Memorial museums and burial sites: Rwanda's unfinished memory work

Anna-Marie de Beer

University of Pretoria, South Africa

Stephanie Wolfe

Weber State University, USA

Omar Ndizeye

State University of New York (SUNY), Binghamton, USA

* Corresponding author: Anna-Marie de Beer, Department of Ancient and Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Pretoria, Private bag X20, Hatfield, 0028, South-Africa. Email: annamarie.debeer@up.ac.za

Abstract

Memorialisation of those who died during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi has been an ongoing concern for both the Rwandan and non-Rwandan communities. The majority of the existing memorials were initially constructed by survivors supported by the local community, administration and other partners in response to the urgent need to bury the bodies of genocide victims. These sites have transformed over the years as memorial policies have codified and evolved. Memorial museums reflect the growing tendency of viewing trauma sites as artistic, interactive spaces that engage with those who visit them. This article examines the aesthetics of memory in three memorial museums situated in Rwanda's western province: Bisesero, Gatwaro and Ngoma. It reflects on the work of the Rwandan architect Vedaste Ngarambe and his contribution as a local voice by considering how the architect's aesthetic design choices reflect not only stories of the massacres that unfolded at the three sites but also the mourning culture of the community in which they are located.

Keywords: aesthetics, Bisesero, embodiment, Gatwaro, genocide, memorial, memory, museum, Ngoma, Rwanda

Introduction

Rwandan context

Most of Rwanda's memorials dedicated to the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi were initially constructed, not by specialised architects, but by the local community. With over 260[1] memorials, these sites vary and many of them are unique. They range from 'well-curated', 'sophisticated', memorial museums such as the Kigali Memorial Centre (Sodaro, 2018: 105, 108), to 'memorialized massacre sites' such as the churches of Nyamata and Ntarama, (Longman, 2017: 67–68), to some 'raw' sites containing displays of remains and evidence (Sodaro, 2018: 90), and to small, local, mass graves, cared for by survivors, which they call 'home' (multiple interviews: 2016–2019). Some are 'trauma sites' (Violi, 2012), constructed on the physical locations of the massacres, and others on sites chosen for logistical or practical purposes.[2]

The majority of these are first and foremost mass burial sites, created by and for survivors to memorialise their loved ones, a process which took place under enormous pressure and urgency to host the multitude of unburied bodies immediately after the genocide (Korman, 2015: 56–57). A small handful, in particular some of the national memorials,[3] have museums with reading material, interactive exhibitions and official guides,[4] but most locations have only mass graves, and sometimes names, photos and personal belongings of victims and examples of murder weapons. The majority of the local-level sites are rarely visited by outsiders to the community and unless a survivor tells the story, the uninitiated visitor may leave touched, but not more informed.

Today, memorials serve as one of the main vehicles of memory of the genocide. Traditionally, Rwanda is an oral-based society where memory was transmitted through storytelling devices, but other physical symbols of memory included tombs, burial huts, trees, rocks, volcanoes and lakes (Bazubagira, 2018: 79–83). Certain trees were planted to mark burial places, rocks and stones symbolised the presence of the ancestors, and volcanoes and lakes were viewed as the dwelling places of the spirits of the departed (Bazubagira, 2018: 82). In ancient times, the dead were placed in burial mats and placed in caves, marshes or deserted hills (Kanimba and Van Pee, 2008: 75). Sometimes, burial huts were built on the family land, and contained items dear to the departed; they were frequently visited to communicate with the 'living dead' through cultural rituals (Bazubagira, 2018: 82). These practices are informed by the traditional Rwandan view of death, which holds that relationships between the living and the dead continue after death (Van't Spijker, 1990: 150).

This article engages with the aesthetics of memory and views memorials as 'artistic' vehicles of memory, where design choices can be probed and examined (Auchter, 2018: 41). Rather than engaging with the better known memorials where foreign involvement in the conceptualisation and maintenance is evident, [5] we centralise the work of a local artistic voice by presenting empirical evidence in the form of unpublished interview data with one of Rwanda's most prominent memorial architects, Vedaste Ngarambe.[6]

We consider three of his memorial designs to establish which artistic elements distinguish them from the many other memorials that dot the Rwandan countryside. Scholars have argued that 'western-style' memorial museums in Rwanda, like Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, are 'at odds with forms and practices of memorialization in the rest of the country' (Sodaro, 2018: 106), but is this also true for the memorial museums designed by Ngarambe? We explore this architect's personal understanding of a memorial, and how his design philosophy enhances the legal Rwandan definition of memorials. We also wonder how it converges with global aesthetic notions of memorial museums, and how it takes account of traditional modes of remembering and mourning.

Research on genocide memorials is often linked to memory politics, and the academic narrative is dominated by critique of the 'state-led approach' in memory work (Viebach, 2019: 282).[7] There are scholars, however, who challenge and nuance these discourses, suggesting that governments do not necessarily have a 'monopoly' on memory politics (Viebach, 2019: 282), and that memorials are more than mere political 'tool[s]' (Ibreck, 2010: 330). [8] We concur with those who argue that constructing memorials that contribute to collective

memory in Rwanda is a complex historical process (Dumas and Korman, 2011: 13; Fox, 2021: 14) involving a range of social actors with their own agency and autonomy – survivors, the international community, family members, memorial care takers, memorial guides and so forth (Fox, 2021: 15; Viebach, 2019: 282). We acknowledge the 'diversity and uniqueness' (Dumas and Korman, 2011: 14) of the Rwandan memorials and explore the contribution of a very specific social actor; a local architect who lost over 300 members of his extended family during the genocide and has a very personal link to some of the memorials.

Bisesero, Gatwaro and Ngoma memorials are located in the architect's home district of Karongi in the Western Province. [9] Bisesero is classified as a national memorial and, more recently, as one of four Rwandan memorials that are also UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) world heritage sites.[10] Established in 1997–1998 in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, it was the first memorial conceptualised by this architect, and the better known of the three, whereas Gatwaro[11] and Ngoma,[12] in their current form, only opened their doors in 2019.

Memorial museums and visitor experience

In contrast to many of the local-level, survivor-focused memorials in Rwanda, Bisesero, Gatwaro and Ngoma are part of a number of 'emergent' sites of memory, characterised by a newly envisaged rapport with the public (Andermann and Arnold-de Simine, 2012: 3). These memorial museums are hybrid locations; they are 'neither real museums nor cemeteries, nor places of worship, nor monuments – they are all of these together, and perhaps even more' (Violi, 2012: 42). These highly performative sites 'mobilize' embodiment (Burnet and Zaretsky, 2023: 514) through aesthetic forms that 'captivate' the senses, and elicit affective responses (Buckley-Zistel, 2021: 788–789).

Memorial museums have three main – albeit 'utopian' – goals: they contain records and *evidence* of events (Sodaro, 2018: 4), and as mourning spaces, they provide *healing* in the form of symbolic reparation. It is their third function that sets them apart; the aim to *transform* their visitors (Sodaro, 2018: 9–10, 174). This role is linked to the 'museum experience' that is envisaged; one characterised by inclusivity, dialogue and participation (Andermann and Arnold-de Simine, 2012: 6). They are 'affirmative' memorials where the visitor is not passive, but actively participates through interacting with the site's aesthetic strategies (Buckley-Zistel, 2021: 788–789).

