commune [county] level."<sup>21</sup> It also reported that "indiscriminate killing of Hutu men, women and children was carried out by the Burundian Army and Gendarmerie, and by Tutsi civilians," during the same four days, and that "no effort was made by the military authorities at any level to stop, investigate or punish such acts."<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the Commission observed that the Burundian army, though nominally under the command of the civilian president, was generally admitted to be a "power unto itself," publicly accused not only of responsibility for the assassination of President Ndadaye and "the deadly repression that followed," but also of being "at present engaged, with total impunity, in the large scale killing of civilians."<sup>23</sup>

The FRODEBU government's attempts to stabilize the country in the months following President Ndadaye's assassination suffered a major setback in April 1994 when President Cyprien Ntaryamira, Ndadaye's successor, died in the shooting

21 United Nations Security Council (UNSC), International Commission of Inquiry for Burundi, *Final Report*, (S/1996/682) (August 22, 1996), 483.

22 International Commission of Inquiry for Burundi, *Final Report*, 486. In its analysis of testimony, the Commission notes that the Burundian army and gendarmerie set out from their bases on October 21, the day of President Ndadaye's assassination, and that by October 22, both the killing of Tutsis by Hutus and the killing of Hutus by soldiers had spread out from points on the main roads to less accessible rural sites; cf. *ibid.*, 468-469.

23 International Commission of Inquiry for Burundi, *Final Report*, 24. The UNSC report repeatedly expresses frustration at the non-cooperation of the Burundian Defence Ministry and armed forces, particularly with regard to the investigation of President Ndadaye's assassination, a tactic that prevented the Commission from going beyond circumstantial evidence to identify "the persons that should be brought to justice for this crime;" cf. *ibid.*, 213. The Commission also noted that its security detail of uniformed and armed Gendarmes (under army command) undoubtedly discouraged Hutus from coming forward to testify, both in Bujumbura and the rural interior, thus giving disproportionate weight to Tutsi testimony; cf. *ibid.*, 49, 54, 257, 307.



down of Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana's plane over Kigali. Seeing the civilian government unable to control the official army, a faction within FRODEBU created an armed wing, the FDD or *Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (Forces for the Defence of Democracy), which eventually developed into the CNDD-FDD party (*Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie—Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie*/National Council for the Defence of Democracy—Forces for the Defence of Democracy) that has governed Burundi since the first post-conflict elections in 2005. The CNDD-FDD is the force that attacked Buta Minor Seminary on April 30, 1997, less than a year after President Pierre Buyoya and his UPRONA party had returned to power via a military coup. Under regional sanctions, Buyoya's regime proved unable to end the civil war and agreed to begin negotiations with armed Hutu movements in 1998. Facilitated successively by Julius Nyerere and Nelson Mandela, these negotiations led to the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in August 2000 by the National Assembly and the Government of Burundi, ten political parties and three armed political movements. In 2005, after almost all parties to the civil war had signed, Burundi held its first democratic elections since 1993. These elections, judged to be free and fair, marked the end of a twelve-year civil war that reached all regions of the country, killing 300,000, driving 400,000 into exile and internally displacing 800,000.<sup>24</sup>

Burundi's 1993-2005 civil war was thus complex, initially pitting a democratically elected government against its own armed forces. It quickly degenerated into interethnic violence perpetrated by, and visited upon, Burundians of all identities and affiliations, eventually involving more than twenty political movements.<sup>25</sup> Although the war was officially waged between armed Hutu political forces and the Tutsi-dominated regular army, civilians were its principal targets. A 1998 Human Rights Watch Report noted that, "in practice, the contenders fight few direct battles and instead carry on combat indirectly through attacks on civilians."<sup>26</sup> Schools

24 Daley, *Gender & Genocide*, 107-34.

25 Daley, *Gender & Genocide*, 89-91, includes a table of twenty-three Burundian political parties, rebel movements and militias with their ethnic affiliations as of 2000.

26 Timothy Longman, *Proxy Targets: Civilians in the War in Burundi* (London, Human Rights Watch, 1998), 1.



were privileged sites of violence. Daley calculates that by 1995, twenty percent of school and university students had abandoned their studies because of the dangers inherent in attending educational institutions.<sup>27</sup> State boarding schools were closed for four months following school massacres after the assassination of President Ndadaye.<sup>28</sup> Even after schools reopened, students continued to be killed. The FRODEBU government's investigations into the security crisis in secondary education indicate that by 1995, political violence had affected most of the state's more than sixty boarding schools. Incompetent, partisan or simply overwhelmed school leadership was cited, with frequent changes in school administrators.<sup>29</sup> Similar problems, including absenteeism, affected other school staff. A climate of suspicion and mistrust characterized the classroom. Succumbing to indiscipline, interethnic antagonism and mass reactions, students intimidated and terrorized one another and at times their instructors, often manipulated by outside parties.<sup>30</sup> Local populations suffered the price of these manipulations, as the indiscriminate reprisals that characterized the civil war generally were even more pronounced in response

27 Daley, *Gender & Genocide*, 111-16. Daley notes that as the war went on, children were also impressed into the regular army and rebel forces; by 2000, they represented an estimated 14,000 combatants. In 2003, Anna Obura found that school enrollments had declined by more than a third since the beginning of the war; cf. Anna Obura, *Staying Power: Struggling to reconstruct education in Burundi since 1993* (Paris: IIEP, 2008), 94. Peter Uvin calculates that nearly three percent of young Burundian males joined an armed movement during the civil war (179). Interviewing youth of both genders in three communes in 2006, he found that the average child lost four years of school during the war; cf. Peter Uvin, *Life After Violence: A People's Story of Burundi* (London, Zed Books, 2009), 179, 91, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350221130>.

28 For a detailed account drawing on eye-witness testimony of the notorious Kibimba massacre of seventy Tutsi boarding school students in October 1993, cf. Nigel Watt, *Burundi: Biography of a Small African Country* (London: Hurst, 2008), 48-55.

29 Léonidas Ntibinonye, principal of a state boarding school at the time of President Ndadaye's assassination, claims that almost all state boarding schools had received new principals following FRODEBU's 1993 election victory; cf. Léonidas Ntibinonye (Buta neighbor, retired high school principal) in discussion with the author, May 2020. Some of the new appointments, he feels, may have favored ethnic polarization. Whatever the positions of individual principals, if it is indeed true that FRODEBU replaced almost all state boarding school principals in 1993, it would mean that most of these establishments were under the direction of people new to their job and in many cases the school community for which they were responsible when the civil war broke out.

30 Thaddée Siryuyumunsi, "L'école: Gestion des tensions dans les établissements secondaires," *Burundi, La Fracture Identitaire: Logiques de violence et certitudes "ethniques,"* eds. Jean-Pierre Chrétien and Melchior Mukuri (Paris, Karthala, 2002), 171-8.



to school violence.<sup>31</sup>

Students and staff at Buta Minor Seminary were well aware of these patterns of school violence. Survivor Pasteur Manirambona, whose brother Patrick Nininahazwe was killed during the attack, recalls that the ethnic divisions created by the civil war had made “a living hell” of other boarding schools.<sup>32</sup> Burundi’s seven minor seminaries, administered as state boarding schools under convention with the Ministry of Education, were not spared. Though the attempt to bring an armed band into Mureke Minor Seminary in the northern diocese of Ngozi failed,<sup>33</sup> Ciya Minor Seminary in the western diocese of Bubanza was successfully attacked by the CNDD-FDD, the same force that would later assail Buta.<sup>34</sup> Family stories about violence against students during the 1972 genocide also figured prominently in the consciousness of Buta seminarians as ethnic violence again broke out in 1993. Zacharie Bukuru, the seminary’s rector, recounts that Tutsi students feared being attacked by the local population, overwhelmingly Hutu, while Hutu students were afraid of the soldiers in the seminary’s security detail.<sup>35</sup> It was in this national

31 Anatole Nahayo, “De la répression du génocide, des crimes contre l’humanité et des crimes de guerre commis au Burundi de 1993 à 2005” (MA thesis, University of Burundi, 2005), 14. For the general pattern of indiscriminate reprisals during the civil war, see Longman, *Proxy Targets*, 97-8 and Daley, *Gender & Genocide*, 111-13.

32 Pasteur Manirambona (student survivor, now priest) in discussion with the author, September 2019.

33 Siryuyumunsi, “L’école,” 171. Déogratias Bukobero, who was a priest on staff at Mureke Minor Seminary at the time, relates that the experience prompted him twenty years later to invoke the Buta martyrs’ testimony to fraternal love when politicized divisions again threatened Mureke students in 2015; cf. Déogratias Bukobero (priest and Spiritual Father at Mureke Seminary) in discussion with the author, October 2019.

