

Anne-Marie with her daughter, Celestine

People from different villages were being collected to take refuge at a camp for internally displaced people. As I was reaching the end of the road, a militiaman looked at me with a lot of bitterness and cut me in the face with his machete. I ran, but was feeling weak. I could hear people being killed with machetes, being hit with clubs, or being speared.

I went to a Catholic Church. There was a group of militiamen there, but one of them who knew me advised me not to hide there, and told me to hide in another house. He sent two young men to kill me there. They hit me with machetes and clubs, saying I shouldn't die in the house because my blood would cause bad omens.

They took me to the forest and raped me there. After they raped me, they called to another two boys; one of them said, "This woman is sweet, you also need to enjoy her." After that, they said, "This Tutsi woman is not getting satisfied. Let's get a corn stem and sharpen it to the shape of a penis; that will satisfy her." So they went to cut that piece and they put my legs apart and then they started pounding that stem of corn into my private parts. After that night, I couldn't walk.

Bernadette with her son, Faustin

My mother negotiated with a militia member to try and save us. We gave him part of our eucalyptus plantation to save my brother, Turgen. We didn't know that they would kill women. Three days later, he came back and said that he no longer wanted the land. He said, "I want your daughter; I want this girl." My mother said no, that the land was enough. Then he came back again with other militiamen. Eventually they took me to the forest, and he told them to gather around.

He told the other militiamen to reduce my height because I had always been arrogant; so they got clubs and hit my legs. I couldn't move; I was shaking all over. Later, I went to a refugee camp for Tutsis. But little did I know that this man had made me pregnant.

My son is twelve years old, and I think he knows. Once he came crying that someone told him, "You're the son of a militiaman. Your father is in prison." You can't take the sins of the father and blame them on the child. The philosophy I use for my life is to laugh; so I laughed and after laughing told him, "Why should that worry you? Why should that make you cry?" If he has brains, he should know by the way that I laughed; I confirmed to him that he is the son of a militiaman. Whenever I think about his future, I don't know, and that is my biggest problem. If there is anything that tortures me, it is the tomorrow of my son.

Brigitte with her children, Emmanuelle, Ambroise, and Rosette

If you saw me before the genocide, you wouldn't believe I am the same person. I used to be a beautiful girl. I used to be loved. It is now all lost. It is now all a nightmare. I feel I don't have a bit of interest in life.

My fiancé was among the people killed in the first three days. After that, I was raped by many men that I didn't love. The results are these children. I never fell in love again, I never enjoyed sex, I never enjoyed being a mother or having children, but I have accepted it.

I am suffering now because of no other crime than having been born a Tutsi, and I am paying a price for sins that I never committed. Most of the women that I know who were raped are HIV positive. Imagine being afraid that you could die at any time, not because you made love and had fun, but because someone came and brutally forced himself on you and infected you with HIV.

Delphine with her daughter, Sophie

At a roadblock, a militiaman said, “We must kill this one. She can’t go beyond this point.” I was just seventeen years old. It didn’t make any sense. Why me? Why not everybody else? I argued with them: “Why kill me and not the people that I’m traveling with?” They said, “We are killing you because you are a Tutsi.” As I prepared myself for death, one of the militiamen came and said, “Don’t kill this beautiful girl. I’ll take her for a ‘wife.’” That’s how my ordeal of rape started. He took me to their headquarters. In the bush nearby, he made me lie down and raped me. I started bleeding, but that was not the worst thing for me—the worst was the shame that he did it with everybody around me watching.

When I realized I was pregnant, my thoughts went back to those nights, to the torture that the militiaman exposed me to. Thinking of giving birth to a child of that man, who never showed me even a slight bit of love, only brutality, I decided I was going to have an abortion. But when I did give birth, surprisingly, I didn’t feel any bitterness. I was happy about the child; I am happy being a mother.

It is degrading for me to pass by and have people say, “Oh, you see that girl. That girl was raped.” You feel you don’t have value. They say we are leftovers of the militia’s sexual appetite. And whenever I think about it, I hate myself.

Esperance with her son, Jean-Louis

Every day, every morning, every evening, a different man came. Whoever came and went told other militias there was a nice Tutsi girl over there, so they kept raping me in turns. I don't know how many there were. For two months, that was my life. For two months, I was a slave to all these militias.