Memorial museums aim to be 'accessible' to their visitors through 'experiential' and 'interactive' strategies' (Sodaro, 2018: 3, 5) that seek to create identification, empathy for and solidarity with the lived experience of the victims (Andermann and Arnold-de Simine, 2012: 3; Atkinson-Phillips, 2022: 952). These sites move beyond simply displaying evidence and providing information; by using strategies such as 'restore[d]' memory elements (Violi, 2012: 44), recreated life narratives, multimedia, and performances, they create visceral experiences (Andermann and Arnold-de Simine, 2012: 5, 7; Sodaro, 2018: 24). The 'physical touchstones' (Stanford, 2023: 611) that elicit affective responses include 'controlled circulation' paths for visitors; a detailed, chronological, mediated unfolding of the story; interactive elements;

personal items and the creative use of architecture, space, lighting and sound (Sodaro, 2018: 24–25).

Visitors become an essential part of the site as they 're-encounter and re-activate' the past, this experience leading to 'felt' knowledge rather than mere intellectual knowledge (Whigham, 2014: 88, 90–91). Whereas a monument is 'fixed and static', a memorial is characterised by 'our movement through its space'; Young (2016) describes them as 'memory by means of perambulation and walking through' (p. 4).[13] His concept of 'perambulatory memory' has also been linked to the notion of embodiment (Young quoted in Burnet and Zaretsky (2023: 516)).

Becoming a memorial architect in Rwanda

In the Rwandan context, a legal definition of genocide memorials and monuments has been established.[14] Rwandan *memorials* are defined by two elements; they serve as burial sites and they provide information about the genocide. Therefore, according to law, all Rwandan memorials host remains of genocide victims. A *monument* is defined as a site of memory which does *not* host remains.[15]

Almost 30 years after the genocide, and in spite of the multitude of memorials on the official list, Ngarambe (2018) still refers to the creation of true memorials in Rwanda as being in its 'initial phase'.[16] He baffled us by stating that Rwanda has only a handful of memorials and an endless number of mass graveyards. Behind this sweeping statement lay, we discovered, more than 20 years of reflection on the characteristics of a memorial in Rwanda. What then are the elements that transform memorials into more than burial sites? For Ngarambe (2018), these appear to be determined by the envisaged public, and the intended function(s) of the memorial. Although his description is comparable to that of globalised memorial museums, we found that his embeddedness in local mourning, burial and storytelling customs distinguishes his work in subtle ways.

In contrast to the spontaneous way in which memorials sprung up all over Rwanda, catering mainly for the urgent needs of local survivors, Ngarambe's artistic approach envisages a dual public: the survivor who comes to mourn, remember and communicate with loved ones and the (mostly) uninformed visitor who comes to learn and perhaps be transformed. In his view, Rwandan memorials have three main functions: (1) burying victims in a dignified manner, (2) bearing the memory of the genocide and (3) serving as a therapeutic tool (Ngarambe, 2018).

The concept of *dignified* or *decent burial*, though meaningful in other contexts, is of specific cultural importance to the Rwandan society. It is directly related to the inhumane ways in which the genocide victims were killed, but also to traditional perceptions on death, rebirth into the invisible world, communal mourning customs and rites of venerating the dead.[17] The genocide victims were subjected to 'bad burial'; although mass burial is 'alien' to traditional Rwandan society, their bodies were thrown in unmarked communal graves, and without receiving the customary funeral rites intended to appease the spirit of the departed (Korman, 2014: 235–236). Memorials respond to the dehumanisation and disrespect with which victims and their remains were treated and the violation of burial rites (Korman, 2015: 57). In memorials, they are reburied in a dignified manner, their memories are honoured during

commemorations and, where possible, they are rehumanised and individualised through immortalising their names [18] and displaying their photos.

Whereas we had been puzzled by the numerous times that survivors called memorials their ‘home’ during interviews, this architect instinctively links memorials to the notion of building a ‘home’ for the departed, because of his connection with the Rwandan traditions and his knowledge of burial huts and communion with the departed:

> When I see my mother or sister’s name written somewhere, I feel happy, and others see photos if I have them. Memory brings restoration. It is as if I was building a house for them, where I could easily go and meet them, talk to them and of course cry. (Ngarambe, 2018)

The second function of *bearing the memory*, for which Ngarambe used the French verb ‘porter’, speaks to the concept of carrying a burden. Memorials must bear the memory and yet, the survivors are the ones who carry it. It becomes the work of the architect to transmit the memory through artistic and memory elements that engage with the visitor.

This function is further complicated by Young’s troublesome notion that the burden of memory might be shouldered by the memorial, and the visitor thus freed from this obligation (Young quoted in Ansah (2023: 168–169) and Sodaro (2018: 106)). Tawiah Ansah wonders for example whether the Kigali Memorial with its carefully curated exhibits presents this pitfall, by carrying the burden *for* rather than *with* the visitor. He concludes that it is the ‘moments of disjuncture’, the ‘spaces of dislocation’, such as the open grave at the memorial, that potentially saves it from this danger by presenting possibilities of perturbing univocal narratives of the genocide and ‘shift[ing]’ the burden onto the visitor, thus rendering the site more interactive (Ansah, 2023: 170, 185).

In terms of the *therapeutic function*, Ngarambe’s designs prioritise the affective impact memorials have on both types of public envisaged. The visitor must be engaged, informed, transformed and challenged. For the survivor, the memorial is intended to provide a form of emotional relief:

> A memorial should *bring back life* there where it is. It must be visited by survivors and non-survivors and it must *make them talk*, in other words, people must leave their suffering, a part of their suffering there. (Ngarambe, 2018, our emphasis)

Ngarambe (2018) imbues his memorials with elements that ‘carry’ the memory of the sites and seek to transform the visitor, but he also builds a burial ‘home’ for the victims that follows the Rwandan custom of mourning at the home of the deceased. While creating space for each of these functional elements is integral to his designs, each memorial is different, and he attempts to emphasise the unique aspects of each site.

Bisesero

Built into a steep hillside, Bisesero memorial preserves the memory of the large group of Tutsi who held out against their killers for nearly 2 months, commemorating the most well-known resistance movement during the genocide. This national memorial overlooks Muyira hill,[19]

the scene of the massacre, and is remarkably different from the other sites, in particular because of its symbolic engagement with those who visit it and the effort to honour the fierce resistance which took place in this region. [20] Whereas the killing sites were typically cramped, enclosed spaces like churches, stadiums or schools, where people gathered and killed in large numbers, Bisesero was different. Here, people were killed on the open hills while fighting back or running away. Here, people resisted; they refused to take refuge in the churches and public buildings (Ngarambe, 2018).

When reports of attacks on surrounding communities reached the Bisesero region, people fled into the hills with their cattle, believing that they could hold out as they had during previous periods of Tutsi massacre. Tutsi from other areas joined them, swelling their numbers significantly. Simple peasants in the region soon started organising a resistance. They took advantage of the terrain, using traditional tactics and weapons such as spears and bows, as well as the rocks that dotted the hillside against the bullets, grenades and machetes of the killers. Women, children and vulnerable people were positioned behind, collecting stones for those on the fighting line.

