Scientific Research Publishing

Sociology Mind, 2026, 16(1), 1-17
https://www.scirp.org/journal/sm
ISSN Online: 2160-0848
ISSN Print: 2160-083X

Mass Graves and the Unburied in Rwanda: Post-Rwanda Genocide, Topology and Ataraxia

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How to cite this paper: Aguilar, M. I. (2026). Mass Graves and the Unburied in Rwanda: Post-Rwanda Genocide, Topology and Ataraxia. *Sociology Mind, 16,* 1-17.
https://doi.org/10.4236/sm.2026.161001

Received: November 24, 2025
Accepted: December 28, 2025
Published: December 31, 2025

Abstract

This paper (number 6) in the research project "Burying the Dead" follows the introductory comments and typology of previous papers (Aguilar, 2024a, 2024b, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c) but moves the material context of mass graves related to victims and killings during the 1994 Rwanda genocide. state sanctioned mass graves throughout the country. As in previous topologies, this paper outlines the characteristics of special continuity and change on locations where mass graves act as local tombs to understand their significance within a socio-historical location. Mass graves were dug in Rwanda beside places of extermination to bury for the most part the 800,000 victims of the genocide. Over the years, some mass graves were rediscovered, and human remains re-buried and preserved with the use of lime. However, the need for individual truth and the identification of individual remains was denied by the state, allowing only the identification of some remains and removing others away from their place of death to local memorials and the national memorial in Kigali. Scholars have challenged such practices by a Rwandan totalitarian state, and some international experts have aided the identification of some human remains challenging the ownership of human remains by the state in what has become a vernacular law rather than a compliance with humanitarian and international law. Thus, discussions on *topological places*, *homeomorphisms* and *homotopies* become important agendas for a comparative cultural preservation considering the traditional applications of *natura non facit saltus*, and the need for justice, identification and individual burials for victims of the 1994 genocide.

Keywords

Rwanda, 1994 Genocide, Mass Graves, Burials, Topology, Cultural Preservation, Murambi, RPF, Memorials, Reparation

1. Introduction: The Topological Memory of the Dead

It could be argued that the CSRP research project on "Burying the Dead" of which

this paper is the sixth one relates to cultural and historical preservation as far as all papers include the study of topologies, places where the dead are buried, rather than the methods of burying the dead. The linking research question can be summarised as an exploration of the global question: how are the afterlife and the metaphysical topological spaces represented materially within tombs, burial sites, and buried bodies? Concepts usually associated with the change of materiality and the properties of a geometric object have been used during the conceptualisation of the research project.

Topology, being the central concept, refers practically to topological spaces as sets endowed with a structure which allows defining continuous deformation of subspaces, and all kinds of continuities. The linear points become point, line and polygon features that in geography share coincident geometry, and that in geography refers to the location of nodes (Mayhew, 2023). Further, homeomorphism within topological spaces allows for an inverse function that makes the whole analysis connected but different. Thus, archaeological sites and tombs contain a diversity of forms and shapes that allow the description of change and continuity rather than solely what appears nondimensional to the human eye. A homotopy represents a deformation of the topological site that informs change and a diverse synchronic and diachronic understanding, thus allowing for the differential and hermeneutical interpretation of tombs as bearers of diverse semantic meaning in the manner of the diversity of diachronicity within the project. Fragmentation, destruction, vandalism, and physical coalition and destruction come into effect when bodies and tombs are destroyed, limited, and physically moved for other purposes than their classification as innate and immobile physical and material realities.

In paper 1 the topology of the dead in India outlined sites of burial within World War I and World War II in British India and the work of cultural and historical preservation by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (Aguilar, 2024a). In paper 2 the topology of the dead outlined the ordering of the dead in Chilean cemeteries since independence from Spain (1810) until the present day (Aguilar, 2024b). Paper 3 examined the topologies of the dead within the long period of political violence from the 1960s until the 2016 Peace accord, and the recovery of bodies unaccounted for in Medellin (Aguilar, 2025a). Paper 4 examined topological anomalies within burials in Chile, particularly within periods of forced disappearance, the air accident of the Uruguayan plane of 1972, and the world of animitas, people who died in a violent manner (Aguilar, 2025b). Within the research project cemeteries have taken precedence because they come out of modernity within a socio-political context of public health policy, state and private ownership and the sense of the family. Paper 5 outlines the fractality of a series of tombs in northern Peru, of the Molla civilisation, chronologically existing before the Incas, and in which a main tomb of el Señor de Sifán is surrounded by others with a degree of preservation and natural conservations that gave credit to the efforts of Pope Leo XIV to support the preservation of ancient tombs and

monuments in Peru (Aguilar, 2025c).