I felt miserable when I found out I was pregnant. I felt that out of this forced sex, there couldn't be a human being, that I must be carrying an animal. Toward the time of giving birth, as I approached nine months, every day I planned that when it comes out, I won't give it my breast; it will starve and die. But when I gave birth, after looking at the child, I changed my attitude. He looked so nice, and I loved him from that moment.

My family doesn't like him. Whenever he does something, they call him Interahamwe (militia). When he plays, they say he wants to kill. When he throws a stone, they say he has the behavior of a militiaman. Whenever they look at him, they say his people killed my family, his people killed my father. My mother tells me that this boy reminds her of everything that happened to her.

I have HIV and I have this son. But to be honest with you, HIV does not worry me as much as the life of my son. My son is my life.

Isabelle with her son, Jean-Paul

A group of militias attacked our home and killed my three brothers. Then they took me to a place where they raped me, one after the other. I can't tell you how many there were; I can't describe the experience. What I know is that later I realized that I was pregnant. I'd never had sex before; that was the first time. After giving birth, I thought of killing the baby because I was bitter, but eventually I decided not to kill him. I feel trauma every time I look at this boy because I don't know who his father is.

I am physically handicapped because of the beatings that I endured and I can't carry anything. I can't work. All I can do is sit down. It was not until now that I can say it is good that I didn't kill that boy because he fetches water for me. Now I have accepted that he is my son, and I will do whatever I can in my position as a mother to raise him. But I fail in my duty as a mother because of poverty. Sometimes he doesn't have enough to eat. I am not interested in a family. I am not interested in love. I don't see any future for me. Sometimes I look at my situation and compare myself with people who have their families around them, and I regret that I didn't die in the genocide.

Josephine with her daughter, Sylvie

I got married when I was sixteen years old to a Tutsi man. By the time genocide started, we had six children. Because I'm Hutu, we thought that maybe I would not be targeted. We came to a very strong checkpoint. One of the militiamen there recognized me. He said, "This one is ours (Hutu), but her children are wrong." They said that they would either kill me with my children or I could give them my children to be killed and be set free. I wanted to be killed with my children. They killed my two boys while I was watching. Then, they told me to flee with the girl.

When the militias knew that I was around, they came and wanted to see the woman who married a Tutsi. They raped me and told me that I should be there for them to have sex with whenever they want, to be a sex object as punishment for marrying a Tutsi. As a result of those rapes, I got pregnant and later gave birth to that girl.

I am one of them (Hutu), but I'm not embarrassed to say that the Hutus are beasts. I don't regret having married a Tutsi. It is agony and trauma to remember how my children and husband were killed. Just in case I don't live, I want my children to remain with these words: Be friendly. Love one another. Learn to be patient just like I have been patient in the trying moments of this world.

Josette with her son, Thomas

The militia came in the evening and locked us in a house. Then they said they were going to rape us, but they used the word *marry*. They said they were going to marry us until we stopped breathing. They would rape us at night, and then the next day they would go out to kill. That was the pattern of our lives. Every morning they hit us ten times. After hitting us, we got a different man. Eventually my sister said it was too much, that we needed to commit suicide. I left, but I didn't know where to go.

My uncle didn't welcome me into his house. He asked me who was responsible for my pregnancy. I said if I am pregnant, then it must be the militias since many of them had raped me. He said I shouldn't enter his house carrying a baby of the Hutus and chased me away.

I must be honest with you; I never loved this child. Whenever I remember what his father did to me, I used to feel the only revenge would be to kill his son. But I never did that. I forced myself to like him, but he is unlikable. The boy is too stubborn and bad. He behaves like a street child. It's not because he knows that I don't love him; it is that blood in him.

Justine with her daughter, Alice

We went to a church nearby because we thought that it would be safe. All of my family were killed in that church except me.

We had been there for two weeks. We were hiding in one room of the church when the militia collected us and took us to a banana plantation, where they raped me. One took me as a sex object for three days. For three days, I was his “wife,” so to speak, and when I came back after the third day, they went to steal food and property from our neighbors. I ran away to come back to the church. When I returned, I found my family dead. I was confused and stranded, but the RPF soldiers found me there and rescued me. My father and mother and all my brothers and sisters were killed. About five thousand people had taken refuge there, but less than one hundred were rescued.