34 Nicolas Nyabenda (student survivor, now a priest and professor of philosophy) in discussion with the author, October 2018. Some Ciya seminarians were abducted and forced to join the rebels in the bush until they were able to escape. During the Buta attack, four students from the junior cycle were also abducted and held by the rebels for several days, suffering beatings and imprisonment before they were able to escape; for an account of their ordeal, cf. Zacharie Bukuru, *We Are All Children of God: The Story of the Forty Young Martyrs of Buta–Burundi*, trans. Jodi Mikalachki (Nairobi: Paulines Africa, 2015), 79-81.

35 Bukuru, *Children of God*, 34-5. In Buta’s southern diocese of Bururi, Hutu civilians had indeed killed Tutsis during the brief but terrible uprising in late April 1972. Conversely, the army targeted Hutu school boys as emerging intellectuals during the nation-wide reprisals, beginning with the Seventh Grade; cf. Chrétien and Dupaquier, *Burundi 1972*, 204-41. Liisa Malkki notes that Hutu refugees in Tanzania emphasized violence against school children in their narratives of the 1972 Burundi genocide; cf. Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, 76-7.

and historical context of mutual fear and recrimination that Bukuru and his staff worked to develop the culture of peace and fraternal love to which the seminarians ultimately bore witness.

### UMUVUKANO: FRATERNAL LOVE DURING A CIVIL WAR

The Buta massacre is noteworthy—perhaps unique in the annals of Burundi’s 1993–2005 civil war—in that no reprisals were visited on the local population. This absence of retributive violence is the more remarkable in that the Hutu CNDD-FDD movement immediately claimed responsibility for the massacre over Voice of America and other media.<sup>36</sup> Officers of the Tutsi-dominated army and government were among the family members who gathered in Buta two days after the attack to bury the murdered students, and some came armed with grenades. Zacharie Bukuru believes that if only Tutsi students had been killed, the mourners would have razed the overwhelmingly Hutu region to the ground.<sup>37</sup> What stopped them was the testimony of fraternal love offered by the students, who had stood together, Hutu and Tutsi, refusing to separate under the threat and eventual execution of armed violence. Gaspard Nzeyimana, a local official whose son Pacifique Kanezere was among the martyred students, emphasizes that it was the students’ solidarity that averted violence. “If these children hadn’t stayed together,” he says, “I don’t know what would have happened to Hutus in this region.”<sup>38</sup> Léopold Nsabiyumva, who was a seminarian in the junior cycle (Grades 7–10) and is native to the region, affirms that “if we had separated and only one group had been killed, the vengeance on the people of the area would have been terrible.”<sup>39</sup> With the exception of two or three Tutsi families, the seminary’s local community of Kivuruga is entirely Hutu. “Here in Kivuruga,” relates Jacqueline Ntakirutimana, who lived in teachers’ housing at the time of the attack, “there were a lot of Hutu people. If the young

36 Bukuru, *Children of God*, 112.

37 Bukuru, *Children of God*, 97.

38 Gaspard Nzeyimana (father of martyr Pacifique Kanezere, head of Muzenga Zone at the time of the attack, veterinarian) in discussion with the author, May 2018.

39 Léopold Nsabiyumva (student survivor, now a priest) in discussion with the author, September 2018.

people hadn't agreed to die together, it would have been a catastrophe, because these children came from rich families in Bujumbura and all over. Those families would have come to take vengeance if the children had agreed to separate."<sup>40</sup> Augustin Nzohabonayo, another teacher at the seminary, also identifies the students' solidarity as critical in having saved the local population from massacre. He recalls that many of those who attended the funeral of the forty seminarians were armed, with some announcing their intention of killing everyone in the area, even at the sacrifice of a few Tutsis who might be among them. "That's why we have the right to say that our students are martyrs," he asserts. "They saved a lot of people."<sup>41</sup>

The political importance of their solidarity was not, however, foremost in students' minds on the day of the attack. Rather, they were motivated by what survivor Léopold Nsabyumva describes as "an impulse of fraternal love."<sup>42</sup> It is for this fraternal love that the Buta martyrs are primarily remembered by Burundians. "They loved one another," says Teresa Banyankubusa, mother of martyr Alexis Ndikumana. "These children died for fraternity, for the love of God—they left this testimony to love and fraternity."<sup>43</sup> Paula Nibigira, mother of martyr Jean-Thierry Arakaza, understands their testimony in similar terms: "They died together, even though people tried to divide them. They were willing to die together—*umuvukano*."<sup>44</sup> Inscribed on the façade of the martyrs' sanctuary, the gender-neutral term *umuvukano* translates as fraternity. It is derived from the Kirundi verb to be born (*ku-vuka*) and the suffix *-na* (with, together), signifying the state of being born with or together that qualifies children of the same parents. Anthropologist Adrien Ntabona explains the familial sense of the term as follows: "my brother is the one who is born from the same womb as me, who prolongs the same human interiority

40 Jacqueline Ntakirutimana (English teacher at Buta Minor Seminary at the time of the attack, now the seminary's accountant) in discussion with the author, December 2019.

41 Augustin Nzohabonayo (science teacher at Buta Minor Seminary, now and at the time of the attack) in discussion with the author, October 2018.

42 Nsabyumva, discussion.

43 Teresa Banyankubusa (farmer, mother of martyr Alexis Ndikumana) in discussion with the author, May 2020.

44 Paula Nibigira (retired school secretary, mother of martyr Jean-Thierry Arakaza), in discussion with the author, November 2018.



as me, and with whom I thus identify, with whom I am one.”<sup>45</sup> In Burundian culture, he elaborates, the full meaning of umuvukano is captured in the phrase *kwi-tanga utiziganya*, to offer oneself unsparingly, which in the familial context implies “the capacity to give one’s life in the consciousness that one thereby reaches the culminating point of self-realization.”<sup>46</sup> Though Ntabona emphasizes blood ties in his discussion of umuvukano, he acknowledges that its virtues can also be extended to “the solidarity of good neighbors, of friendship and even social harmony in general.”<sup>47</sup> In his conclusions, he argues that a Burundian ethic of humanism “demands that the spirit of family be without borders to render people capable of extending blood ties, of achieving a sense of neighborliness based on familial solidarity, of procuring an unlimited openness to every person and every member of society. In this way, one will be able to say to people of different origins and different ethnicities: “*turi bamwe*” (we are one).”<sup>48</sup>

In Ntabona’s formulation, fully realized Burundian humanism goes beyond the familial sense of fraternity to encompass all human beings, including all ethnicities. This is a poignant vision in the wake of Burundi’s decades of interethnic violence. Perhaps for this reason, the Buta students’ self-offering is most meaningful to other Burundians as a sacrificial witness to fraternal love that knew no ethnic bounds. Godeliève Ntisezerana, mother of martyr Désiré Nduwimana, emphasizes the importance of the students’ witness to fraternity in the midst of Burundi’s civil war. “The children of Buta refused to separate by ethnicity,” she says, “though there was an interethnic war going on in the country.”<sup>49</sup> Survivor Melchior Ngowenubusa, who was among the students in the senior dormitory, also situates the martyrs’ testimony in this sociopolitical context: “It’s a message that demonstrated the importance of fraternity between members of a nation,” he explains. “In the precise case of Buta Minor Seminary, this fraternity demonstrated itself in a country

45 Adrien Ntabona, *L’Ubuntu (Humanité Réussie): Ses roses et ses épines au Burundi* (Bujumbura: CRID, 2020), 38. I use my own English translations in all quotations from this work.