News of their resistance soon reached the authorities who sent reinforcements and launched a large assault on Bisesero. Those who survived spent their days hiding until a group of French soldiers arrived, informing the refugees they would soon return. Thinking that they were now safe, many left their hiding places and became easy targets for the militia who fell upon them, slaughtering as many as they could. When the French returned 3 days later, very few remained, not even half of those who had greeted them just a few days before.

In the aftermath of the genocide, survivors began to gather the remains of those who were scattered on the hills and valleys. They chose Bisesero, a hill that overlooks Muyira hill, as the burial place for this massacre; this laid the foundation for further development of the site. Bisesero's construction was initiated in 1997 [21] and various local members from 'both sides' of the 'divided community' participated (Ibreck, 2009: 192). A decision was made to leave some of the remains on display to preserve the memory of the heroic stand at Bisesero and serve as evidence of the massacre.

When Ngarambe visited the site a few months after the genocide, he was surprised to see what he thought were masses of white stones on the hills. The stones that he saw were in fact bones, shining in the sunlight. He reflected on how to demonstrate the suffering of the victims, while emulating their spirit of resistance. The result is a memorial that engages with the visitor and brings home the terrifying experience of the Tutsis on a corporeal and mental level. Architectural elements work together with the sloping terrain of the site to guide the visitor on their own journey, moving through the stages that evoke the experiences of the victims. The approach that underpinned his work was to challenge the visitor to engage with the mental and physical torture that the Tutsis had been subjected to. Bisesero's 'setting and structure emulate that of the resistance' (Shepard, 2019: 134) and Ibreck (2009) notes that, 'in contrast to the other memorial sites', Bisesero 'communicates the meaning of the genocide symbolically' (pp. 191–192). This memorial has a minimum of written elements and although the information building hosts a small collection of books, the visitor experience is

mostly structured through symbolic elements, the landscape and the architectural design, enhanced by the guide's explanations.

Bisesero has been cited as an example of how some African memorials incorporate and emphasise the 'tangible, physical representation of ideas and feelings' (Stanford, 2023: 612). Ngarambe's design intentions are echoed in Stanford's (2023) analysis: she describes 'physical structures, body positioning, and visitor movement' (p. 612) that take visitors beyond intellectual knowledge towards a form of 'embodied empathy', and identification with the victims.

On a metaphorical level, the visitor is to be 'transformed' into a fleeing refugee by the site (Ngarambe, 2018). There is really only one road to follow and this is clearly indicated by the steep winding pathway that leads from the entrance to the top of the hill. You move constantly upwards from the information building by following the narrow path of stone steps, hemmed in by low walls on both sides.

Figure 1. The traditional Rwandan woven agaseke basket.

Source: Photograph by authors.

At this point in the interview, the architect took a piece of paper and started sketching out the symbolic elements; a huge inverted triumphal arch at the entrance underlines the spirit of resistance and the triumph of life over death because the killers did not succeed in their ultimate goal, which was to eliminate all the Tutsis. [22] Just inside the entrance is a large rock surrounded by nine spears, evoking the weapons of resistance and the nine municipalities of the former Kibuye prefecture. The white building which serves as an entrance to the pathway leading up the hill evokes the shape of the woven agaseke basket (Figure 1).

In Rwandan culture, this basket, fitted with a lid, represents intimacy and dignity, and is used to bear concealed gifts on special occasions. But the agaseke building at Bisesero has been 'cut open', and so the building has a flat roof instead of following the pointed shape of the covered basket; for Ngarambe (2018), it is a symbol of the destruction and transgression of everything held sacred in this society (Figure 2).

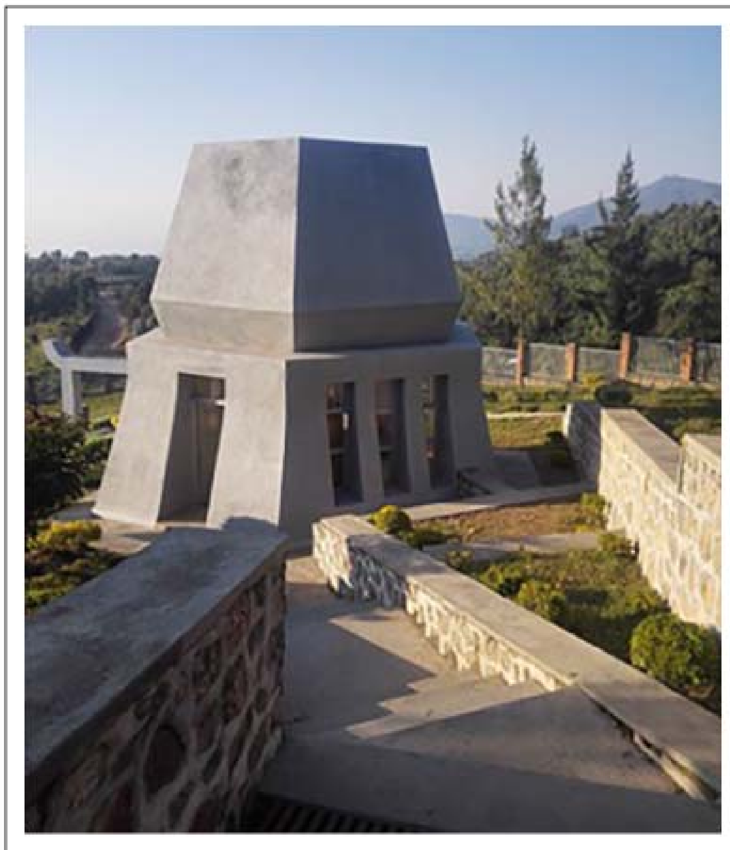

Figure 2. The flat-roofed agaseke building at Bisesero Genocide Memorial.

Source: Photograph by authors

The agaseke building marks the next stage of the visit; a trial that is both physical and mental; 'when you move beyond this, it's as if you pass through death, it's a doorway that allows you to enter into the resistance', and as Ngarambe (2018) put it, 'when you go on this journey you

are a victim, it's as if you are being chased by the militia'. An enclosed cement path zigzagging up leads you from building to building, containing skulls, bones and weapons. [23]

Like the victims, you are not free to move where you want. Your only choice is to 'move forward and die, or perhaps survive', forcing you to think of the suffering of those who were not able to complete the journey. 'You will not overcome easily'. As you climb upwards, you are confronted over and over with the remains of the victims at various stages; 'every step is an obstacle, an obstacle during the genocide [. . .] and when you reach the top, you too are a survivor' (Ngarambe, 2018). Stanford (2023) confirms the bodily impact of Ngarambe's design, in some of the display buildings, the visitor 'looks down upon the bones, while in others the entry brings viewers face to face with the skulls of victims' (p. 617).

The path's surface now changes from smooth concrete to a mixture of smaller stones, some of them jutting out so that you must be careful not to trip over them. According to Ngarambe (2018), they speak of the stones that the resistance used to fight with. Stanford (2023) suggests that their placement as obstacles to the upwards climb compels visitors to physically take note of the 'simultaneous fortitude and futility of fighting heavily armed attackers with stones' (p. 618), and creates a sense of being exposed and in danger. The zigzagging stone path is lined with dark, threatening boulders, towering over the path and representing the killers and their overpowering numbers and weapons. This is the final stage you need to move through before reaching a spacious communal mass grave at the top, surrounded by the forest and overlooking the memorial. Trees have been added to the existing forest, symbolising the dead as per Rwandan tradition (Ibreck, 2009: 194). It is a place of quiet, remembrance and reflection, here only the birds sing and the wind blows gently over the graves of the fallen heroes of the resistance.