I was okay until I delivered the baby I was carrying. I don't have many problems, but my sisters left behind children. They are orphans and only have me to look after them. But I am not strong enough or in a position to do so. Right now, we do not have a house. If I could get shelter, I would put all these orphans together and take care of them.

Marie with her daughter, Mary, and her cousin, Jacqueline

When I heard the bullets, I ran and hid under the bed. They had killed my aunt and uncle, but they hadn't killed their baby, Jacqueline. When I came out from under the bed, it was one of the most shocking moments in my life. They had raped my aunty, and there was blood flowing out of her private parts. The whole sitting room was full of blood and dead bodies except for the little kid who was alive, but sucking the breasts of her dead mother.

We were attacked by a gang of Hutu men. I started to scream and to shout and to make noise. One of them hit me hard in the chest. They negotiated among themselves which one would take me home. And one of them raped me. After the rape, I couldn't speak. He raped me over and over for about an hour, and when he was done, he left me there unconscious. After a month and a half, I was told I was pregnant.

After the war, I reunited with my father and he constantly reminded me that this kid is bad, her family is bad. Her family killed my relatives; there is no reason whatsoever for me to love this girl. When I see her, she reminds me of the rape. The first rape and the second rape and all the rapes that followed. I can't say that I love her, but I can't say that I hate her either.

Odette with her son, Martin

When the militiaman was going to rape me, I begged him kindly, saying, “I’m still a student. I’m still young. Wait. When I finish school, I will be your wife, but please don’t rape me.” Then he told me, “You don’t have time to go to school, so forget about being anyone’s wife. Even if you are lucky enough to survive, you will just be a maid in my house.”

Before my father died, he told me that I shouldn’t get pregnant before marriage. I imagined my brother asking me, “Why are you pregnant? Who got you pregnant?” While I was pregnant with a child of rape, I thought of my father’s wish that after four years of secondary school, I should go to a convent and become a nun. I tried to abort the baby, but I didn’t know how to do it. I also thought it was a sin against God, so I decided to keep my pregnancy.

I started loving my son when I went back to school and I began studying psychology. That’s when I knew that this child of mine needed a lot of attention and that he’s innocent. I tried to remove the hatred from me and turn it into love.

I don’t think I’m a mother. I don’t think I’m a girl. I’m something in between, something I don’t know. Because a mother must have a home. I don’t have a home. A girl doesn’t have a child. I have a child.

Stella with her son, Claude

Sometimes I forget where I am. Today we may be talking and, all of a sudden, I think I am in the forests in the Congo. Sometimes I see myself and around me, men are running, chasing me or raping me. Then, I realize I am in a normal setting. I have these hallucinations and nightmares. I have never overcome them.

My problem is that boy, my son. I don't think about Rwanda often. I think about my son. He is like a tree without branches. I am alone with him. I don't have any surviving relatives apart from my old mother. He is my life. He is the only life I have. I love him. If I didn't have him, I don't know what I would be. I ask myself, suppose I die now, what would happen to him? I would really be happy to have my life as it originally was before the war. Perhaps then, my son would have a future. The legacy of genocide is too much to live with.

Sylvina with her daughter, Marianne

I cannot really tell you how many men came to rape me. All I know is that four months later, I was pregnant. I felt so bad, I tried committing suicide twice. I kept asking myself how I was going to raise a child whose father I didn't know. But deep down I said to myself, "You don't know why you stayed alive when all your family members died. There must be a reason."

The militiamen raped us brutally. I don't want to think about it again. We begged them to kill us, but they refused. They would make us sit at the roadblock as they killed people. After killing, they would come back to rape us.

Now, I have many children that I look after. My brothers and sisters have all been killed, but six of their children survived. I am their everything—their mother, their father, their grandfather. My children, my orphans, and my daughter are my hope. They don't want to hear that I am HIV positive, but it is reality that they have to live with. I am.

Marianne is my life. Since I know that she is alive and she is mine, I don't regret the past because I will have her as long as I can be on this earth. The only thing that gives me trouble is what will happen when I die? I am not sure of my tomorrow because I am living with HIV, which is a legacy of genocide.