46 Adrien Ntabona, *L’Ubuntu*, 39-40.

47 Adrien Ntabona, *L’Ubuntu*, 35.

48 Adrien Ntabona, *L’Ubuntu*, 171.

49 Godeliève Ntisezerana (farmer, mother of martyr Désiré Nduwimana) in discussion with the author, December 2019.



where people were looking daggers at one another, where they were killing each other on the basis of ethnic affiliation.”<sup>50</sup> Ngowenubusa and other students in the senior cycle (Grades 11-13) had their fraternity tested. Targeted and cornered in their dormitory, they were ordered at least three times to separate. Some withstood individual pressure, including physical violence, to make them join the attackers.<sup>51</sup> Their collective decision to stay together is central to the survivors’ understanding of what they experienced. Immediately after the attack, Stany Niyizonkiza, a student from the senior dormitory, cried out to the seminary’s rector, “Father, they wanted to separate us, but we refused.”<sup>52</sup> Other testimonies recount how students cared for one another during the attack without regard to ethnicity, some undergoing considerable risk to protect or carry wounded classmates to safety.<sup>53</sup> Father Zacharie Bukuru, the seminary’s rector, shared that testimony two days after the massacre when he addressed mourners at the funeral Mass, imploring them not to dishonor the memory “of these young people who died hand-in-hand forgiving their assassins. . . . I beg of you, ask for the grace to forgive during the eucharist. Do not try to kill in your turn. You see where violence leads.”<sup>54</sup>

Because of the students’ solidarity, there were, in fact, no reprisals after the Buta massacre. Gaspard Nzeyimana, whose son was killed in the attack, was the administrative head of the zone in which Buta is located. During the reception after the students’ funeral, which was attended by the president of the Republic and other high officers of church and state, he publicly called upon President Buyoya

50 Melchior Ngowenubusa (student survivor, medical doctor) in discussion with the author, October 2018.

51 Bukuru, *Children of God*, 85-90.

52 Bukuru, *Children of God*, 99.

53 Survivor Innocent Ndayiragije, who was injured in the knee and the back during the attack, reports that fellow students Edouard Nkeshimana and Pasteur Manirambona carried him down the stairs and hid him in the outdoor toilets. Though a cold rain was falling, Pasteur removed his own t-shirt and used it to bandage Innocent’s knee. Neither student who carried him was of his ethnicity; cf. Innocent Ndayiragije (student survivor, executive director of ALM-Buta), in discussion with the author, March 2018. Survivor Claude Minani, who ran into the bushes with three other boys from the junior dormitory, recalls how they pushed him into the middle of their hiding place so that he would not be seen by the attackers, since his ethnicity made him particularly vulnerable; cf. Claude Minani (student survivor, doctor) in discussion with the author, March 2018. For other examples of student solidarity during the attack, cf. Bukuru, *Children of God*, 86-92.

54 Bukuru, *Children of God*, 106.

to protect the local population from reprisals, noting that as a Hutu himself, he would surely have removed his son from the seminary had he been complicit in the attack. Nzeyimana also appealed to Colonel Jean Bikomagu, the army chief of staff regarded by many Hutus as responsible for President Ndadaïye's death and military violence against Hutu civilians. Prompted by Nzeyimana, Bikomagu personally removed Tutsi gang members who had come up from Bujumbura with the intention of killing local Hutus after the funeral, taking them to the Bururi military base and dispatching them from there to the capital.<sup>55</sup> A few days after the funeral, Hutu staff at the school were alerted that outsiders were preparing a list accusing them of having brought the attackers to the school. They appealed to Salvatore Niciteretse, rector of the Cathedral Parish in Bururi, who persuaded the provincial governor and the commander of the local military base to intervene for their protection.<sup>56</sup> From the president to the governor to the army chief of staff and the base commander, these men had been engaged for years in violence against Hutu armed movements and civilian populations. The fraternal love of the Buta students in remaining together as Hutus and Tutsis prompted all these officers to break an established pattern of indiscriminate reprisals against civilian populations, particularly after school massacres.

Now Bishop of Bururi diocese, Salvatore Niciteretse was one of the first people on the scene after the attack, helping convey wounded students to hospital and sheltering their traumatized classmates in his own room that night. "The martyrs of Buta were ordinary seminarians like any others" he points out. "But then, in the name of their faith, they refused to divide ethnically into Hutus and Tutsis." Reflecting theologically on their witness, he observes that in the testimony of the Buta martyrs, "faith is stronger than ethnicity. That's what Jesus asks: he who prefers his mother or father to me is not worthy of me. And there it is—in the name of this faith—another fraternity that goes beyond the fraternity of blood or family."<sup>57</sup> A theologian specializing in the social doctrine of the Church, Niciteretse approaches the Buta martyrdom in terms of the social teachings of Jesus. In his analysis, the

<sup>55</sup> Nzeyimana, discussion.

<sup>56</sup> Henri Nizigama (student supervisor at Buta Minor Seminary) in discussion with the author, May 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Salvatore Niciteretse (Bishop of Bururi and theologian) in discussion with the author, May 2020.



students' witness reframes the blood relationships that underlie concepts of kinship, including ethnicity. By refusing to separate ethnically, the students offered an example of fraternity grounded in faith as a spiritual alternative to the divisionist manipulation of ethnic identities. Their faith thus allowed them to transcend both the political context of the civil war and the false premises of its fratricidal ideology.

## IBANGA: SACRIFICIAL COMMITMENT TO THE VERY END

Survivor Nicolas Nyabenda affirms that the martyrs' testimony was a refutation of the divisionist ideology of the civil war: "After at least four years of attempted ethnic division and failed ideological manipulation, the forty young seminarians testified that we were educated for communion in life and in death. To do that, it was necessary for us to give primacy to the other."<sup>58</sup> This idea of gift, particularly the gift of self for the other, lies at the heart of Burundian understandings of martyrdom. Léonidas Nitereka, Vicar General of the Diocese of Bururi and an anthropologist, defines Christian martyrdom in these terms:

Christian martyrdom is the encounter between two dynamics of gift. There is Christ who gave himself for love, and this gift . . . constitutes a call. So the martyr has the grace to respond to the gift with another gift. It is really the encounter between two gifts. In this sense, the martyr shows that a person is by nature gift, openness. The human person is this openness toward God who gives himself.<sup>59</sup>

The sacrificial gift of self for the other, Nitereka observes, has deep roots in Burundian culture. He links it to the Burundian concept of *ibanga*, which he defines as "a sense of responsibility, of things done well, which gives you a certain dignity. It's the idea of sacrifice in order to attain the status of a worthy person, a person of honor. . . . You have a role in society and so you play your role to the very end."<sup>60</sup>

58 Nyabenda, Letter.

59 Léonidas Nitereka (Vicar General of Bururi Diocese, theologian of anthropology) in discussion with the author, October 2018.

60 Nitereka, discussion.



Anthropologist Adrien Ntabona defines *ibanga* as “the voluntary acceptance of a burden of responsibility, no matter how heavy.”<sup>61</sup> He goes on to characterize *ibanga* as both the anchor and the summit of Burundian humanism, identifying it as a national value that can enrich the world.<sup>62</sup> Though *ibanga* was traditionally associated with a warrior’s duty to face combat, Ntabona argues that now “it is active nonviolence that must be privileged. But accepting death in the peaceful defence of a just cause, that must remain *de rigueur*, even if it is costly.”<sup>63</sup> As a virtue, *ibanga* has the capacity to create “a shared communal ‘me’” he elaborates, “through which one is ready for sacrifice.”<sup>64</sup> Ntabona recognizes this communal consciousness of *ibanga* in the Buta martyrs, asserting that “they prepared themselves together to testify to the very end to Christian fraternity.”<sup>65</sup>

The Buta students’ solidarity to the very end of their ordeal is often cited by Burundians as the seal of their martyrdom. Even after the attack had ended and the regular army came to transport the wounded to hospital, it was the students themselves who carried their injured classmates down the dormitory stairs to the waiting trucks. “They were covered in the blood of their fellow students,” recounts Henri Nizigama, a staff member who observed this operation. “They would keep checking—Is he still breathing? That’s what proves their fraternity.”<sup>66</sup> Sealed in the blood of their living comrades, the survivors testified to the end to fraternal love for their classmates. With respect to those who died, César Sabushimike, another staff member on dormitory duty during the attack, testifies that “I am convinced that each one of them was faithful to the end, even to martyrdom. So I respect each and every one of them. . . . I knew them all well.”<sup>67</sup> Pierre Nyandwi, father of martyr Désiré Nduwimana and a retired soldier, says that the Buta students are martyrs because “they showed a spirit of unity among themselves without regard to

61 Ntabona, *L’Ubuntu*, 18.

62 Ntabona, *L’Ubuntu*, 25-28.

63 Ntabona, *L’Ubuntu*, 20.

64 Ntabona, *L’Ubuntu*, 26.

65 Adrien Ntabona, Letter to the author, 22 November 2018.

66 Nizigama, discussion.

67 César Sabushimike (student supervisor at Buta Minor Seminary) in discussion with the author, May 2020.



ethnicity and especially because, by the grace of God, they held out until death.”<sup>68</sup> Nyandwi defines martyrdom in general as accepting the ultimate duty or charge (ibanga) one receives in baptism [*ni ukwemera ibanga warayaronse ya batisimo*].<sup>69</sup> Marc Bigirindavyi, who taught at the seminary at the time of the attack, also understands martyrdom in terms of the traditional virtue of ibanga, saying that “it is a question of defending and not yielding—whatever the trials to be faced—something one believes with one’s whole heart, something worthy of being safeguarded.”<sup>70</sup>