Gatwaro

The town of Kibuye [24] is located on the Eastern shore of Lake Kivu. Situated in the heart of a district which hosted a high concentration of Tutsis before the genocide, it holds numerous sites of genocide memory. [25] Kibuye Parish is at the top of a hill, opposite the Kibuye roundabout which is notoriously linked to the arrival of refugees with their goats and cows from various locations outside town, and to the herding of people to the stadium.

Those fleeing to the stadium believed that the neighbouring prefecture office and military barracks would provide them with protection, but once arrived, they realised it was a ruse to gather them in one place. A group of several thousand had gathered at the former commune office in Mabanza from where they were sent to Kibuye by their mayor. They started the 19-km journey from Mabanza in the early morning hours of 13 April and arrived at Kibuye more than 5 hours later. During that long walk of death, they were harassed and tortured, stones thrown at them; killers lining the road with machetes and clubs taunted them. Many of them never made it to Kibuye. Some entered the stadium and others went to the Catholic Parish. On 17 April, more than 11,000 who had sought refuge in the parish were massacred.

The next day, the militia, led by the local governor, gathered at the roundabout and surrounded the stadium. The killing started in the early afternoon and within a span of less than 9 hours they killed most of the people gathered there. Machine guns were fired from

the steep hillside of Gatwaro Hill, where soldiers positioned themselves among the trees. On the opposite hill, local Hutu citizens gathered, ready to point out any Tutsis attempting to flee by drumming on metal tins so that the militia could catch them. The militia joined in with their machetes and nail-studded clubs, and after taking a pause, returned the next morning to finish off those who were still breathing. After 4 days, the genocidaires dug a mass grave with a caterpillar machine used for road construction, and piled the bodies, which had started to decompose, inside.

During the genocide, the stadium was used for mobilising meetings and afterwards, it continued to be used for games and ceremonies. Today, Gatwaro Stadium has been demolished. Part of it had already been destroyed during the massacre by grenades and shelling but it was totally dismantled in 2010–2011 when the government extended the adjacent hospital.

In the aftermath of the genocide, survivors did not know exactly where to find the mass grave in the muddy swamp ground that surrounded the stadium, and asked for a memorial to be built at this site. Gatwaro Stadium memorial in its current form officially opened in July 2019, 25 years after the massacres. We visited the newly constructed memorial in November 2019. Like Bisesero, the memorial had an official guide, who is also a survivor. The site is flanked on one side by the new hospital extension and on the other side by a school. The area between the memorial building and the hospital that was part of the former stadium is now an open piece of land.

If Bisesero emulates physical and mental resistance, Gatwaro confronts the visitor with the futility of 'the long walk' of death to Kibuye: '19 km that they walked in order to go and die. This is very unique – they died in an enclosed stadium' (Ngarambe, 2018).

The memorial consists of different sections, and it commemorates the stadium massacre as well as massacres in the surrounding area. Inside the circular information building, the first part contains panels with photos of the former stadium and the parish as it was reconstructed after 1999. It shows the sites chosen by the authorities in communes where Tutsis were urged to gather to facilitate their killing within a short period of time, the number of victims in each site and the ways in which they were killed. There is a written survivor testimony and a map which shows the 'walk of death'; the distances the Tutsis travelled to the stadium and the parish from the various points of departure and a description of their journeys.

The preparation of the genocide in Rwanda and in Kibuye prefecture is narrated through the display panels. There are original documents with Commune stamps, including a report by the former mayor of Mabanza Commune indicating the names of 26 Tutsis and their professional activities. This report was used in planning the killings. Artefacts that are of particular interest in assisting the visitor to understand the planning and execution of the genocide in this area, and especially the role of the local authorities, include Théoneste Bagasora's [26] diary which is on display, the command issued to allow Commune police to train their own militia as well as the signed command and maps to set up the roadblocks in Kibuye.

In his more recent memorial designs, Ngarambe has started adding a space for remembering the perpetrators which reminds visitors of the role they played. This element does not exist

at Bisesero. In the middle of the information building is an enclosed area, an octagon-shaped room darkened with a type of black cloth which represents a prison cell. Eight panels and some stands display photos and names of those who planned and led the genocide. Their involvement, the weapons they used and the sentence they received after the genocide are on display. The lighting, absence of colour and enclosed structure reinforce the visitor's sense of being in a prison. The placement of the room performs an uncanny type of reversal of what happened at this site; during the massacre, the victims in the stadium and parish were surrounded and cut off by their armed persecutors. Here, it is the images of the perpetrators and their weapons that are surrounded by and cut off from the rest of the memorial.

Separated from the information building by a grass area and a wall is a long structure where the victims have been reburied. A small paved road leads the visitor to the burial place, passing the area where, as the guide explained, the mass grave was discovered after the genocide in the swampy grounds, and from where the hastily-thrown remains were moved to their new home. It is perhaps this site, that is now covered with grass, that is one of the most unsettling parts of the memorial. With the stadium demolished, this 'imprint' in the soil is one of the few physical 'links' that testify to what happened here, but without a guide to point it out, it can easily be mistaken for a simple patch of grass. (Violi, 2012: 39).

Inside the long building, one walks through a lower section containing coffins, to the bottom of a wide flight of stairs. At the top is another section, with photos and names of the victims that they were able to find. As with Bisesero, the design elements seems to invite the visitor to reflect on the experience, from the darkened prison area for the perpetrators and their tools of death, to the flight of stairs at the end that evokes the long march of death from Mabanza to Kibuye.

Although it follows Ngarambe's design principles, there are less symbolic elements and opportunities for the visitor to experientially engage with the memory of the massacre. The stadium has been destroyed and the physical impact of the memorial is less overwhelming than the extended site at Bisesero. However, the two dominant geographical features that characterised this massacre are still present and engage the visitor's imagination; Gatwaro hill from where soldiers were shooting at the stadium looms up behind the site and the main road coming in from Cyangugu by which many victims arrived on foot passes in front of the memorial entrance.

Ngoma (Mugonero massacre)

During the genocide, Mugonero was a Seventh Day Adventist complex hosting a church, a hospital and a nursing school. The head pastor, Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, and his son, director of the hospital, played a key role in this massacre. From the 7th of April, Tutsi refugees from the neighbouring hills had started streaming to Mugonero with their families, cattle and living essentials. They were spread out between the hospital, the nursing school and the compound between the hospital and the mission offices.

The militia surrounded those seeking refuge and cut off their access to food, water and outside communication. After a meeting at the local prefecture, it became known that there were plans to attack those in the church the next day. A group of Tutsi pastors wrote a

desperate letter to the pastor, begging him to use his influence to intervene for those gathered in his church. However, the pastor and his son were among the community leaders who headed up the attacks the next morning. Armed mainly with stones, the refugees resisted for almost 7 hours, while pastors, old women and children prayed and sang in the church. As with many massacres from this province, the militia with their traditional weapons called in outside help. Soldiers from Kibuye military camp arrived with rifles and hand grenades. By that afternoon, the refugees had been overrun and outnumbered; about 7000 victims died at this site and the number of survivors count to a mere 50.[27]

The Ngoma memorial stands adjacent to the complex where the Mugonero massacre took place.[28] Designed by Ngarambe, it was constructed in 2018–2019 to replace the original one to incorporate displays that tell the story of the massacre. [29] Built on church land, it is mainly managed and funded by the church, some donors and the survivors.