The memory of the past has changed and has diversified globally so that as argued by Nicolas Argenti, European conceptions of the past through the dead in "a post-Ottoman time marks the limit of models of temporality founded upon the premise of a linear chronology. In testifying to an experience of the affective half-life of political violence (remembered not as the glory of the state or as culpability of the opponent, but simply a loss) as well as uneventful coexistence, it challenges the central operative principle of Western historicity: that the past is distant and ever-receding" (Argenti, 2017: p. 8).

Innovation and leadership come out of the memory of the dead, for the dead shape our memory, our present and our future. We avoid talking about the dead in the West because we want to be influencers, young and free of care, until the dead of today, yesterday and tomorrow reminds us that we are because we honoured the dead and/or failed the dead who were previously the living. Thus, in introducing the concept of ataraxia, this paper connects the peacefulness of the living with the repose of the dead, both states related by the active action of the preservation, burial, and keeping of the dead. Thus, the ataraxia for the living becomes the ataraxia for the dead and vice versa understood as "the state of tranquillity or imperturbability, freedom from anxiety, considered to be one of the desirable results of an immersion in scepticism", indeed part of the highest form of happiness (Blackburn, 2016). In the case of post-genocide Rwanda, there is a different socio-political understanding of how to reach ataraxia: the Rwandan government by a state ataraxia of unburied bodies, and the victim's families and local communities by a kin ataraxia of local burial within a country in which most families are Roman Catholic families, requiring local Catholic burials. On the one hand, ataraxia is achieved by exercising state rights dictated by the state, on the other hand, ataraxia is achieved by the exercise of kin and individual rights of burial.

2. A Journey with the Global Dead

My reflections return to a life surrounded by the living in crisis and the dead unburied. After being surrounded by the dead at age 16 in Chile, I came to study in Europe, and my following experiences were those of working with the living in Kenya/Somalia (1987 - 1990), who had at the centre their secession war and their cemeteries in the middle of the desert. By 1992, the civil war in Somalia had started and I was visiting the living and trying to get them out of Mogadishu where the dead were abundant during the Somali civil war. The paths of work and life brought me to visit Rwanda where on the 6th of April 1994 the President was killed and three months of killings started in what became known as the Rwanda Genocide. 800,000 people were killed, and the conflict expanded to ethnic cleansing in Burundi, and grave ongoing violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Congo and Congo Brazaville (Prunier, 2002).

Therefore, questions of innovation have been full of questions about imagination and duty towards victims and survivors of killing moments in which the rule

of law as we understand it disappears. In fact, during those moments of violence, the rule of law is suspended and substituted for a period of madness, ethnocide, genocide, crimes against humanity, and massive rapes and sexual violence during war. My latest reflection on crimes against humanity has returned to the 2014 Yazidi Genocide in northern Iraq and the life of a UN ambassador for peace, Nadia Murad, a victim of sexual slavery who lost many relatives within the Yazidi genocide by Daesh/ISIS. My biography of her short and meaningful life is being published by Routledge (Aguilar, 2026). However, we must not forget that any leadership and innovation by the UN came about because of the horrors of World War II, the holocaust, and the use of nuclear weapons on civil populations in Japan. Leadership and human rights remind us of the life of UN personnel, peacekeeping forces, NGOs, development agencies and all those who have been involved with the living, the dead and have become themselves living dead and dead, including the heroes on peacekeeping from Canada and Belgium in Rwanda, together with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Special Representative in Bagdad, Sergio Vieira de Mello, blasted by bombs together with 21 UN personnel in Iraq on 19 August 2003.

I want to turn to Rwanda to propose problematic areas of post-genocide burial and the state use of bodies for purposes of national memory that remain problematic, even when the Kagame administration would justify them as necessary for the future unity of Rwanda.

3. Rwanda Revisited

It is necessary to add to this brief historical assessment of post-genocide burial in Rwanda that on 6 April 1994 the plane of Rwanda's president was shot down as it approached Kigali and a well-prepared genocide of Tutsis, Hutu moderates and those who protected Tutsis began (Prunier, 2002). The killings lasted for three months until the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) advanced into Kigali and the Hutu government fled. It is a fact that 800,000 people were killed by fellow citizens and that militia organized the killings by pushing Hutu "nationalism" and by creating the daily conditions of group solidarity in which Hutus went for "a hunt" and the pray were Tutsis who were in hiding.[1] The killing was systematic and most of the victims were killed inside churches, schools, hospitals and buildings used for community purposes. One could say that they represented the old colonial administration.