Uwera with her son, Francoise

When I talk of the genocide, I don't have enough words to express it. I can only say it robbed me of my parents, my immediate family, my childhood, and everything that I had regarded so dear in my life. It resulted in my being raped when I was fourteen. And, as if that was not bad enough, the rape left me pregnant. I had a baby with nobody to tell, with nobody to help care for it, with nobody—just alone, struggling by myself.

What they did to my mother, I don't want to remember. They raped her. When I saw this, it was unbearable for me. That was when I realized it was war, it was genocide. I was now an orphan.

Later, when I realized I was pregnant, I was annoyed. But at that time in my life, the pregnancy was a small problem compared to what I had gone through. The real problem was that I didn't have any surviving relatives. I knew it was just me, but I was prepared to face it head-on. I was very bitter to be a mother at a time when I wasn't ready. Since no one survived in my family, I thought God must have a plan for me to live with someone. So I said to myself, "Well, let me nurse this kid. This is the blood of my family." And, who knows, it might be my only family on this Earth. I have mixed feelings: bitterness and happiness.

Valerie with her son, Robert

The genocide started when I was fifteen. All the Tutsis from this area ran up the hill where the strong men from the area were resisting. We repelled the presidential guard until April 18. That day they killed many people. My two brothers, sister, and parents were killed that day. When I awoke the next morning, one militiaman asked if we had money to give them. When we gave them money, they left us alone and told us to take this road. Little did we know then that they were sending us directly into a roadblock of merciless militiamen. One of the militiamen started raping me from that night on for two weeks until we heard that the RPF forces were near the village. The militiaman became scared. He told me that they were going to kill us in the evening, but if I trusted him, he would save me. I didn't have a choice.

I had never had sex until I was raped during the genocide. I never loved that man at all. I always feared him. Even now, when I hear people say they enjoy sex, I don't know what it means to enjoy sex. For me, sex has been a torture and I associate it with torture.

Now I am free. I feel satisfied and have hope and faith in God and in the survivors' organizations that support us. They encourage us to live positively. Whatever I do, I strive to see that my parents' killers are not going to laugh at me. Instead, they are going to see me progressing every day and keeping alive.

Yvette with her son, Isaac

We were forced into “marriage,” and forced into being mothers, but we accepted our children and love them. There is nothing bad existing in the world that we did not go through. Pray for us so that we may die a peaceful death. Tell the world that if we die, we are leaving behind these children, these children who were born when the world was looking away and never came to our rescue.

Shortly before my wedding, the genocide started. I carried my youngest brother on my back and moved into the forest. We were about six girls, and the militiamen were many. They asked how many of us were still virgins; almost all of us were. They ordered me to take my brother off my back. They squeezed his ribs, and said they didn’t need to use a machete or a bullet on that one. They threw him in the forest, and as he was crying, they ordered us to remove our clothes. They started raping us. In turns, they did that for six hours. We were left there as if we were dead.

After around six months, I thought I was probably pregnant. I feared suicide and thought instead that I should give birth to that kid and kill it. But when I gave birth, he was so beautiful that I developed love immediately. I said to myself, “I can’t kill him; I am going to love him.” What I’ve gone through has prepared me for anything. I pray that if I am to die, let me die after seeing my son living a good life.

Catherine with her son, Eugene

I would be happy to see the world that neglected us help us bring the people that did those bad things to justice. Most of the victims of rape, like me, were unfortunate and got pregnant. We were not prepared. Even before genocide, some of us were very poor and couldn't afford to raise our children. We became unwilling mothers, but also unprepared mothers. At least mine is lucky; he has me. How I struggle, God knows. But, there are children whose mothers died immediately after giving birth and others whose mothers died because of HIV. Those children are on the streets. Nobody cares for them; nobody loves them. The community has passed judgment against them.

Two years after I gave birth to Eugene, I didn't have ways of supporting myself and my son, so I became a prostitute. Unfortunately, I got pregnant again and gave birth to another child—this time not as a result of rape, but of prostitution because I was looking for money to support my child. Four years later, I realized what I was doing was not right, so I registered for school again, received a diploma in primary education, and became a teacher.