Ngoma memorial is an interactive memorial, designed to engage with the visitor. Hosted in a long, spacious, well-lit, white church-like building on Ngoma hill, the space is divided into sections and is decorated with artistic elements and artefacts. It contains testimonies, information posters, notes and letters, miniature labelled replicas of the surrounding hills, personal belongings and photos of the victims, documents dating from the period, coffins with remains of the victims, a separate enclosed space containing details of the perpetrators and an area where visitors can reflect and write messages to the victims on small post-it notes. There was no official guide to accompany us, but the written texts and displays provided us with an overview of the massacre. On the ground, throughout the display area, long, wide strips of cement border the display boxes with written texts and cement beddings filled with rocks and pebbles. These strips are marked with hand- and footprints, big and small, which hauntingly evoke the multitude of refugees gathered in the church complex. Ngarambe (2024, personal communication) explains that these signs embody the last physical traces the victims made as they were felled to the ground, their 'final' prints on the earth (Figure 3).

When you enter the memorial, the story of the massacre unfolds chronologically on panels lined up with documents. They tell of how the genocide started here; you are confronted by messages that victims left to their families the night before the massacre. You can also read the translated plea for help sent to Pastor Ntakirutimana. This artefact, like Bagasora's diary and the roadmaps with roadblocks displayed at Gatwaro memorial, creates a strong sense of authenticity. Further on, a visual display with a row of miniature models provides an overview of the hills surrounding the area, indicating the living communities where the victims had fled from and the names of the hills on which they had lived before the genocide, such as Murambi, Ngarama, Mpembe, Bisesero.

Figure 3. Hand- and footprints set in cement at Ngoma Genocide Memorial.

Source: Photograph by authors

This series of grassy hills ends abruptly with a disquieting display containing some burnt charcoal, a few upright burnt sticks, a gnarled piece of wood and a handful of rocks painting a stark picture of death (Figure 4). Ngarambe (2024, personal communication) explains that for Rwandans, the symbolism is obvious; whereas a fire indicates the presence of human life, burnt-out wood indicates the absence of life. The miniature charcoal model with burnt tree stumps, placed at the end of a row of hills covered with grass, symbolises whole families that have been decimated and that, just like burnt wood, can no longer reproduce life.30 On a display board above, victim's names are listed, names of families completely wiped out and even a list of the 50 people who survived the massacre is provided, an archival element that we had not come across in any of the other memorials.

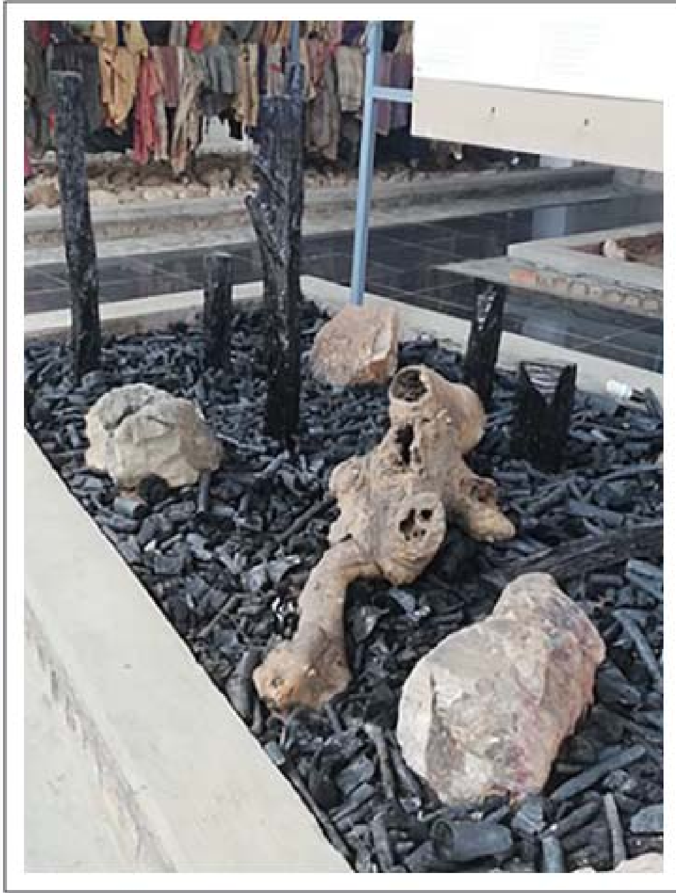

Figure 4. The display of burnt charcoal, wood and rocks at Ngoma Genocide Memorial.

Source: Photograph by authors.

An area with racks of victim's clothes and belongings separates this part from the entrance tothe 'perpetrator's cell'. Like the enclosed space at Gatwaro, this is a separate, prison-like room, destined for the planners of the genocide in this area. A thick metal chain is attached to the door that separates this dark room from the rest of the open, well-lighted memorial. It exhibits photos of notorious perpetrators, details of participation, prison sentences and weapons (Figure 5).

After leaving this room, visitors go up a short flight of stairs to an area that looks down on the displays and where they can reflect and leave messages.

Figure 5. The 'prison cell' with details of perpetrators and weapons at Ngoma Genocide Memorial.

Source: Photograph by authors

Conclusions

Memorial as 'home'

Bisesero, Gatwaro and Ngoma are all 'trauma sites' that are physically linked to the scenes of massacre they commemorate (Violi, 2012: 37). Although Bisesero is not on Muyira hill where the resistance massacres took place, it faces that hill, and the physical landscape is the same. Gatwaro is on the stadium grounds. The Ngoma memorial case is less clear. Compared to the other two sites, the memorial feels slightly disconnected from the actual scene of the massacre on a physical level. Here, it is more difficult to visualise the massacres and physical terrain because the memorial is housed in a newly designed building adjacent to the church complex, which does not form part of an envisaged visit to the memorial. As you leave the memorial, the entrance to the complex is visible on the side of the road. We were told that the hospital still stands and that there is a nursing school and offices. The church was destroyed and there are now houses in its place. A new church has been built. The memorial is named, not after the Mugonero complex where the massacre took place, but after the hill on which it stands, this name change adding to the slight feeling of disconnect.

The sites all employ 'strategies of embodiment' (Stanford, 2023: 611), which invite visitors to move around, to engage with the physical spaces, displays, walls of names, remains and

photos of the deceased and official documents and to write comments or messages to the deceased – activities which stimulate not only physical and emotional reactions, but also 'mental introspection' (Buckley-Zistel, 2021: 789). All three have been reconstructed with 'controlled' paths, leading visitors through a carefully mediated and chronological experience of the story (Whigham, 2014: 88, 93), as they are confronted with 'indexical traces' (Violi, 2012: 39) such as bones and skulls, letters, diaries, roadmaps, weapons, spears and stones, even the surrounding landscape and hills. Architectural elements such as dark, claustrophobic spaces and steep staircases have a strong visceral impact on the visitor. All three memorial visits end with a flight of steps that lead to a space intended for reflection, and in the case of Ngoma, reaction in the form of the possibility to write down messages.