Most writers and commentators have pointed to the fact that most of the killers and the victims lived side by side in the same neighbourhoods and villages and that most of them knew each other. They were for the most part Christians, most of them Catholics, and their religious obligations didn't prevent them from killing others day by day. Indeed, some of the killers had spoken about the fact that because they were busy with "the hunt" they didn't have time to go to church and

[1]The "hunt" as an expression by Hutu killers is used consistently in the interviews conducted by Jean Hatzfeld after the genocide, see Jean Hatzfeld (2005).

religious services were suspended because people were either hunting or were being hunt. In the words of Theodore Nyilinkwaya "Everyone was called to hunt the enemy" (Gourevitch, 1999: p. 24). Pio, a killer awaiting trial, explained "the hunt" in a fuller way:

> We no longer saw a human being when we turned up a Tutsi in the swamps. I mean a person like us, sharing similar thoughts and feelings. The hunt was savage, the hunters were savage, the prey was savage—savagery took over the mind (Hatzfeld, 2005: p. 42).

The foreign missionaries working in Rwanda fled as soon as the killings started, most of the Rwandan bishops remained silent and some explained to foreign journalists that what was happening in Rwanda was done with the best possible intentions to create a better nation. The inability of providing a theology of solidarity, hope and cooperation between different groups in Rwanda provided a reminder that in Africa blood was thicker than water, a dictum that has been associated with the power of family, kin and ethnic groups over the power of belonging to a community that required membership through Christian baptism and the use of water in order to dissolve the divisions created by ethnicity and social identity.

4. The Killings

On 6 April 1994, President Juvenal Habyarimama was returning from Tanzania where he had attended peace talks to secure a cease fire between different warring factions in Rwanda. At 8:30 p.m. and as his plane approached Kanombe military base in Kigali three missiles were fired at the presidential plane. The plane crashed on the grounds of the presidential palace and all on board died: President Habyarimama, the newly elected Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira, Rwanda's Chief of Staff Deogratias Nsabimana, several senior members of the presidential staff and members of the French crew that operated the plane. The Rwandan government blamed the Rwandan Patriotic Front for killing the Hutu president while other Rwandan diplomats blamed the Belgians for firing the missiles. It was clear though that whoever had fired the missiles had access to the military base and that the Rwandan government was immediately taken by Hutu extremists who mobilized the militia to exercise violent retaliation against the Tutsi population.

Years later, it is possible to assert as a fact that the genocide had already been prepared and that lists of Hutu moderates, enemies of the government and the Tutsi leadership in Kigali were already in circulation. The media frenzy orchestrated by the militia called upon all Hutus to defend the Hutu government and to attack the Tutsis. The massacres in Kigali started on the 7 April 1994 and spread throughout the country as groups of militias were sent to different districts to coordinate the killings with government personnel. The possibility of escape was very small as Rwanda remains a country locked in hills and with inadequate means of transport. Thus, those who escaped the killings at the start of the genocide were those who owned means of transport and as the roadblocks were placed all over

the country those who managed to escape to the swamps and forests and were not discovered by the militia. It could be said that as usual the poor were those without the possibility of escaping while those who owned some means were able to escape by road or were able to bribe others to survive.

One of the most shocking stories of the genocide was related to a common phenomenon: that of awaiting one's death without hope of anything else. For those who gathered in churches and schools or hills around their villages awaited their own death that coincided with the arrival of the militia. Philip Gourevitch collected the story of seven Tutsi pastors who, on the 16 April 1994, wrote to their Adventist leader Pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana requesting he had a word with the local governor because they feared that on the next day they were going to be killed at Mugonero Adventist Centre and at the hospital.[2] The pastors ended the letter in the following religious manner: "We believe that, with the help of God who entrusted you the leadership of this flock, which is going to be destroyed, your intervention will be highly appreciated, the same way as the Jews were saved by Esther" (Gourevitch, 1999:42). According to Ntakirutimana he wrote back to them saying that nothing could be done and neither he nor the governor could intervene. While he claimed his innocence after the massacre of thousands of Tutsis in Mugonero, in 1996, the FBI arrested him in Laredo, Texas, being accused of leading and organizing the killings of the Tutsi population to whom he ministered to.

The killing was systematic and had a norm of order and predictability. Lists were circulated before the arrival of the militia while people were being encouraged to congregate on public spaces to escape the violence. The militia gathered Hutu males in football fields and open spaces and briefed them on the job to be done. They killed and searched for those who were hiding from morning to late afternoon and later they drank and feasted together until returning to their homes, their wives and their children. It is very striking that the killings and their organization was for the most part public unlike other conflicts in which a state apparatus created private spaces outside the view and the rules of a nation to torture and kill, as it was the case of South Africa or Chile.

The foreign missionaries left, unlike the situation in other countries, showing again passivity and following the orders to evacuate from their own embassies that were unheard of in other situations. The colonial ordering had been well-developed even within independence and the killings were possible because the colonial world was still present within the government, the churches and the people. The international community failed to intervene and the poor and the marginalized of Rwanda were left on their own to deal with killers who were finally in control of a process of disordering of the colonial and Christian world that they considered "the past" (The Tablet, 1996: p. 148). Thus, Rwanda became a killing field very similar to those of Latin America in which Christians tortured and killed in the name of a project of ordering while those killed and tortured were also part of the

[2]Those signing the letter were Pastors Ezekiel Semugeshi, Isaka Rucondo, Seth Rwanyabuto, Eliezer Seromba, Seth Sebihe, Jerome Gakwaya and Ezekias Zigirinshuti.

same symbolic community of God and Church divided by a different understanding of Christianity, nationalism and patriotism.