Survivor Nicolas Nyabenda invokes the phrase *gupfira ibanga* [to die for ibanga] as a pre-Christian articulation of martyrdom in the name of honor and devotion.<sup>71</sup> A UNESCO manual on Burundian cultural values observes that *gupfira ibanga* means to die in assuming one’s responsibilities.<sup>72</sup> In discussing the Buta martyrdom, neighbor Gemma Murebwayira notes that in Burundian culture, “there are moments when people prefer to die rather than to default on their responsibilities.”<sup>73</sup> Her husband, Léonidas Ntubinoye, who directed another state boarding school at the time of the attack, defines a martyr as “someone who agrees to suffer for an idea by abandoning self to save a situation,” adding that “I insist on this idea of voluntary suffering to the end.”<sup>74</sup> He cites the Kirundi proverb, *gusangira ugupfa no gukira* [to share death and life] in support of this value.<sup>75</sup> Reflecting on the Buta martyrdom, Liduine Bukuru, a neighbor who survived the general attack on the surrounding area in 1997, ties this radical faithfulness to the Cross. “When I visit the tombs of

68 Pierre Nyandwi (retired soldier, father of martyr Désiré Nduwimana) in discussion with the author, December 2019. Nyandwi’s son, Désiré Nduwimana, was indeed faithful to the end. Survivor Pasteur Manirambona recalls that he was the first to respond to injured students’ pleas for help during a break in the attack while other seminarians hesitated to move for fear of being shot. Désiré was killed when the attackers returned; cf. Pasteur Manirambona, discussion.

69 Nyandwi, discussion.

70 Marc Bigirindavyi (priest, former geography teacher at Buta Minor Seminary) in discussion with the author, September 2019.

71 Nyabenda, Letter.

72 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Manuel sur les valeurs culturelles du Burundi* (Bujumbura, August 2017), 93. The manual’s Burundian authors associate *ibanga* generally with a sense of benevolence and unfailing fidelity to friends and society; cf. UNESCO, *Manuel*, 84-93.

73 Gemma Murebwayira (Buta neighbor, high school teacher) in discussion with the author, May 2020.

74 Ntubinoye, discussion.

75 Ntubinoye, discussion.



Figure 2. Current Buta seminarians and other worshippers at the tombs of the Martyrs of Fraternity after the Sunday Mass for 20th anniversary of the martyrdom, 2017. Photo by Jodi Mikalachki.

the martyrs,” she relates, “I always think about the meaning of the Cross, that we’re all called to venerate the Cross. . . . There is nowhere we can flee the Holy Cross. On Earth or in Hell, the Cross will always be there and we must worship it, whatever the cost.”<sup>76</sup> For all these Burundians—parents, instructors and neighbors of the Buta martyrs—Christian martyrdom is intimately bound up with the traditional virtue of *ibanga*, or fidelity to one’s social commitments, whatever the cost. Faithful to the end, the Buta seminarians paid the ultimate price of worshipping the Cross. A red cross surmounts each of their tombs, inscribed with their names.

## A CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY FROM BURUNDI TO THE WORLD

As important as the Buta students’ moral and cultural training was in preparing them to testify to fraternity, those closest to the martyrs insist on a divine element that allowed them to be faithful to the end. It is in this divine assistance that they discern the global importance of the martyrs’ testimony. Vincent Nsabimana, father of martyr Jean-Thierry Arakaza, insists that in the students’ witness to fraternal love, “there was a strength that goes beyond men. I don’t know how they found the strength to die together. It goes beyond the will of man, it goes beyond.

<sup>76</sup> Liduine Bukuru (Buta neighbor, farmer) in discussion with the author, December 2019.

It was not their strength alone. There was a supernatural force that acted in them.”<sup>77</sup> Gaspard Nzeyimana, father of martyr Pacifique Kanezere, agrees. “Do you think it’s normal, without the work of the Holy Spirit? You hear gunshots and you go and try to escape. But the children helped one another.”<sup>78</sup> For Nzeyimana, this divine assistance affirms the students’ status as Christian martyrs: “Whether the Pope accords it or not, they’re martyrs. . . . Kanezere is my ambassador to the Lord; he represents me. He also represents the family and the nation—the whole world. There are forty sons who are ambassadors.”<sup>79</sup> Nzeyimana’s belief that the Buta martyrs’ witness belongs to the whole world is echoed by his fellow bereaved father, Vincent Nsabimana: “I don’t think it’s just for the context of Burundi. It’s a very unique case. You should look in other countries to see if there is a case like it. I don’t think you’ll find it.”<sup>80</sup> Reflecting on God’s choice of Buta, a tiny community in a little-known nation in the heart of Africa, Nzeyimana invokes a hymn about Bethlehem as a small town that wasn’t very noble but which the Lord chose to honor rather than Jerusalem. He reports that his late wife, Jacqueline Karenzo, mother of martyr Pacifique Kanezere, used to tell him that “maybe Buta was a small place where the Lord wanted the world and especially the country to see and think about what *Imana ishaka* [God wants].”<sup>81</sup> Nzeyimana’s shift to Kirundi is telling. In the Buta martyrdom, it suggests, Imana, the God of Burundi from precolonial times to the present, reveals God’s will to the world and gives the world something to think about.

Burundian theologians amplify the parents’ sense that Burundi is taking its place in Christian history through the martyrs of Buta. Venant Bacinoni, retired Bishop of Bururi, notes the growing inclusiveness of the church’s liturgical calendar: “In the missal of the liturgical calendar, martyrs have a very big place. . . . They come from all countries, all cultures. . . . Before, it was centered on Europe, after, the Americas.

77 Vincent Nsabimana (retired high school principal, father of martyr Jean-Thierry Arakaza) in discussion with the author, November 2018.

78 Nzeyimana, discussion.

79 Nzeyimana, discussion.

80 Nsabimana, discussion.

81 Nzeyimana, discussion.

Now, they've added Asia, Africa—the Martyrs of Uganda.”<sup>82</sup> The witness of the Martyrs of Uganda—also African youth who maintained fraternal solidarity to the end—is a recurrent point of comparison for Burundians reflecting on the Buta martyrdom. The current Bishop of Bururi, Monsignor Salvatore Niciteretse, notes that the Martyrs of Uganda “died refusing to deny their faith and were resurrected in such a way that thousands and thousands of people live out the values to which they testified.”<sup>83</sup> In recognition of the power of the Uganda Martyrs’ testimony in evangelizing eastern Africa, the fourth Sunday after Pentecost is dedicated to their remembrance in the Church of Burundi. The major seminary in Bururi Diocese is also dedicated to the Martyrs of Uganda. Buta supervisor Henri Nizigama observes that “here in Africa, we know the Martyrs of Uganda.”<sup>84</sup> Noting that in the past, Burundians might go on pilgrimage to Uganda, survivor Pasteur Manirambona is encouraged that more Burundians are making pilgrimages now to discover the Buta martyrdom.<sup>85</sup> Pierre Nyandwi, father of martyr Désiré Nduwimana, asserts that, like the Buta martyrs, the Martyrs of Uganda also testified to unity: “Among them, there were Protestants, Catholics, even two Muslims.”<sup>86</sup>

Anthropologist and theologian Léonidas Nitereka reflects on the inclusiveness of the Church’s commemoration of martyrs: “In the tradition of the Church, we commemorate saints, martyrs—even those who are geographically or chronologically distant from us—it all enters into the tradition of the Church.” In commemorating the Buta martyrdom, he adds, “we want to make present the value that is contained in this event, because the fact of accepting death in the name of faith, agreeing to die for fraternity, that speaks. It’s a value that speaks, that will remain perpetual, that will speak to man at any moment in history and in any place on the globe.”<sup>87</sup> Survivor Pasteur Manirambona, whose brother Patrick Nininahazwe is one of the martyrs, is now a priest serving in Italy, where he is doing graduate work in