These artistic elements distinguish them from the other hastily constructed mass burial sites in Rwanda. They also differ from the memorials upgraded or created by the authorities after the initial attempts by survivors; often these are district or sector memorials which are sometimes relocated to more appropriate geographic spaces, but not necessarily at the scene of the trauma. The official focus is on providing solid structures and decent mass graves in the face of limited means, especially in circumstances where mass graves have started deteriorating or been subjected to flooding, water damage and so on. [31] The focus appears to be practical rather than aesthetic, and they typically have a limited number of aesthetic elements that embody and symbolise the traumatic experiences related to the specific sites. The few displays that there are focus on evidence and emphasise the efforts of the state to combat genocide denialism through exhibiting examples of remains, weapons of killing and personal items from the victims.

Perhaps, the most interesting distinction is that the three memorials designed by a local architect are also subtly different from the memorials that were influenced by global trends in memorial museum design, and where international bodies such as Aegis Trust assisted the Rwandan authorities in conceptualising them. The 'flagship' Kigali Memorial Centre and Murambi, for example, both national memorial centres, incorporate western modes of storytelling; video footage, recorded testimonies, large display boards, 'visual commemorative texts', plaques, sophisticated websites and written descriptions clearly aim to educate the visitor (Yusin, 2016: 338, 339) on a 'national, regional, and international stage' and are examples of the globalisation, transculturality and 'transnationalism of the memorial museum form' (Sodaro, 2018: 86, 96). [32]

Achieving the correct balance between providing visitor information with strikingly curated displays and personalising the experience of individuals is a challenge. Ngarambe (2018) states that many Rwandans view Kigali as the prime example of what a memorial should look like, but the architect fears that the experience can be overwhelming to the individual:

> you go there but it doesn't console you because you get lost amongst the masses of information and remains, so it doesn't help the individual. At Bisesero it was easier to do because the memory can be represented in the open air, and not in an electronic format.

Bisesero, Gatwaro and Ngoma are also unique in terms of their visitor profile. While memorials like Kigali, Murambi, Nyamata and Ntarama receive more international than local visitors (Longman, 2017: 88; Sodaro, 2018: 105), the smaller, unknown sites of memory in Rwanda are frequented mainly by the local population. The sites designed by Ngarambe fall somewhere between these two categories; they are frequently visited by the local population but they also attract a wider, more international public, especially Bisesero.

The elements that demonstrate the local voice of this architect and distinguish his work from the other more western-style memorials appear to be more pronounced at Bisesero, than at the other two, and our assumption is that the reason may be threefold. First, the architect has a very personal link to Bisesero, where he lost his family members. Second, the time frame is important. Bisesero was constructed in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, when there was less foreign influence on memorial design in Rwanda, and more than 6 years before Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre had been built. The other two were inaugurated 15 years after the Kigali memorial, and by that time, newly designed memorial museums had started to be influenced by the modern approach adopted at Kigali and Murambi. As memorials in the country became more state-managed, they have also become more uniform.[33]

Third, the physical landscape with the steep hills and rocky terrain at Bisesero lends itself remarkably well to becoming a part of the story and the visitor's experience, without the need for written words. In contrast, the two other memorials make more use of display boards and written texts (though they are still much less technological and modern than at Kigali), and the natural setting is less suggestive of how the story unfolded. We can no longer see the stadium at Gatwaro or the church at Ngoma in which the victims perished, but we can look over the hills at Bisesero and imagine the scene that unfolded there. We can physically climb the steps up the steep hill and see the rocks that could have been used by those who resisted there.

In globalised museum memorial practices, the written word and technological interventions (multimedia, recordings, videos, created sounds, lights, display boards, etc.) play an important role in transmitting memory and telling the story of the site. However, Ngarambe's designs (especially at Bisesero), which create a space for the survivor experience, embrace and imitate the physical environment in which they exist; he expects the landscape, the symbolic and cultural elements, the oral, traditional modes of memory transmission and the physical spaces to shoulder this burden. This is clear from elements such as the traditional basket-shaped hut without its protective lid, dark menacing rocks, the victory arch in the form of a cow's horns, the rock of resistance surrounded by spears, challenging flights of stairs, the hand- and footprints embedded in the ground, the symbolic use of stones and rocks, charcoal and dark, enclosed rooms for perpetrators.

Knowledge of traditional mourning rites informs Ngarambe's use of symbolic elements and physical space. An example of such a central rite is the burning of a log inside the house of the deceased during the mourning period (Van't Spijker, 1990: 69). The family and friends gather around this log that is kept burning slowly for a period of days. Ngarambe (2018) honours this practice by creating a space for remembrance fires to be burnt during commemoration nights because it is 'at night when we invoke the dead and call out their

names, where we feel close to them, it's as if the spirit world was active at night, and people are comforted. They cry for their dead'. He confirms that he 'translates' this key element in all of his memorials: 'The interior and the exterior space must bear the memory, and the commemoration is outside and it is at night' (Ngarambe, 2018). In this way, his designs embrace the concept of a memorial as a traditional burial 'home' where survivors come to have communion with their loved ones.[34]

The unfinished work of memory

An analysis of Rwanda's memorials cannot take place without acknowledging its evolving nature, and the influence of resources on the building and maintenance of memorials. Dealing with genocide requires profound reflection, and practices of remembering are constantly evolving. After more than 30 years, it is still a work in progress and under (re)construction like the country itself. For Ngarambe, most of his memorials are still incomplete. Of Bisesero, inaugurated in 1998, he says: 'It is an artistic approach that will of course be completed with time. The first phase already exists but there will be others' (Ngarambe, 2018). Further sections will be added, he hopes, when the government has the means. He still envisages a forest with a part for visitors to read more information, write comments and so on, and another section, dedicated to survivors. He dreams of a way to individualise the impersonal masses of bones and other remains by placing symbolic stones, and signs with the individual names of the victims. A bench nearby where the weary survivor could rest, grieve and speak to those who are no longer with them.

In spite of the frustration with this unfinished work, experience has taught him to be pragmatic. In a country so ravaged by the aftermath of a genocide and where resources are so limited, material needs must often be prioritised. The first, most practical urgency is to create decent graveyards for the hundreds of thousands of bodies. Then follows the process of integrating the memory and the story into these sites: 'we cannot bring memory in if we don't first have good mass graves. We cannot preserve memory while survivors must still sleep on the streets' (Ngarambe, 2018). [35] Memory transmission remains urgent and relevant in Rwanda but this work, in its various forms, is an unfinished process that takes place in stages, and there is much still to be done.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The funding received from the following institutions for some of the field work.: 1) Weber State University 2) The Richard K. and Shirley S. Hemingway Foundation 3) The South-African National Research Foundation.