Within the violence that reigned in communal terrors and the nightmares of the frenzy of evil that took over the land I would like to dwell on one of the first killings in Kigali. It is no coincidence that one of the first killings took place at the Jesuit Retreat Centre in Kigali (African Rights, 1995: pp. 863-865). Those who were at the centre of any possible resistance had to be annihilated first; thus, at 7:00 a.m. on the morning of 7 April 1994 seventeen people were killed at the Christus Centre in Kigali, a group that included priests, seminarians, lay people and staff. An hour after the radio announcement that the Rwandese president had been assassinated members of the Presidential Guard arrived at the retreat centre. They requested to see everybody's ID cards, but nobody had them because they didn't need them at that time when they were praying in the chapel. Ten minutes later, the armed guards separated the Rwandese from the Europeans and locked them in different rooms. Among the expatriates, there were three Belgian Jesuits, and three Spanish women who belonged to the lay organization Vita et Pax who were kept in the dining room. When they were released at 2:20 p.m. they found seventeen bodies in the room where the Rwandese had been locked. Two of them, a young woman and a diocesan priest, had been spared. However, among the victims there were eight members of Vita et Pax, four diocesan priests, a social worker, a cook and three Jesuits.

One must ask why the Presidential Guard targeted the retreat centre. The African Rights Report argues very convincingly that during February 1994, the retreat centre had been a place of refuge for Tutsi refugees and that the Jesuits had denied a request by the authorities to expel the refugees from the retreat centre. It is possible, the report argues, that those who were killed were assumed to be refugees. However, priests at the retreat centre had formed an association to defend the rights of refugees under the name of Patrie (African Rights, 1995: p. 865).

The killing of the Jesuits in Kigali resembles those of other Jesuits in time of conflict within other nations such as El Salvador where the whole community of the Jesuits working at the university were killed, including Ignacio Ellacuría SJ, because of their involvement in public life trying to dispel conflict through a direct mediation between the guerrillas and the state. In the case of Rwanda those three Jesuits to be killed first symbolized the full extent of the genocide that was unfolding. Two of them were Tutsi, Chrysologue Mahame (67) and Patrick Gahizi (48) but one of them was a Hutu, Innocent Rutagambwa (46), who had been working at the Jesuit provincial office from 1990 to February 1994 and had translated the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola into Kinyarwanda (biographies in African Rights, 1995: pp. 863-864). A portrait of the three Jesuits would explain the fact that the Presidential Guard executed first the Jesuits, then those Hutu leaders opposed to the genocide and the Tutsi leadership in Kigali.

Fr. Mahame was the long-time Superior at the Christus Centre having been the first Rwandese Jesuit. Born in Kibeho he had joined the Jesuits in 1952 in Dujuma, Zaire. He studied theology at Eagenhoven in Belgium and was ordained as a priest in 1961 taking his final vows in 1970. In 1992, he helped the creation of the human

rights organization Association des Volontaires de la Paix (AVP), association of which he was its legal representative having participated many times in mediations between the government and the RPF. He had had disagreements with the Rwandan president, and it is possible to argue that this was the reason why the Presidential Guard of all military units was sent to the Jesuit retreat centre after the Rwandan president was killed. Fr. Gahizi joined the Jesuits in Cyangugu in 1977, studied philosophy at Kimwenza in Zaire and theology at the Gregorian University in Rome. He was ordained in 1984 and continued further studies in Rome and Quebec. He took final vows in 1990 and when the war broke out, he was in prison for two weeks. Later, he became Provincial's delegate and superior of the scholastic residence at the University of Butare. Fr. Rutagambwa entered the Jesuits in Cyangugu in 1969 and studied philosophy and theology at Kimwenza, African Linguistics at the University of Lumumbashi in Zaire and continued further studies at the Gregorian University in Rome. He was ordained in 1979 and took his final vows in 1987 returning to Rwanda where he taught at the high school in Gisenyi where he was supposed to return in 1994 after his years of service at the Jesuit Provincial offices.

The killing of the Jesuits was the signal expected by others to start the systematic killings. Within the post-independence life of Rwandans, the Jesuits had brought their own Jesuit spirituality and had aimed at shaping the Rwandan leadership with a Christian spirituality of contemplation and action following in the steps of Ignatius of Loyola (Aguilar, 2008: chapter 4). They were dangerous for the Hutu extremists because they could have organized a resistance to the killings. Therefore, in a strange manner the first to be killed were not Tutsi politicians or Hutu moderates but those who were praying and searching for God at a retreat centre. Once those spiritual masters were out of the way the killing at a large scale began.