82 Venant Bacinoni (retired Bishop of Bururi, theologian) in discussion with the author, October 2018.

83 Niciteretse, discussion.

84 Nizigama, discussion.

85 Manirambona, discussion.

86 Nyandwi, discussion.

87 Nitereka, discussion.





philosophy. “As a Burundian,” he says, “to have a place where we testify that there were martyrs shows that our evangelization has born fruit, not just for us, but for the whole church.” He speaks of the “fraternal approach” of Italians who invite him to share about Buta, “as though this event went beyond Burundi.” He confesses that “I’d been afraid they might not really understand. But I saw a real openness in the way they listened, a willingness to receive our story.”<sup>88</sup> The value of fraternal love for which the Buta martyrs died thus speaks to the wider Church and the world, fostering a growing fraternity among Christians and others open to listening. In this, it exemplifies “a union increasingly directed toward others” that Francis defines in *Fratelli Tutti* as “a social friendship that excludes no one and a fraternity that is open to all.”<sup>89</sup>

## FRAGILE, HANDICAPPED, YOUNG

The fraternal witness of the Buta martyrs is all the more eloquent in that, as boys during a civil war, they were particularly vulnerable to genocidal violence and its manipulations. Political scientist Adam Jones has demonstrated “that it is non-combatant males who tend overwhelmingly to be the victims of gender-selective killing” and that “modern warfare, with its relentless press-ganging and criminality, extends ever further down the age ladder in the hunt for child soldiers and streets thugs—overwhelmingly boys.”<sup>90</sup> One of the possible aims in attacking Buta was to recruit Hutus in the senior classes to serve as officers in the rebellion, hence the attackers’ focus on the senior dormitory and their repeated attempts to persuade Hutu students to identify themselves.<sup>91</sup> Seniors were also targeted because they would soon graduate and report for compulsory military service in the regular army.<sup>92</sup> The attackers’ eagerness to eliminate these students is consistent with Jones’s

88 Manirambona, discussion.

89 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 94.

90 Adam Jones, *Gender Inclusive: Essays on violence, men and feminist international relations* (London: Routledge, 2009), 179, 173.

91 Nyabenda, discussion.

92 Innocent Ndayiragije recalls hearing attackers shout, “To the senior dormitory, they’ll go for military service soon and attack us!” as they ran up the stairs to the dormitory; cf. Ndayiragije, discussion.

analysis of the emphasis on “battle age” males in genocide: “the enemy who is today passive, feminized, prone to abuse may tomorrow be the active, masculine abuser of oneself.”<sup>93</sup> Indeed, when the CNDD-FDD claimed responsibility for the Buta attack, they accused the seminary of being a training center for Tutsi militants, claiming the latter had opened fire on FDD troops as they passed through the area. These unfounded allegations received considerable credence in European news organs.<sup>94</sup>

Survivors of the Buta attack testify to an acute awareness of their vulnerability. On dormitory duty during the attack, supervisor Henri Nizigama says that “we were set there like baby birds. There were no weapons. There were no soldiers. There were just these children who died in unity.”<sup>95</sup> Teacher Jacqueline Ntakirutimana, whose family clothed and sheltered martyr Oscar Nzisabira before he died of his injuries after fleeing the attack on the junior dormitory, recalls that “he was a little child, really, in Eighth Grade. He was wearing a little top and underwear.” As the civil war continued to rage after the attack, the surviving students experienced a complex vulnerability that was at once physical, social, political and spiritual. Newly discharged from hospital and on crutches, student Nepo Bironkwa joined in founding a survivors’ association after the Mass commemorating the first anniversary of the martyrdom. The association was later refounded as the peace and development organization *Association Lumière du Monde—Buta* (Light of the World Association—Buta), or ALM-Buta. Bironkwa, now a journalist, served as president and chair of the board of ALM-Buta from 2012 to 2018. He recalls how vulnerable the survivors were to exploitation in the years following the massacre:

93 Jones, *Gender Inclusive*, 297. For Jones’s work on Burundian genocide in particular, see “The Great Lakes Genocides: Hidden Histories, Hidden Precedents,” in *Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory*, ed. Alexander Laban Hinton et al. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 2013), where he characterizes the 1972 Burundian genocide as “a classic (perhaps the classic) eliticide—aimed at stripping the target group of its educated elements.” Jones classifies the 1972 genocide as “a classic gendercide against males,” noting that in many areas of the country, and especially the south (where Buta is located), no educated Hutu males were believed to have survived; cf. Jones, “Great Lakes,” 133. Daley compares the 1972 targeted killings of Hutu students with the pervasive vulnerability of all students as emerging elites in the 1993-2005 civil war; cf. Daley, *Gender & Genocide*, 110-11.

94 Bukuru, *Children of God*, 111-14.

95 Nizigama, discussion.



We were still fragile, handicapped, young. When we organized a memorial Mass at the [Bujumbura] cathedral, we'd come out to find young people waving political posters . . . People would show up and take the opportunity to spread their own message to the audience—even family members of survivors. . . . At our first commemorations, uninvited guests took the floor to say that [the seminarians] had been massacred by Hutu extremists. . . . Now we're adults, we're autonomous. We can tell people their message has no place here, even a priest. But before, when we were fragile and vulnerable, it was easy to take over our commemorations. We knew then and we know now that commemoration is very political, very sensitive.<sup>96</sup>

Physically vulnerable in their long recuperation from injuries that have left some with handicapped limbs, damaged organs or bullets embedded in bones, the survivors also had the social vulnerability of children in a society that privileges age and familial authority. They learned early that the massacre of their classmates would be exploited for political purposes, becoming wary of offers to support their commemorations financially.<sup>97</sup> Spiritually, they were also vulnerable to manipulation by priests who sought to frame the Buta story in partisan terms. On some occasions, survivors were prevented from sharing their testimony after commemorative Masses in the Buta martyrs' sanctuary, an enforced silence that Bironkwa compares to reliving the event itself.<sup>98</sup>

The survivors had their own objectives in memorializing the deaths of their fellow students. Principal among these, says Bironkwa, was the need “to stay together for solidarity, mutual support, and especially for commemoration, to gather together around this event at Buta.”<sup>99</sup> Their main vehicle was the Catholic Mass, offered in memory of the Martyrs of Fraternity on the thirtieth of each month. In their first two years, they would gather after Masses to share memories and reconstruct

96 Jean Nepomucène Bironkwa (survivor, past president and chair of the board, ALM–Buta) in discussion with the author, March 2018.

97 Bironkwa, discussion. Bironkwa recalls politicians offering them a bus to travel to Buta for commemorative Masses. He emphasizes that this is why it is so important for ALM–Buta to finance its own activities.

98 Bironkwa, discussion.

99 Bironkwa, discussion.

the day of the attack. “What happened in the dormitory,” Bironkwa says, “no one has the full story on that. Someone right next to you heard something you didn’t hear.”<sup>100</sup> He also testifies to how the survivors’ continuing solidarity helped them address their inner trauma: “For those who stayed together to talk, to say things out loud—that allowed us to get past the fear, the hatred, the anger that we had inside us. The fact of staying together—both ethnicities together—allowed us to go beyond ethnic hatred.”<sup>101</sup> Innocent Ndayiragije, who survived multiple injuries in the attack and is now executive director of ALM-Buta, confirms that gathering for commemorations allowed the survivors to transcend the ethnic manipulations of the war. But it wasn’t easy. “Buta was not a community of angels,” he observes. There were boys from political families on different sides. One or two didn’t want to form an association at all. Some asked, “If the attackers had told Hutus and Tutsis to separate before they started shooting, what would we have done?” In the end, they agreed not to say “if.” They would focus on what had happened, not what might have happened.<sup>102</sup>

## A CULTURE OF PEACE: LIVING THE *INTORE* DANCE

The extraordinarily mature decisions of these young survivors, most of them still in high school or beginning university, were the fruits of the seminary’s efforts to create a culture of peace during the early years of the civil war. Innocent Ndayiragije, who was the incoming student president at the time of the attack, says the Buta students received an education “designed to produce rational men who could transcend the differences there were during crises, people who could say, ‘If Papa did this, do I have to do it, too?’ We shouldn’t be selfish and always crying, ‘My ethnic group has suffered.’ I don’t need to be my father.”<sup>103</sup> Vincent Nsabimana, father of martyr Jean-Thierry Arakaza, was principal of another boarding school in the region during the civil war. He affirms that the students’ witness to unity was grounded in home and school training: “It’s the fruit of upbringing by parents

<sup>100</sup> Bironkwa, discussion.

<sup>101</sup> Bironkwa, discussion.

<sup>102</sup> Ndayiragije, discussion.