I love my son—the only trouble is when he asks where his father is. When he grows big, I will tell him.

Marguerite with her son, Joseph

Militias started shooting and killing. Three of us could not run, so they raped us. One held me by the hand, another by the leg, and another raped. After that, they switched and another one held my hands and another one raped.

When I realized I was pregnant, I wasn't shocked. I already had one child from a rape long ago. I needed a second child, but not from a rape. Honestly, I love this boy so much. I don't know why, but I love him. Because of this love, I protect him. I don't want him to know the circumstances under which he was born. Even his brother does not know that they are not full brothers. They think they have the same father and that he died in the genocide.

My family doesn't love them, they know that I was raped, so they don't like either of these children, who they call bastards. My consolation is that I love my children. I will always encourage my children to laugh—laugh among themselves, laugh with other people, laugh with God—and to be patient in every situation. When you are patient and accepting, it prepares you for the future. There's a church community that is very supportive. I found alternatives to my family. Faith in God has given me peace of mind, and it keeps me going because I'm hopeful that things may be better.

Olivia with her son, Marco

About ten thousand people had fled to the church compound. After a week, militias started attacking us. It was a terrible experience. They entered with machetes, with axes, with grenades and guns. They started cutting into the crowd. It was all noise, crying, and the killing did not stop. On the third day, they did not kill, but spent the entire day just raping women from different corners of the church. I am a victim of that day; they raped me with all of my children watching. I can only remember the first five men. After that I started losing my understanding. Even after I was unconscious, they kept raping me.

I had a premonition that I might survive if I picked one child and ran away. I looked at all three of my children, and they all looked so nice to me that I couldn't pick one. But I also knew that I couldn't run with all three. Eventually, my heart told me to pick the first born, so I ran toward the church door with him. Many other people were running too, and I fell. I put my body over my son's to protect him. The militias started cutting the people on top into pieces, and blood was falling on us. When they came to my layer, the militiamen said, "I think this one is already dead." I pretended to be so. I learned later that my other two children were killed after I left them behind in the church.

Philomena with her daughter, Juliette

Today, I have a big challenge: I am a mother but feel unwilling to be a mother. I don't love this child. Whenever I look at this child, the memories of rape return. Whenever I look at her, I imagine those men holding my legs open. I understand that she is innocent, and I try to love her, but I fail. I don't love her like a mother ought to love her child. I don't see a future for her. I have asked God to forgive me. Maybe, with time, I will love this daughter of mine. But for now, no. Sometimes, I regret not aborting; other times, because she is the only daughter I am going to have in my life, I don't regret it. For a long time, I really hated God. I asked myself, why did people die? Why did my family die? Why this extreme violence? Why am I HIV positive? Where was God? Why did he let it happen?

When the genocide started, I was thirteen and in the first year of secondary school. We stayed inside for some days until the militia came. They killed my father. They said, "We are going to have sex with you." I said, "Can you please wait? After the war, I will be your wife." I kept pleading that I was a virgin, so he said, "If you are such a coward, let me show you something about it." They removed all of my mother's clothes and raped her, one man after another. Then they raped my elder sister. Then they raped me.

Valentine with her daughters, Amelie and Inez

That fateful day, April 9, is when they attacked my husband's house and killed him. We had just ended our honeymoon. We had been married for three months, and I was two months pregnant, carrying a little girl. The head of the militias was ruthless and put a spear in my leg to force my legs apart. I was raped every night, and during the day, they locked me in.

When I was in a refugee camp in Congo, I gave birth to my daughter. Fortunately, she was alive. I stayed there and was raped by other men as they wished. Shortly afterward, I became pregnant again. One day, I boarded a truck that was bringing people back to Rwanda. When we arrived, I learned the news of my family: they had all been killed. I am the only survivor in my family. It took me a long time to be able to sit and talk like we are sitting here now.

I love my first daughter more because I gave birth to her as a result of love. Her father was my husband. The second girl is a result of unwanted circumstance. I never loved her father. My love is divided, but slowly, I am beginning to appreciate that the younger daughter is innocent. I love her only now that I am beginning to appreciate that she is my daughter, too.