Once the city of Kigali had been secured and the international observers kept out of Rwanda the militia mobilized its members to rural Rwanda and the killing started village by village, church by church, neighbourhood by neighbourhood. According to the 1991 Rwandan Census Kibuye had the highest concentration of Tutsis within Rwanda. They numbered 252,000 before the genocide. By the end of 1994 there were only 7000 to 8000 Tutsis alive in Kibuye. Kibuye is only one of the many examples of a systematic extermination of an ethnic group by fellow nationals and fellow Christians within Rwanda. The killings were well-planned and directed by the Prefect of Kibuye, Clément Kayishema, a medical doctor.[3] He re-directed some of the frightened Tutsis to so-called "safe areas" such as Kibuye parish, Gatwaro Stadium and Kibuye Hospital. After a couple of weeks attacks

[3]Clément Kayishema was born in 1954 and attended the National University of Rwanda. From 1986 to 1991 he was the medical director of the hospital in Nyanza. In 1987 he married Mukandoli and they had two children. He was appointed prefect of Kibuye on 3 July 1992. On 21 May 1999 he was sentenced to life imprisonment by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). The ICTR was created on 8 November 1994 by the United Nations Security Council in order to prosecute those responsible for crimes against humanity in Rwanda between 1 January and 31 December 1994, see UN Resolution 955. French name: *Tribunal pénal international pour le Rwanda*. Kinyarwanda name: *Urukiko Nshinjabyaha Mpuzamahanga rwagenewe u Rwanda*.

started on those gathered within the "safe areas" with re-enforcements arriving from Gisenyi, Ruhengeri and Cyangugu, where massive killings had already taken place. The killings had already started on 7 April 1994, when those who couldn't run to the hills, mainly the elderly, were massacred by militia. Most of the Tutsis sought shelter on the hills where their parents had already thought refuge during the ethnic attacks on Tutsis in 1973. After days fighting the militia the Tutsi who were on the hills were forced to flee to the commune office in Mabanza and from there were directed to Kibuye town, a seven-hour walk.

The massacres in Kibuye started on 9 and 10 April 1994 when the European sisters at Mubuga were instructed to leave in a vehicle provided by the Prefect leaving the Tutsi refugees defenceless. On 17 April 1994 soldiers mounted guns and started shooting into the crowded Gatwaro Stadium from 1.00 to 8.00 pm. Grenades were thrown in, and people with machetes slaughtered anybody who tried to escape. A few managed to escape due to the exhaustion of the militia but were systematically tracked down in the countryside and hacked to death.

Another public massacre took place at Kibuye Parish. Children, old men and women were brought to the parish compound and according to a census carried out on 15 April 1994 by Fr. Boniface Senyenzi and a Belgian woman there were 7200 refugees at the parish. The place was crowded with people staying in the courtyard of the church, the Home St. Jean, the school and all the areas close to the church. When a French officer, Lt. Col. Eric de Stabenrath, found the remnants of the killings at Kibuye Parish he counted 4300 bodies piled one on top of another. According to survivors the militia arrived by boat and called upon young Tutsi first and killed them searching house by house. On 16 April 1994, two hundred Twa attacked the refugees at the parish compound but were repelled. However, on the following day, Sunday 17 April 1994, four hundred and fifty men, including soldiers, policemen, prison wardens, plus four hundred members of the militia attacked the parish refugees who sought refuge inside the church building. They killed them all with grenades, machine guns and machetes. Louis Rutaganira (44), a businessman in the area before the killings, described the horror as follows:

> There were so many people dead. But the killers wanted to single out the survivors. So, they threw tear-gas inside the church which forced the lining to get up. Immediately, those with machetes came in to finish off the living. Those who managed to run outside were macheted on the doorstep. Those of us who survived were the ones hidden under dead bodies. The finishing off lasted from 3.00 to 5.00 pm. We were choking with the tear-gas. But we were so buried by dead bodies that it was difficult to get up even if we wanted to (African Rights, 1995: p. 421).

The home St. Jean was also attacked and five priests including Abbé Gahinda, who had come from Nyundo, as well as two hundred people, were killed. The killers departed by 7.00 p.m. as darkness approached, leaving everybody dead apart from a few who had taken refuge on the roof of the Catholic mission. The massacres stopped with the arrival of French soldiers who were stationed at the

Ecole Technique Normale and on 30 April, two weeks after the massacres, only 60 frightened survivors left the pile of bodies. They were helped by other locals who organized boats that crossed them to Ijwi Island in Zaire.