<sup>103</sup> Ndayiragije, discussion.



and the seminary's leadership, of training, of moral and religious education. It's the result of a certain overall education."<sup>104</sup> Buta teacher Augustin Nzohabonayo, who went on to direct another state boarding school during the civil war, emphasizes the exceptional cohesiveness of the Buta school community in preparing the students to make their witness:

In many regions, there was a complete breach between the two groups in the population. Students made a sort of ghetto out of the school; they didn't go out for fear of being killed. Here [at Buta], there was social cohesion in the whole community—the school and the locality. Some students used to go out to drink—unauthorized outings. That meant that the students weren't afraid of the local community. . . . One of the deep causes that allowed the students to die for one another was that there was cohesion between teachers. Elsewhere, if students died, it was because of the teachers. That's why students in turn would kill teachers. . . . At Buta, there were no cliques among teachers.<sup>105</sup>

Student survivors interviewed in 2008 also emphasized the effectiveness of school leadership in preventing ethnic conflict at the seminary, citing the example of inter-ethnic collaboration among teachers and other staff members.<sup>106</sup>

Students had nevertheless come to the seminary with strong and divergent ideas about Burundi's past conflicts, especially the 1972 genocide, though it had occurred before they were born.<sup>107</sup> After the October 1993 assassination of President Ndada-ye, Buta's Rector, Zacharie Bukuru, instituted evening meetings at the seminary so that students could express their anger, fear and mistrust regarding events that soon escalated into civil war. Partly to release tensions from these stormy encounters, the seminary's leadership also brought students together in sporting and cultural activities. One of the most important of these was traditional Burundian dance.

<sup>104</sup> Nsabimana, discussion.

<sup>105</sup> Nzohabonayo, discussion. Survivor Nicolas Nyabenda notes that one sign of this good understanding among teachers was that no one resigned from the staff during the war; cf. Nyabenda, discussion.

<sup>106</sup> Alexis Nimubona, "La part des écoles sous convention catholique dans la formation des cadres: Cas du Petit Séminaire de Buta (1965-2008)" (Undergraduate thesis, University of Burundi, 2009), 102-3.

<sup>107</sup> Bukuru, *Children of God*, 34-5.



Bukuru, who instituted the dance program, recalls that “Traditional dancing called us beyond ourselves into generosity, joy, relaxation, sharing, dialogue, and purity. . . . The dances brought us together in a single culture, uniting us in something beyond our differences in ethnicity, age, or social status.”<sup>108</sup> In the polemical context of the civil war, where speech was easily misinterpreted, dance allowed students to express their cultural unity nonverbally. Survivor Edouard Nkeshimana, who taught the *umuyebe* dance of his native Mirwa region to fellow students, explains how that dance’s powerful foot-stomping grounded them in a shared ancestral connection to the earth, celebrating their vitality: “We really like to dance with our feet. . . . It’s as though we’re packing down the earth. That shows that the earth is our mother. . . . It’s also good exercise. It expresses a celebration of life, showing that we’re in good health, good shape.”<sup>109</sup> Nkeshimana, who helped carry Innocent Ndayiragije to safety after he was wounded during the attack, lost his sense of taste and smell for five years following the ordeal. When speaking of the attack, he says he can still smell the smoke from the grenade and the spilled blood of his classmates. “Inside us, there lives a message that cannot be translated,” he relates. “What we lived through goes far beyond what we can say.”<sup>110</sup>

Among the dances offering nonverbal release and expressions of solidarity at the seminary, the *intore* or warriors’ dance retains an important place in commemorations of the martyrs. Originally a spectacular military parade performed for kings and noblemen, the *intore* dance has been adapted liturgically to the Catholic Mass, where it is offered to the glory of God by young male dancers in traditional warriors’ costume. Brandishing fringed batons representing a bow or spear in one hand and a shield in the other, the dancers mime advances and retreats, executing leaps and pirouettes with undulations of the upper body to demonstrate their skillful evasion of enemy missiles. The ensemble moves as one person, exemplifying unity,

108 Bukuru, *Children of God*, 43. Sylvie Hatungimana makes similar observations in her study of Burundian dance and identity, describing its use in schools as a means of fostering dialogue, reducing tensions between students and calling them to something greater than themselves; cf. Sylvie Hatungimana, “Les Danses Rundi en Terre Étrangère: Une étude menée auprès des Burundi de Belgique (Dissertation, Université de Louvain-la-neuve, 2005), 82.

109 Edouard Nkeshimana (student survivor, priest assigned to Buta Pastoral Center) in discussion with the author, May 2018.

110 Nkeshimana, discussion.



flexibility and grace as well as strength, daring and endurance.<sup>111</sup> The intore dance thus demonstrates supple alternatives to aggression in its response to imagined violence, even as it choreographs battle. The technical term for its performance of is *kwiwereka*, meaning to show oneself or demonstrate one's devotion, courage, and grace.<sup>112</sup> In its function of demonstrating cultural values, *kwiwereka* is related to the etymological sense of the Greek term *martyros*, which is derived from verbs meaning to affirm or prove. Survivor Nicolas Nyabenda defines Christian martyrdom "as a way of bringing out Christ, this hidden God, to show him to the world."<sup>113</sup> As intore dancers demonstrate their virile devotion to the king, so martyrs also show the hidden Christ to the world. The literal meaning of intore is "chosen," indicating the high honor of being called to protect, and possibly die for, the king.<sup>114</sup> A sense of chosenness also characterizes martyrs. As philosopher Marie Goretti Nizigiyimana explains, in martyrdom, one both chooses and is chosen by God to bear witness to a truth that one cannot relinquish, a truth that embraces one's whole being.<sup>115</sup> Martyrdom and the intore dance are thus both associated with being chosen for public demonstration of high values and ideals.

Philosopher Ferdinand Nindorera articulates a connection between Christian martyrdom and the social and aesthetic practices that build human community: "Martyrs found civilization and human community. Their commemoration restores social cohesion, revives history, and even reinforces the arts . . . at the level of sacred

111 The *intore* costume also includes a crown of raffia, a leopard skin around the waist, criss-crossed bands of beads over a bare torso, beaded bracelets, a white necklace, and rattling anklets. For variations on this accoutrement and its interpretation, cf. Jean-Baptiste Ntahokaja, *Plaidoyer pour l'Afrique* (Bujumbura, Université du Burundi, 1993), 63, and Hatungimana, "Les Danses Rundi," 72.

112 Hatungimana, "Les Danses Rundi," 53, 71-2; Ntahokaja, *Plaidoyer*, 63-4.

113 Nyabenda, Letter.

114 Hatungimana, "Les Danses Rundi," 71-2; Ntahokaja, *Plaidoyer*, 63-4. Both scholars note that, traditionally, intore dancers performed at the royal court or were attached to noble households or chiefdoms. Acquiring skill in this dance was a central part of the training for the sons of such courts or households. Aesthetic and moral connotations of the term intore include beauty, goodness and grace. Socially, it points to an elite, generally associated with Tutsis. The earth-connected umuyebe dance taught by Buta seminarian and survivor Edouard Nkeshimana is generally associated with Hutus.

115 Marie Goretti Nizigiyimana (professor of philosophy, former secretary general of the National Office of Catholic Education in Burundi) in discussion with the author, September 2018.



music, dance, rhetoric, architecture.”<sup>116</sup> These spiritual-aesthetic connections also inform survivor accounts of dancing during commemorations of the Buta martyrdom. Innocent Ndayiragije, who was a member of the intore dance group as a seminarian, describes his experience of joining in the post-communion dance at the twentieth anniversary of the Buta martyrdom in 2017:

It was a thanksgiving. I was shot in the knee and the lower back but I can walk and play sports and use the members of the body that God gave me. One of the dances that really shaped me was the intore dance. An intore is a warrior for the king; he's dynamic, someone who is healthy in body and spirit, who can defend the king. If you're an intore, it means you're wise and good, truly sociable, someone who can bring people together. If you've once danced that dance—ah!—we danced it when we were twenty years old, and twenty years later, we had to dance it again for the glory of God.<sup>117</sup>

In Ndayiragije's account, an intore exemplifies bodily and spiritual health, qualities whose purpose is to defend the king. Focused on service, the intore also acts as a leader, bringing people together through wisdom, goodness and true sociability. Scarred by trauma to his knee and lower back during the attack, Ndayiragije also testifies to having been shaped by the intore dance as a seminarian. Twenty years later, his intore training triumphs over the traces of aggression against his body. He gives thanks that he can express physical and spiritual health in the dynamic sociability of the post-communion dance, his exclamation of “ah!” standing in for the glory that cannot be articulated in words.