Beatrice and her sons, Antoine and Geoffrey

I'm not happy being a mother—I have two children as a result of rape. These children have distorted my life. The experience of rape has thwarted my ambitions. My children don't have a family and their future is not clear. I don't know where they belong. They don't know where they belong. All they see is me, but I am not able to sustain myself. I don't see a bright future for them because they don't have a family. They don't have a father. They don't have an address. They don't belong anywhere. They are not recognized by the community.

The genocide started when I was seventeen. I hid in the forest for a night and then decided to go to one of my uncles' homes to hide. I stayed there for only a day before the militias came and one of them took me. But when we reached his house, he told me he had “married” me, that I was now his “wife.” He raped me every night and kept me captive. Because of the way I look, I couldn't go out of the house. Hutus were all around, and they would recognize me immediately. I got pregnant, and the result is that young boy, Antoine. This militiaman kept me until the RPF forces were advancing, and he forced me to go with him into exile in Burundi and then to Tanzania. Because I was raped every day, I got pregnant again and, in 1996, had a second child, Geoffrey.

Chantal with her daughter, Lucie

I frequently fall sick. I am alone and don't have anyone to visit me, no one to take me to the hospital. That's problem one. Problem two is when my daughter wants something and I can't give it to her; that's the biggest challenge. I can't explain the feeling of failing to supply my daughter with what she wants. I raised this child by myself, the hard way. I have not told her, but one time she came from school and said, "Mommy, every kid has a father, why don't I have a father?" I almost told her the whole story, but instead said, "Your father is in exile." Then she asked, "Why is my father in exile?" I told her that he was in a militia, and she didn't believe me.

In group counseling, we are divided into groups and share our experiences. This has helped me because I forget about myself when I am with others. I was raped by one man. There are women who tell me they were raped by ten, others by five, others don't even know the number. When I hear that, I realize that my problem is small compared to others—it keeps me going.

Henriette with her daughter, Noemi

I became a mother when I wasn't ready to be a mother. There is nothing that can make me happy now. My life has been destroyed. I am not interested in living, but I live for those two children. For them, somehow I live.

When the militias came attacking, they came shouting my name, "Henriette, Henriette." Even before the genocide, when we went to church and passed by the training center, those boys, who were now militiamen, said: "Some day, we will have you." When I heard them shouting my name, I waited until the last minute, but I knew I was going to die.

They came and took those who were fifteen or sixteen years old into the bush nearby, and for a whole day they raped us. From one to the other, exchanging and switching, the whole day until six in the evening when they brought us back to the church where we had taken refuge. They killed men first, young men, but whenever they came to us, they said, "Don't kill them, they will be our 'wives.' Don't kill them."

I hated myself. My father and mother were killed. Deep within me, I was thinking that since my other family members had died, there was no reason to stay—I just wanted to die. I insisted, "Leave me alone. Let me go where I will be seen so they will kill me soon and save me from the agony."

Anselme with her daughter, Berina

I used to be beautiful. Don't look at me like I am now. The militiamen were all excited; one said, "I want that beautiful girl. I want that beautiful girl." Eventually they agreed that they were all going to share me. They took me in the bush, removed every piece of clothing I had on, and said they were going to kill me slowly a slow dehumanizing death.

After the genocide, life was extremely difficult for me. I started feeling my health deteriorating and I became weak. When I found out I was HIV positive, I was really disappointed. I took a long time to accept it. I even thought of committing suicide. Surprisingly, it is that daughter of mine that has been attending to me all this time, looking after me. Some people told me I really died and was resurrected, but she was always there waiting for me. My sisters used to ask me, "Why do you keep this child of a militia? Why don't you throw it away?" But I insisted that she has my blood, so I had to be with her. I started loving her when she became helpful, when she would bring me water, when she was there when I became sick. I honestly love my child. If I didn't have her, who would take care of me?

I later came to Kigali to look for my sister, to see if she can help me. She told me, "All right, I will help you. But don't come with your daughter." When I did anyway, she said, "You don't come in my house with her. You can go elsewhere, or you can leave that daughter outside and come in."

I think I'm dying soon. I don't have hope for my future. But my problem is the future of my daughter. If I could leave her in an orphanage, I would die happy. I don't see anything positive in my life. I am always sorrowful. My life is not good. There is nothing to make me happy.