The area of Kibuye became a catalyst of a larger story. If victims were betrayed by neighbours and friends and if several clergies failed to stop the genocide, there were some priests and religious who protected the refugees until death. Thus, one of the survivors paid tribute to the mission superior, Fr. Boniface Senyenzi, Fr. Theophilus from Rwamatamu, five religious brothers from the Major Seminary and a Belgian nun, Tante Emma, who ran a guest house. Some Hutu brothers had warned them about the arrival of the militia, and they decided to stay and organize the protection of the refugees.

5. Unburied Bones

As already outlined, most of those thousands killed inside churches, hospitals and schools were not buried but their bones remain objects of curiosity for visitors and a reminder of loving relatives to their families. Daily, some relatives go to talk to their loved ones and the cohesion between a physical and a meta-physical world is ever strengthened. This communion between living human beings and their ancestors who live in another world is not unusual; what becomes unusual is the centrality of a hermeneutics of presence that dictates readings and interpretations of memory through silence and the memories of silence. The reality of an event of death and despair that took place at a particular space and time during the genocide becomes for a person who was left alive a place and an important place in daily life. In John Inge's analysis "what is undifferentiated space becomes for us significant place by virtue of our familiarity with it" (Inge, 2003: pp. 1-2).

The existence of mass graves in Rwanda who are regularly discovered and rearranged by international personnel with hundreds of witnesses present, mainly those who are descendants and relatives of those who were killed in 1994 cannot be denied. Thus, while no efforts to bury the dead were undertaken after the Rwanda genocide, as the Rwanda Patriotic Front declared those places as sites of memory. However, as outlined by Astrid Jamar and Laura Major:

> A government-managed programme launched in the 2000s to exhume graves containing Tutsi victims of the 1994 genocide emerged out of this longer history of managing the dead. The programme took place alongside an adjacent redesign and formalising of memorials and a consolidation of sites, moving bodies from smaller community level sites to larger district or regional locations. Among other adjustments to law (which included enormous fines for removing or concealing the remains of genocide victims), a policy was introduced to arrange the relocation of all of the bodies of victims of the genocide, even if buried in individual graves, into the memorials (Jamar & Major, 2022: pp. 61-62).

According to Korman, the shift took place for remains to be shifted during na-

tional commemorations and to be used by the state to prevent any negation of the 1994 genocide (Korman, 2015). Thus, the sharp analysis of Jamar & Major in which they challenge that the "right to know" by families has been respected, and they argue that vernacular rights have been created by the state to have control of memory and control of the state ownership of the genocide. Indeed, in my own writings on Rwanda I have challenged the narrative of the RPF suggesting that because colonial powers and the Catholic Church, according to them, are responsible for the climate of injustice that led to the genocide, a Catholic population ceased to have rights to bury their dead who in terms of their Catholic belief await the Resurrection and therefore require a proper individual grave as it was in some individual cases (for historical processes regarding the RPF ideology, see Kalibwami, 1991; Linden, 1977; Prunier, 1993). Indeed, there are issues of resources involved but as in any other genocide the RPF government has not allowed a legal process of identification and of trial and judgement of killers if they were Tutsi or members of the RPF.

For example, in the case of Murambi, namely the Murambi memorial site located on a hilly area of Gikongoro, southwest of Rwanda, a technical school was being constructed at the time of the genocide. Many of the victims gathered for shelter and refuge when they started hearing about killings elsewhere and the massive killings started on 16 April 1994 when ca. 65,000 Tutsis took refuge at the local school. Militia cut supplies of food, water and electricity and launched attacks at people sheltering at the technical school. Local leaders and Catholic bishops of the area suggested to the refugees at the Church to move to the technical school where French troops were located, hoping that they would be protected. The refugees contained an initial attack but on 21 April 1994 at 3 a.m., witnesses testified that vehicles, trucks and buses arrived transporting soldiers. The soldiers surrounded the school and launched an artillery attack, with grenades and machetes being used by the militia. For the next six to seven hours around 45,000 people including children were killed. As a result, mass graves were dug around the school with no care for the bodies who were buried rapidly. In 1995, relatives of the dead provided information and some bodies were dug and buried properly. Clothing and other personal materials were preserved at the sites (see images at Amuno & Amuno, 2014). The bodies of those who were not re-buried were preserved with lime as a reminder of the massacre and genocide. Amuno & Amuno, who took samples for their research in January and February 2012, stated that "trauma wounds to the head, legs, and arms were extensively observed in the dry skeletal remains of the preserved bodies" (figure 5 in Amuno & Amuno, 2014: p. 148).

6. A Skeletal Topology

Why did Rwandans agree with the policy of not burying their dead? Was it because there were too many bodies? Was it because they were in shock and could not react to the possibility of grieving for all those dead? Why was the memory of the dead important to the post-genocide regime of the Rwanda Patriotic Front?

These are some of the social and historical questions that arise out of a unique practice after social violence; in most other cases, burial places or cremations were aimed at moving on as a nation or monuments were built to remember historical events. However, I am not concerned here with socio-historical explanations; I have dealt unsuccessfully with many questions related to the 1994 Rwanda genocide somewhere else (Aguilar, 1998).