Father Léopold Mvukiye, who survived the 1972 genocide as a minor seminarian, was a priest and science teacher at Buta Minor Seminary at the time of the 1997 attack. Reputed to have confessed the martyrs the night before they died, he left the dais of honor during the twentieth anniversary Mass to join the young intore dancers:

I did it spontaneously, to let out my exuberance, my joy. Dance is really the

<sup>116</sup> Ferdinand Nindorera (philosopher and priest) in discussion with the author, September 2018.

<sup>117</sup> Ndayiragije, discussion.



African soul. It's spellbinding, captivating; it pulls you in. I had to be in the midst of my children that day. Rhythm is African. We make sure that everyone enters the dance. Even those who don't want to, we push them. It dispels our calamities, frustrations, repressions. Otherwise, we'd go mad, given the events we've had to endure.<sup>118</sup>

Like Ndayiragije, Mvukiye articulates his experience of dancing during the memorial in terms of the social values of solidarity and inclusivity. He, too, affirms how dance preserves mental and spiritual health, dispelling the calamities, frustrations and repressions that might otherwise drive Burundians mad. Meditating on the necessary transformation of Burundian society as the civil war neared its conclusion, Zacharie Bukuru also invoked the aesthetics of commemoration as a way of healing the nation: "What symbols can draw together young Burundians who have survived our ethnic conflicts? What liturgy must we invent so that these symbols might be regularly celebrated and buried in our hidden memory, so that no-one might again forget what makes us live together as a people?"<sup>119</sup>

Fifteen years after the attack, the survivors decided to refound their association as an organization open to anyone who shares their mission of peaceful solidarity. "It was to say that if it remained a survivors' association, it wouldn't last long," explains president and chair of the board Eric Nkengurutse. "So we created Light of the World Buta after this light that blazed at Buta. Now there are women who have joined, families. Soon it will be up to our children to keep it going."<sup>120</sup> Light of the World Buta has participated with other organizations in supporting the work of Burundi's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and other transitional justice projects and is also collaborating with the Diocese of Bururi to prepare the silver jubilee of the Martyrs of Fraternity in 2022. One of their missions is to organize

118 Léopold Mvukiye (priest and science teacher at Buta Minor Seminary now and at the time of the attack) in discussion with the author, May 2018. Sylvie Hatungimana also characterizes dance as the soul of the Burundian people: "The practice of dance is a very important act in Burundi and for the Murundi growing up in the country. It is not just the mirror of a country and a people; it is also its soul;" cf. Hatungimana, "Les Danses Rundi," 86 (my translation).

119 Bukuru, *Children of God*, 158.

120 Eric Nkengurutse (student survivor, president and chair of the board of ALM-Buta) in discussion with the author, February 2021.

support for the martyrs' parents, some of whom live in extreme poverty, and all of whom are aging. More than twenty years after their great ordeal, a group of once fragile, handicapped youth has come of age.

## VULNERABLE PEACE

The vulnerability that characterized the survivors at the time of the attack, however, might still be said to qualify the national projects of peace and reconciliation in which they participate. Peace in Burundi seems perennially to be fragile, handicapped, young. This fragility is perhaps not a handicap, however, but rather, a resource. Meditating on the confluence of violence, mourning and politics in the context of the United States following the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, Judith Butler calls for “reimagining the possibility of community on the basis of vulnerability and loss.”<sup>121</sup> The body gathered around the story of Buta is indeed such a community. While it commemorates vulnerability and loss, it also speaks of fraternal love, a value rendered all the more impressive because exemplified by undefended youth. “Suffering can yield an experience of humility, of vulnerability, of impressionability and dependence, and these can become resources,” writes Butler, “if we do not ‘resolve’ them too quickly.”<sup>122</sup> The ongoing commemoration of the martyrs of Buta fosters a recurrent experience of the qualities Butler names. In its social and aesthetic rites of inclusion and solidarity, commemoration can hold a space for shared responses to violence—responses that are supple, dynamic and graceful, like the movements of the intore dancers—responses that do not resolve into cries for war in the name of self-protection or vindication.

Burundian responses to the Buta story highlight its educative role in Burundian society, emphasizing the paradox that fragile, handicapped schoolboys have become the teachers of the nation. Retired Bishop Venant Bacinoni acknowledges that “These young people gave us a lesson in fraternity that goes beyond words to speak against all those who want to separate people.”<sup>123</sup> Philosopher Marie Goretti

<sup>121</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 20.

<sup>122</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, 149-50.

<sup>123</sup> Venant Bacinoni (retired Bishop of Bururi, theologian), in discussion with the author, May 2018.





Nizigiyimana emphasizes that it is a lesson for all Burundians, revealing the shared nature of suffering during periods of national conflict: “These children who died speak to us. When they testified for fraternity, they were all called to testify together. If there is a problem in the country, it cannot strike one ethnicity alone; there are always victims on all sides.”<sup>124</sup> For survivor and physician Melchior Ngowenubusa, the Buta martyrs speak into the future of the nation, calling on Burundians to develop ways to live together and learn from the past.<sup>125</sup> Through their example, the possibility of national reconciliation becomes real. “The testimony of the children of Buta,” says philosopher Jean Bosco Habarugira, “shows that the mission of reconciling the people of Burundi is possible.”<sup>126</sup> For teacher Augustin Nzohabonayo, in Buta at least, that mission has already been accomplished. “The situation that we live in today is one of great cohesion following the example given by the students,” he relates, “an example emanating from internal cohesion in the school community as a whole, but also from the external community. Today, there’s no going back on it.”<sup>127</sup>

As Nzohabonayo testifies, the Buta martyrs’ witness to fraternal love is bearing fruit in Burundi. Bishop Salvatore Niciteretse observes that “it is these seminarians who are helping us to live fraternity.” Pointing to the growing pilgrimage movement from diocesan parishes, which unites Hutus and Tutsis in long journeys on foot to the Martyrs’ Sanctuary, he says, “This is how blood poured out brings people together. While they were alive, [the seminarians] could praise the Lord, but because they died for a cause, they cause the Lord to be praised even more. Before, they were only forty offering praise, but today, they are thousands. They’re purifying the site.”<sup>128</sup> Buta secretary Barnabé Bizindavyi, who was in the dormitory during the attack, believes that the martyrs’ witness is calling Burundians back to social values they had abandoned: “The testimony of these martyrs is first to the Barundi, who have been in interminable wars, in a fratricidal war. It’s a testimony

<sup>124</sup> Nizigiyimana, discussion.

<sup>125</sup> Ngowenubusa, discussion.

<sup>126</sup> Jean Bosco Habarugira (priest and professor of philosophy) in discussion with the author, September 2018.

<sup>127</sup> Nzohabonayo, discussion.

<sup>128</sup> Niciteretse, discussion.

of reconciliation, of a return to the message bequeathed by their ancestors to live in peace, in fraternity, in love.”<sup>129</sup> Survivor Pasteur Manirambona recalls that when they were young, the seminarians dreamed of being doctors, teachers, magistrates. “All these dreams have been realized as a single dream,” he now says, “the dream of uniting our country. We have received this gift.”<sup>130</sup>

It is a gift of which Burundians are proud. “It’s a great honor for the Catholic Church that these children were able to die together,” affirms Bishop Salvatore Niciteretse, “a great honor for the defenders of love and fraternity. . . . Though it lost its sons, the Church is proud.”<sup>131</sup> Neighbor Languide Baragahorana, who registered her son at Buta only months after the seminarians were massacred, speaks of “rendering homage to the bravura they had to be able not to separate,” asserting that after the attack, parents were not afraid but rather “proud to send our children to the seminary because we saw that they were teaching fraternity, teaching love in that place.”<sup>132</sup> Near the end of a discussion in which she expressed great love for her son, martyr Alexis Ndikumana, and a strong sense of personal loss, Teresa Banyankubusa could nevertheless affirm that “It’s a blessing to be among the forty that God chose. I’ve given birth to eight children, but God chose one. I rejoice greatly. Alexis has left a good testimony.”<sup>133</sup> Neighbor Léonidas Ntibinonoye affirms that “each one of these martyrs is an eternal image. A light shone in Buta and the darkness could not extinguish it.”<sup>134</sup>

The light of Buta is fraternal love. As a value, fraternity has a human particularity to it, for it is made manifest in the love between particular people whose human qualities give it an exemplary character. The youthfulness of the Buta martyrs is notable in the ways Burundians speak of them: *“These young people gave us a lesson in fraternity . . . These children who died speak to us . . . The testimony given by the children*

129 Barnabé Bizindavyi (secretary of Buta Minor Seminary, student supervisor at the time of the attack) in discussion with the author, December 2019.