ORCID iDs

Anna-Marie de Beer https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5677-0704

Stephanie Wolfe https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8344-5774

Omar Ndizeye https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3036-4625

Notes

1. At the start of our project on Rwandan memorials in 2016, we received a list of 265 official memorials from the government. This list has constantly changed as memorials are moved or merged, and new memorials built. The research findings of our field trips and interviews are discussed in more detail in our forthcoming article *Journey through Rwandan Memorials*.
2. Not all memorials are located at physical sites of atrocity, but if they are, Patrizia Violi (2012) calls them trauma sites. Trauma sites are 'wounded places' (Till, 2008: 109) that hold 'embodied' memories and physical 'traces' of the atrocity that visitors can interpret and which engage their imagination (Violi, 2012: 37, 39).
3. There are currently eight national memorials located at Kigali, Murambi, Ntarama, Bisesero, Nyamata, Nyarubuye, Nyange and Rebero. National genocide memorials 'have a special history of national relevance relating to the planning and execution of the Genocide against the Tutsi' and are managed by the government in collaboration with the district in which the memorial is located (Article 10, *Law N°15/2016 of 02/05/2016*, Article 22, *Law N°15/2016 of 02/05/2016*).
4. Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, opened in 2004, 10 years after the genocide, was the first memorial that included a museum section containing a *written* narrative of the genocide.
5. Scholars such as Ansah (2023), Bazubagira (2018), Bolin (2019, 2020), DeMartini (2015), Longman (2017), Sodaro (2018), Williams (2007: 18–19), Yusin (2016) and others offer useful analyses that should be read in conjunction with this article.
6. Ngarambe has a vast legacy of memory work in Rwanda; apart from the genocide memorials that he designed and is still involved with, he spent almost 9 years working on The Campaign Against Genocide Museum in Kigali and designed the National Liberation Museum Park at Mulindi. He continues to design memorial museums at various sites in Rwanda.
7. A significant body of work on the plethora of potential and real dangers of memory politics exists. It deals with issues like the consequences of government control over discourses, the marginalisation or silencing of certain parts of the community (cf. Viebach, 2019: 293); the nefarious uses of commemoration by political elites, of 'mobilizing the dead' (Korman, 2015) and politicising and instrumentalising death and memory (Mwambari, 2021: 619); the potential undermining of 'affect-driven activist' approaches to memory through their 'entangle[ment]' with government agendas (Antweiler, 2024: 9); the possible misrepresentation of collective memories and creation of 'false memories' through revisionist narratives (Hitchcott, 2021: 937); the 'gendered consequences' of 'scripted memories' (Mannergren Selimovic, 2020: 132) and the 'stratification' of memory (Fox, 2021: 79–93), to mention only some of the existing debates.
8. These scholars cite examples such as ground roots 'resistance to the dominant politics of memory', attempts by the survivor community to 'influence state policy on remembrance' (Ibreck, 2010: 331, 335), unofficial, 'vernacular memory practices' that

resist and supplement hegemonic memory (Mwambari, 2021: 613), and memorials which act as spaces for 'productive dialogue' (Fox, 2021: 48).

9. All three memorials are in what was previously known as Kibuye prefecture. At the time of the genocide, Ngarambe had left this region and was in the Congo.
10. Bisesero was created to memorialise the genocide in the Bisesero area, which is a mountainous region that straddles the former Gishyita and Gisovu communes.
11. Gatwaro is located in the former Gishyita commune and focuses on the genocide at Gatwaro Stadium, in addition to the killing sites at Kibuye Parish, Nyamishaba school and the 'walk of death' to Kibuye Town.
12. Ngoma is located at Mugonero. It memorialises the genocide which took place in the Mugonero church complex in the former Gishyita commune.
13. This term is used by Young during his discussion of Maya Lin's comments and memorial design.
14. A memorial site is defined as 'a place where bodies of the victims of the Genocide against the Tutsi are laid to rest and where some of the facts of the Genocide against the Tutsi are kept' (Article 2, *Law N°15/2016 of 02/05/2016 Governing Ceremonies to Commemorate the Genocide against the Tutsi and Organisation and Management of Memorial Sites for the Genocide against the Tutsi*).
15. A monument for the genocide against the Tutsi is, 'a structure erected either in Rwanda or abroad in a location other than where bodies of the victims of the Genocide against the Tutsi are buried which is reminiscent of the history of the Genocide against the Tutsi' (Article 2, *Law N°15/2016 of 02/05/2016*).
16. The information and quotations provided on Vedaste Ngarambe's views on memorials are drawn from a recorded interview held at Kigali in 2018. The interview took place in Kinyarwanda and French, and was subsequently transcribed and translated into English.
17. Consult Bagilishya (2000: 344, 347), Korman (2014), Longman (2017: 4–5) and Van't Spijker (1990: 111–113). Véronique Tadjo (2002) creatively incorporates this key cultural element into her narrative of the genocide, through a chapter entitled 'The wrath of the dead'.
18. Consult Woodley (2022: 7) on the significance of naming the dead at memorials.
19. Also known as Muhira hill.
20. Consult also descriptions of Bisesero in De Laat (2023), Dumas and Korman (2011), Ibreck (2009), Shepard (2019), Stanford (2023) and Yusin (2017).
21. Dumas and Korman note in 1997 the execution of the memorial was entrusted to an 'architecture firm in Kigali under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, and it was inaugurated in April 1998 during the National Commemoration'. Furthermore, it was the 'prospect of holding the official commemoration ceremonies in Bisesero in April 1998' that played an important role in the construction of this memorial (Dumas and Korman, 2011: 24). Construction and development of the site have been continual, and there were notable differences between our research visits conducted in 2013 and 2016.

22. The arch also represents the horns of a cow and is a 'sociocultural reference to the cattlebreeding activity of the Abasesero, who formed the Tutsi population living in the region' (Dumas and Korman, 2011: 25).
23. Nine small buildings containing remains and weapons are situated in different stages of this journey.
24. Also called Karongi town.
25. In particular, the massacres at the Saint Pierre/Kibuye Catholic Parish, Home Saint Jean, Gatwaro Stadium and Kibuye Hospital.
26. The senior military officer who is considered as one of the masterminds of the genocide.
27. This massacre has been widely documented. See for example Gourevitch (2000).
28. Like the Gatwaro memorial, we were only able to visit it in June 2019 because it had not yet been completed during our previous visits.
29. Consult Dumas and Korman (2011) for a description of the original memorial.
30. In Rwandan tradition, dying without having offspring is unfortunate, and a young person who passes away without having any offspring is buried with a piece of coal, symbolising the inability to reproduce life, to prevent their spirit from returning in an evil form (Ngarambe, 2018).
31. See for example Fox (2021: 49) on buried bones resurfacing in the rainy season.
32. For more details on Western involvement and influence on the creation of the Kigali Memorial Centre, and the role of Aegis Trust and the Smith brothers, consult Longman (2017: 80–81) and Sodaro (2018: 91–92).
33. See Wolfe (2020) on the laws regulating what is included and excluded in memorials.
34. Consult also Fox (2021) on memorials in Rwanda as a 'home for the dead' (p. 49).
35. Here, Ngarambe evokes the role of memorials as sites of resources for survivors, also discussed by Fox (2021: 52–55).

References

Andermann J and Arnold-de Simine S (2012) Introduction: memory, community and the new museum. *Theory, Culture & Society* 29(1): 3–13.

Ansah TB (2023) An open grave: the Kigali memorial and the aesthetics of memorialization. In: Wolfe S, Kane MC and Ansah TB (eds) *In the Shadow of Genocide: Justice and Memory within Rwanda*. London: Routledge; Taylor & Francis, pp. 167–187.

Antweiler K (2024) Memory as a means of governmentality. *Memory Studies* 17(2): 137–154.

Atkinson-Phillips A (2022) Remembering experience: public memorials are not just about the dead anymore. *Memory Studies* 15(5): 947–962.

Auchter J (2018) Displaying dead bodies: bones and human biomatter post-genocide. *Human Remains and Violence: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 4(1): 41–55.