I am here concerned with theological insights, with narratives about God provided not by the Rwandan government or by those who try to understand the inexplicable but by the theologizing of a people that must live with the bones, with the memories and with their God or the absence of God in their lives (Aguilar, 2009, where I comment on Murambi). Thus, I, on purpose, rely heavily on the novel Murambi to illustrate the "skeletal topology" and theological absence. I would argue that a literary source provides unique insight into the lived experience and emotional reality of the post-genocide landscape.

In *Murambi* the novel, the scene of God's absence is set by the return of a Rwandese, Cornelius Uvimana, who from Djibuti, comes to visit the country where his family lived before the 1994 genocide (Diop, 2016). Two childhood friends, Jessica Kamanzi and Stanley Ntaramira, met him at the airport and they made it possible for him to visit many places including those in which people he knew, and his family lived, that is, the location where they resided before they were killed. Many of their dead bodies remained within the grounds of churches. In a visit to the grounds of the church at Ntarama Cornelius witnessed the results of the genocidal killing frenzy:

> On two long tables, inside a rectangular straw hut, human remains were exhibited: skulls on the right, and an assortment of other bones on the left. On a piece of paper caught on a little bouquet of flowers, someone had written by hand, "The innocent do not die, they rest" (Diop, 2016: p. 71).

After visiting a second larger building with holes left by the grenades thrown into the church by the militia, they drove to another church. At the church of Nyamata twenty-five to thirty thousand cadavers were on display within the red brick church where Rwandan Catholics had sung and prayed to their Living God. However, in the novel, the guide brought Cornelius and his friend Jessica to one of the basements of the building known as crypt number 1. Well preserved bodies lied on tables and Cornelius was struck by one body that was very well preserved, a young woman, identified by the guide as Theresa Mukandori, a well-known local lady. The description of her state was horrifying but a common reflection of all the pain and suffering inflicted by torturers and killers during the genocide:

> The young woman had her head pushed back and the scream extracted from her by the pain had been frozen on her still grimacing face. Her magnificent tresses were dishevelled, and her legs wide apart. A stake—of wood or of iron, Cornelius didn't know, he was too shocked to notice—had remained lodged in her vagina (Diop, 2016: p. 73).

Theresa's case was a typical one, her brother wanted to bury her in a decent grave, but the government authorities insisted that she would contribute to the future of Rwanda by remaining a testimony of what had happened. Beside the church there were two graves: the first one of the priest who died before the genocide of a heart attack when he heard that Pope John Paul II was going to visit Rwanda and a second one of an Italian nun, who had given an interview to a foreign radio two years before the genocide stating that the killing of Tutsis was wrong. She was shot by unknown men and buried beside the church (Diop, 2016: p. 74). Later, within the plot of the novel, Cornelius learned that his own father, a well-known local medical doctor, had not been killed but had led the killings at the polytechnic in Murambi (Diop, 2016: pp. 76-77). Within that carnage of thousands he didn't save his wife, his two children (Cornelius' brother and sister) and his in-laws. After the killings were completed, he was helped to escape the scene of the crimes.

Throughout the novel, it is striking that Diop and the characters he created combine a matter-of-fact approach to the killings and the events of Rwanda. More striking is still the fact that thousands killed in churches remained unburied while others found in the countryside or the swamps were buried. The details in the novel are striking because they correspond to the reality of contemporary Rwanda in which the placement of unburied skeletons in churches and sacred places speak of a historical memory in which God, church and nation are discussed daily because for a human being corpses, bodies and skeletons bring visual images of a common humanity that suffers and of a God who remains alive or dead in the perception of human beings. Further, they remind all visitors of the social illnesses that made the Rwanda genocide possible. For most visitors, the God of Nyamata who was watching over his people remained silent while the killings were happening because he was looking elsewhere.

Indeed, while God "was looking elsewhere" the militia not only instigated massive killings, but they also took the booty of war, Tutsi women. Maybe those who were enslaved for sexual use by their captors could tell a living story if they are still alive. However, the unburied corpses described in the novel became a reality for the peace keeping forces that tried desperately with insufficient personnel and no authority to provide safe havens for those fleeing, including the killers, or to try to diminish the military vengeance of the then army commander Paul Kagame and the victorious forces of the Rwanda patriotic Front. However, within that carnage the bodies expressed the human understanding of an absent God while the theological reading of suffering and rape speaks still to me of a destroyed and humiliated human being who is still loved by God.

The skeletons of Rwanda that tell the story of a fallen institutional Christianity and the presence of a crucified and loving God who gets killed and raped many, many times because the leaders of his own institutional church could not be there to defend him. Lt. General Roméo Dallaire, force commander of the UN mission to Rwanda, speaking of the forceful message provided by the dead bodies, partic-

ularly of women and girls said: "They died in a position of total vulnerability, flat on their backs, with their legs bent and knees wide apart. It was the expression of their dead faces that assaulted me the most, a frieze of shock, pain and humiliation" (Dallaire, 2004: p. 430).