130 Manirambona, discussion.

131 Niciteretse, discussion.

132 Languide Baragahorana (Buta neighbor, mother of Buta graduate, ALM-Buta member, retired nurse) in discussion with the author, May 2020.

133 Banyankubusa, discussion.

134 Ntibinonoye, discussion.



of Buta . . . *If these children hadn't stayed together . . . Though it lost its sons, the Church is proud . . . I've given birth to eight children, but God chose one . . .*” The value of the Buta testimony speaks with a particular eloquence because of the youthful vulnerability of its exemplars. Fragile, handicapped, young—they withstood violent attempts to separate them on the day of the attack and attempts to polarize their testimony in the years that followed. The ongoing story of their fraternal love demonstrates that peace itself is something equally vulnerable, perhaps equally precarious and unresolved. “Peace is never given completely,” says anthropologist Léonidas Nitereka. “It is a reality that is always still to be built. That is why it is always still fragile. . . . Peace is thus always an initiative still to be pursued; it always still requires efforts to renew it. It has this fragility.”<sup>135</sup> Perhaps the ultimate lesson of the martyrs of Buta lies in their precarious fragility. Out of impressionable vulnerability, youthful dependence, and a speaking humility before God, one another and their assailants, they became resources to guide Burundi and other nations in the pursuit of a precarious peace that is always still to be built, pursued, renewed.

## CONCLUSION

The testimony of the Martyrs of Fraternity of Buta resonates strongly with Francis’s teaching on the universal scope of fraternal love in *Fratelli Tutti*. Indeed, their witness to fraternal love speaks to his desire for “a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words.”<sup>136</sup> If Francis is right that “the first victim of every war is ‘the human family’s innate vocation to fraternity,’”<sup>137</sup> then testimonies to fraternal love during war—especially civil war—are particularly valuable in restoring the human family. “Life exists where there is bonding, communion, fraternity,” Francis declares, “and life is stronger than death when it is built on true relationships and bonds of fidelity.”<sup>138</sup> The Buta martyrs’ love for one another proved stronger than death because it was built on fraternal relationships

135 Nitereka, discussion. I include both senses of “always” and “still” in translating the French adverb *toujours* with which Nitereka repeatedly qualifies the ongoing process of peacebuilding and the fragile nature of peace itself.

136 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 6.

137 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 26.

138 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 87.



fostered by the seminary community and because it was rooted in a culture of sacrificial commitment to others, particularly those “born together” in *umuvukano*. As *Abapfuriye Umuvukano*, or those who died for fraternity, the Martyrs of Fraternity of Buta speak together against the fratricidal violence of Burundi’s civil war and the human self-destructiveness of all wars. In their youthful vulnerability, they also testify to the divine foundation of fraternal love. Even as the human fathers of the martyrs insist on the element of divine assistance in their sons’ witness to fraternity in the face of death, so Francis argues that “without an openness to the Father of all, there will be no solid stable reasons for an appeal to fraternity,” quoting *Caritas in Veritate* to affirm that “reason, by itself, is capable of grasping the equality between men and of giving stability to their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity.”<sup>139</sup> The Buta martyrs offer a fully realized Christian witness to fraternal love, one in which Burundians recognize the quality of *ibanga*, which holds nothing back in its absolute commitment to others. The process of building fraternity, in Burundi and elsewhere, requires a similar commitment, as Francis recognizes in calling for a “perseverance” that may entail “moments of silence and suffering,” yet “can patiently embrace the broader experience of individuals and peoples.”<sup>140</sup>

The virtues of perseverance and patience, essential components of *ibanga*, are also fundamental to Francis’s vision of peace: “There is no end to the building of a country’s social peace; rather, it is ‘an open-ended endeavour, a never-ending task that demands the commitment of everyone and challenges us to work tirelessly to build the unity of the nation.’”<sup>141</sup> Francis’s repeated qualification of this task as having “no end,” “open-ended” and “never-ending” recalls Léonidas Nitereka’s characterization of peace as “a reality always still to be built . . . an initiative still to be pursued [that] always still requires efforts to renew it.” It is toward this precarious, open-ended, and ever to be pursued initiative of peace that the Martyrs of Fraternity of Buta lead us. It will not be the robust, consolidated peace commonly articulated in metaphors of building and sustainability, however attractive that vision may be. For if peace is to be sustained at all, the Buta testimony suggests,

139 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 272.

140 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 50.

141 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 232.



it will be in the form of something much more vulnerable, something supple and sociable and closely connected to suffering, like the martyrs themselves. In their precarious vulnerability, and the consequent grandeur of their example, the martyrs of Buta lead us toward a peace that is always still fragile, handicapped, young—and through those very qualities, real and human and possible.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bukuru, Zacharie. *We Are All Children of God: The Story of the Forty Young Martyrs of Buta—Burundi*. Translated by Jodi Mikalachki. Nairobi: Paulines Africa, 2015.
- Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004.
- Chrétien, Jean-Pierre and Jean-François Dupaquier. *Burundi 1972: Au bord des génocides*. Paris: Karthala, 2007.
- Daley, Patricia O. *Gender & Genocide in Burundi: The Search For Spaces of Peace in the Great Lakes Region*. Oxford: James Currey, 2008.
- Depelchin, Jacques. *Silences in African History: Between the syndromes of discovery and abolition*. Dar es Salaam: Nkuku na Nyota, 2005.
- Francis. *Fratelli Tutti*. Accessed October 18, 2020. [Vatican.va. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html).
- Hatungimana, Sylvie. “Les Danses Rundi en Terre Étrangère: Une étude menée auprès des Barundi de Belgique.” Dissertation, University of Louvain-la-neuve, 2005.
- Jones, Adam. *Gender Inclusive: Essays on violence, men and feminist international relations*. London: Routledge, 2009.



- \_\_\_\_\_. “The Great Lakes Genocides: Hidden Histories, Hidden Precedents.” In *Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory*, edited by Alexander Laban Hinton et al., 129-48. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 2013.
- Lemarchand, René. *Burundi: Ethnocide as discourse and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rwanda and Burundi*. New York: Praeger, 1970.
- Lemarchand, René and David Martin. *Selective Genocide in Burundi*. London: Minority Rights Group, Report No. 20, July 1974.
- Longman, Timothy. *Proxy Targets: Civilians in the War in Burundi*. London: Human Rights Watch, 1998.
- Malkki, Liisa. *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226190969.001.0001>.
- Mukuri, Melchior. *Dictionnaire Chronologique du Burundi, Vol. 2: 1966-1993, L'Ere des Coups D'Etat*. Bujumbura: Université du Burundi, 2013.
- Nahayo, Anatole. “De la Répression du Génocide: Des crimes contre l’humanité et des crimes de guerre commis au Burundi de 1993 à 2005.” MA thesis, University of Burundi, 2005.
- Nimubona, Alexis. “La Part des Écoles Sous Convention Catholique dans la Formation des Cadres: Cas du Petit Séminaire de Buta (1965 - 2008).” Undergraduate thesis, University of Burundi, 2009.
- Ntabona, Adrien. Letter to the author. November 22, 2018.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *L'Ubuntu (Humanité réussie). Ses roses et ses épines au Burundi*. Bujumbura: CRID, 2020.
- Ntahokaja, Jean-Baptiste. *Plaidoyer pour l'Afrique*. Bujumbura: Université du Burundi, 1993.

Nyabenda, Nicolas. Letter to the author. November 11, 2018.

Obura, Anna. *Staying power: Struggling to Reconstruct Education in Burundi since 1993*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning, 2008.

Siryuyumunsi, Thaddée. “L’école : gestion des tensions dans les établissements secondaires.” In *Burundi, la fracture identitaire: Logiques de violence et certitudes “ethniques”*, edited by Jean-Pierre Chrétien and Melchior Mukuri, 171-8. Paris: Karthala, 2002.

United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. *Revised and Updated Report on the Question of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Whitaker Report)*, Thirty-eighth session, Item 4 of the provisional agenda, (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1985/6). July 2, 1985.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). *Manuel sur les Valeurs Culturelles du Burundi*. Bujumbura: August 2017.

United Nations Security Council (UNSC), International Commission of Inquiry for Burundi. *Final Report* (S/1996/682). August 22, 1996.

Uvin, Peter. *Life After Violence: A People’s Story of Burundi*. London: Zed Books, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350221130>.

Watt, Nigel. *Burundi: Biography of a Small African Country*. London: Hurst, 2008.