Bagilishya D (2000) Mourning and recovery from trauma: in Rwanda, tears flow within. *Transcultural Psychiatry* 37(3): 337–353.

Bazubagira AK (2018) *Community Perceptions and Understandings of Rwanda Genocide Memorials: The People's Stories*. Saarbrücken: Scholars' Press.

Bolin A (2019) Dignity in death and life: negotiating 'Agaciro' for the nation in preservation practice at Nyamata Genocide Memorial, Rwanda. *Anthropological Quarterly* 92(2): 345–374.

Bolin A (2020) Imagining genocide heritage: Material modes of development and preservation in Rwanda. *Journal of Material Culture*, 25(2), 196–219.

Buckley-Zistel S (2021) Tracing the politics of aesthetics: from imposing, via counter to affirmative memorials to violence. *Memory Studies* 14(4): 781–796.

Burnet J and Zaretsky N (2023) Introduction: sites of reckoning special issue. *Memory Studies* 16(3): 513–518.

De Laat S (2023) Memory and photographs of unrepresentable trauma. In: Wolfe S, Kane MC and Ansah TB (eds) *In the Shadow of Genocide: Justice and Memory within Rwanda*. London: Routledge; Taylor & Francis, pp. 228–248.

DeMartini A (2015) Attempting intelligibility with the seemingly incomprehensible: Murambi, human remains and the labour of care. *Museum & Society* 13(4): 431–444.

Dumas H and Korman R (2011) Memorial spaces for the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda. *Afrique Contemporaine* 238(2): 11–27.

Fox N (2021) *After Genocide: Memory and Reconciliation in Rwanda*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Gourevitch P (2000) *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*. London: Picador.

Hitchcott N (2021) Seeing the genocide against the Tutsi through someone else's eyes: prosthetic memory and Hotel Rwanda. *Memory Studies* 14(5): 935–948.

Ibreck RC (2009) *Remembering humanity: the politics of genocide memorialisation in Rwanda.* PhD Thesis, University of Bristol, Bristol.

Ibreck RC (2010) The politics of mourning: survivor contributions to memorials in post-genocide Rwanda. *Memory Studies* 3(4): 330–343.

Korman R (2014) The Tutsi body in the 1994 genocide: ideology, physical destruction, and memory. In: Anstett É and Dreyfus J-M (eds) *Destruction and Human Remains: Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 226–242.

Korman R (2015) Mobilising the dead? The place of bones and corpses in the commemoration of the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda. *Human Remains and Violence: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1(2): 56–70.

Kanimba MC and Van Pee L (2008) Rwanda, its cultural heritage: Past and present. Institute of National Museums of Rwanda.

Longman T (2017) *Memory and Justice in Post-Genocide Rwanda*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mannergren Selimovic J (2020) Gender, narrative and affect: top-down politics of commemoration in post-genocide Rwanda. *Memory Studies* 13(2): 131–145.

Mwambari D (2021) Agaciro, vernacular memory, and the politics of memory in post-genocide Rwanda. *African Affairs* 120(481): 611–628.

Ngarambe V (2018) Interview with Vedaste Ngarambe In: De Beer A-M, Wolfe S and Ndizeye O (eds). *Recorded, unpublished interview*.

Ngarambe V (2024) Telephonic discussion with Vedaste Ngarambe.

Shepard M (2019) *The art of reconciliation in Rwanda*. PhD Thesis, Columbia University, New York.

Sodaro A (2018) *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Stanford R (2023) Design elements evoke embodiment at cultural sites in Rwanda and South Africa. *Memory Studies* 16(3): 611–620.

Tadjo V (2002) *The Shadow of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda*. Oxford: Heinemann.

Till KE (2008) Artistic and activist memory-work: approaching place-based practice. *Memory Studies* 1: 99–113.

Van't Spijker G (1990) *Les Usages Funéraires et la Mission de l'Eglise: Une é tude anthropologique et théologique des rites funéraires au Rwanda*. Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J.H. Kok.

Viebach J (2019) Of other times: Temporality, memory and trauma in post-genocide Rwanda. *International Review of Victimology* 25(3): 277–301.

Violi P (2012) Trauma site museums and politics of memory: Tuol Sleng, Villa Grimaldi and the Bologna Ustica Museum. *Theory, Culture & Society* 29(1): 36–75.

Whigham K (2014) Filling the absence: the re-embodiment of sites of mass atrocity and the practices they generate. *Museum & Society* 12(2): 88–103.

Williams PH (2007) *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

Wolfe S (2020) Memorialization in Rwanda: the legal, social, and digital constructions of the memorial narrative. In: Zucker EM V and Simon DJ (eds) *Mass Violence and Memory in the Digital Age* (Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 19–44.

Woodley J (2022) 'Nothing is lost': mourning and memory at the national memorial for peace and justice. *Memory Studies* 16(5): 1054–1070.

Young JE (2016) *The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

Yusin J (2016) The itinerary of commemoration in the Kigali memorial centre: on trauma, time and difference. *Culture, Theory and Critique* 57(3): 338–356.

Yusin J (2017) *The Future Life of Trauma: Partitions, Borders, Repetition*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Author biographies

Anna-Marie de Beer grew up in Zimbabwe and teaches French and francophone studies at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. Her research interests include collective trauma, memory, memorialisation and musealisation, cultural mourning, orality and storytelling in Africa. She works on literary representations of the genocide in Rwanda and is the author of the monograph *Sharing the Burden of Stories from the Tutsi Genocide, Rwanda: é crire par devoir de mémoire* (Palgrave, 2020). Her recent publications include, 'Remembering Rwanda through transnational narrative', in *In the Shadow of Genocide: Memory, Justice, and Transformation within Rwanda* (Routledge, 2023) and 'Ubuntu, reconciliation in Rwanda and returning to personhood through collective narrative', in *Ubuntu: The reconstitution of Community* (Indiana University Press, 2019). She has been travelling to Rwanda to interview genocide survivors and visit memorial sites for the project *Journey through Rwandan Memorials.*

Stephanie Wolfe is a Professor at Weber State University in the Department of Political Science and Philosophy; a Research Associate in the Department of Ancient and Modern Languages and Cultures, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria and the 2023–2025 First Vice President of the International Association of Genocide Scholars. Her publications include *The Politics of Reparations and Apologies* (2014), *In the Shadow of Genocide: Justice and Memory within Rwanda* (Routledge, 2023) and book chapters on international law, reparations, apologies, justice and memory. She has been travelling to Rwanda to interview genocide survivors and visit memorial sites for the project *Journey through Rwandan Memorials.*

Omar Ndizeye was born in Rwanda and teaches in the Africana and Latinx Studies Department at SUNY Oneonta. His research interests encompass sites of memory, musealisation, cultural mourning and memory representations in post-genocide Rwanda. In 2020, he published a memoir titled '*Life and Death in Nyamata: Memoir of a Boy in Rwanda's Darkest Church'* through Amsterdam Publishers. In addition, Ndizeye developed an interactive map titled '*Atlas of Genocide against Tutsi Killing Sites'*, published on ArcGIS in 2022. He has been featured in the edited text '*In the Shadow of Genocide: Memory, Justice, and Transformation within Rwanda'*, published by Routledge in 2023. He has been travelling to Rwanda to interview genocide survivors and visit memorial sites for the project *Journey through Rwandan Memorials*.