I return to the same question once again: Why did Rwandans agree with the policy of not burying their dead? Was it because there were too many bodies? Was it because they were in shock and could not react to the possibility of grieving for all those dead? Why was the memory of the dead important to the post-genocide regime of the Rwanda Patriotic Front? These are some of the social and historical questions that arise out of a unique practice after social violence; in most other cases, burial places or cremations were aimed at moving on as a nation or monuments were built to remember historical events.

I have explored some of the burial, re-burial and political use of the dead in general after the genocide. However, given the fact that new mass graves were found in the past few years, there is always the possibility of returning to studies of those graves done by scientists, particularly experts brought in by the international community that have been alarmed by the final conclusion: with limited resources it would be impossible to identify more bodies, even given the fact that some of their relatives are alive. Thus, burying and identifying the dead remains a contentious narrative of inequality given the fact that less concern for identification and proper burial of the dead seems to exist in African countries.

7. Conclusions: Mass Graves, Topologies and the Ataraxia of the Dead

The topology of mass graves in Rwanda, literally of thousands of mass graves still to be found, reflects the crude materiality of a severe topology in which materiality has been broken disfigured and altered from the moment of killing to the various moments of inhumation, burial, re-burial through hidden moments of criminality and silence. The negation of individual histories and the histories of the victims through international tribunals where only a few were interrogated, and the forced silence imposed by the state of Rwanda has created a social and institutional silence. Neither the gacaca courts nor the international tribunal managed to deal with the hidden secrets that lie within the mass graves of Rwanda. The gacaca courts were indigenous courts in which those accused of genocidal crimes told their truth and asked for forgiveness from victim's relatives while orchestrators and leaders of the genocide were sent to the International Tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania or were tried in European courts. The topologies have become homotopes that represent a deformation of the topological site that informs change and created as a result diverse synchronic and diachronic understanding.

Jamar & Major (2022) have provided a comprehensive and credible analysis of the process of creating topologies that at the start were designed to provide the truth as it was in Latin America after the military regimes. However, the state intervention of the RPF silenced the topologies by unifying them through a process

of national memory in which the genocide could not be denied. However, the movement of bones and human remains meant that the truth as legal aspect of life was recovered only in a minority of cases. The victims, mostly poor farmers and labourers were denied the truth about their loved ones. How was a father, a mother or their child murdered is a different question than the national erosion of a massive truth of ethnic cleansing and different socio-cultural understandings. Those who attended the diggings and re-burials were not allowed to find out where their loved ones were. They guessed that they were in Murambi, for example, but the fact that Diop's literary creation must be used is because the individual truths and the trials with possible compensation that might have followed never took place.

In conclusion, the works by foreign experts allowed for a reflection on the genocide took another level, the identification of human beings and their places of burial remain significant for the healing of a nation. Cemeteries and graves are locations where history continues unfolding, as it has been through the search and burial of those who died in World Wars I-II (Aguilar, 2024a). For the differential and hermeneutical interpretation of tombs as bearers of diverse semantic meaning in the manner of the diversity of diachronicity become a social memory and a human right by all groups and not only the Tutsi despite their great suffering within the Rwanda genocide.

The metaphorical application of mathematical topology is a novel analytical framework. Within such framework, the concepts of homeomorphism and homotopy applied to the state-led transformation of burial sites, transform burial sites into political symbols, thus the challenge for the victims' families and to the national system of preservation, burial and state appropriation rather that the identification of individual corpses and legal return to their families.

Change and innovation are the only constant for human beings associated through institutions. The order of law, be it constitutional, international or religious, remains the sole possibility of innovation through a common foundation. Global innovation requires multiculturality and multilateralism in all ways of association with an ever-possible opening to the Global South, and to the equality of nations. Within such innovation changes can take place by a common sense of service and cooperation with others with a close relationship between central structures and institutions of law, between the secular and the religious, between the political and the universal. As in the case of law, reform comes out of continuity with the past and the accumulation of a common understanding towards the future.

For the future requires the past and the present as well. For the future is the accommodation of the Ataraxia of the Dead within the lives of the living, descendants of the dead, not only within the nation state (Warren, 2006). The ataraxia for the living becomes the ataraxia for the dead and vice versa understood as "the state of tranquillity or imperturbability, freedom from anxiety, considered to be one of the desirable results of an immersion in scepticism", indeed part of the highest form of happiness (Blackburn, 2016). Otherwise, as it has been the case of other

processes of genocide and ethnic cleansing in Africa, new generations will again create topologies of more dead, once the nation state cannot control the search for the truth lying now within the mass graves in Rwanda.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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