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Wednesday, Sep. 26, 2007

Seeds of Change in Rwanda

By ALEX PERRY/NYAMATA

We step inside Nyamata church and my guide, Josh Ruxin, points out the wall where babies were smashed up against the brick. "You can still see the blood," he says. More blood, wide dry brown stains, covers the altar cloth. Against a side wall, I find two new-looking closed coffins covered in cloth, a stack of 20 more, empty and expectant, and an open sack scattered with ribs, femurs and broken skulls. "Oh yeah," says Ruxin, looking over. "Thirteen years later, they're still finding new bodies round here every day." We walk around to the front of the church where a raised white-tiled plinth is scattered with dead flowers and plastic wrap. In its center is another stairwell. "If you want the full tour ... ," Ruxin trails off. I descend. At the foot of the stairs is a narrow corridor. The walls are lined with shelves, floor to the ceiling, stacked with neat piles of bones and skulls. "There's 50,000 people down there," says Ruxin, when I emerge.

The Hutu slaughter of Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda between April and July 1994 was so quick and wholesale, it has proved impossible to find all the dead or separate their remains. It is estimated that Rwanda lost 800,000 people in 100 days. Perhaps 2 million took part in the slaughter, this in a country of 8 million. The genocide museum in the capital Kigali concludes its description of 1994 with the words: "Rwanda was dead." As a Tutsi area, Nyamata was a crucible of the killing. It was where, in a series of practice massacres after 1990, that the Hutu militia, the Interahamwe, honed their calculations of the optimum rate of dispatch. Come April 1994, around six out of every 10 people in Nyamata were killed, though again, no one is sure of the exact figure. A few miles from Nyamata, a sign at a second massacre site reads: ÉGLISE NTARAMA: +/- 5,000 PEOPLE.

A holocaust colors everything that follows, alters the essence of a nation. And it fosters a lasting mystery — an incomprehension over how man could behave so inhumanly to man. At his offices in Kigali, President Paul Kagame says: "Hutu fathers killed their own children because some of them resembled

their wives, who were Tutsi. How do you explain that?" Nations that haven't just peered into the abyss, but lived in it, have a tight grasp on the price of failure. Those that survive are duty-bound to do everything to avoid a repeat. So when Columbia University public health and development expert Ruxin, 37, arrived in Rwanda and asked where to set up the Millennium Villages Project, a program to end poverty in 80 villages across the world, Kagame's government gave him an office 100 m from Nyamata church.

Rwanda's unbending approach since its holocaust has led it to some remarkable successes — and embroiled it in controversy. What's undeniable is that Rwanda is forging a remarkable path to development. Last week the country was named the most improved sub-Saharan nation on the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, ranking factors such as transparency and human development over the last five years. If yesterday Rwanda was Africa's great tragedy, today, to many, it is its great hope. "This is not just a nation that's emerged from the ashes," says Ruxin. "It pulled itself up by its bootstraps when there weren't even any boots. Now it's achieving a level of recognition that makes other countries salivate. It's a place of real hope."

Francine Mukantarengwa is describing how she survived the genocide when my translator breaks down. "Fourteen people in my family were killed," she says. "The brother of the killer of my family — he hid me." At this point, the interpreter, a former fighter with Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), starts weeping. I let Francine go. She'd already told me about her life after the genocide. "I was abandoned," she said. "I was alone and I had nothing." And now? "Now I have goats, I have two cows, I have built a house. I have 700 coffee trees. I'm even putting money in the bank."

Francine's new prosperity came from the lush terraces in the southern mountains of Maraba, through which Texas A&M University agronomist Tim Schilling had driven me in his pickup an hour earlier. Rwanda is tiny and landlocked, an oasis of rain, lakes and volcanoes in the heart of Africa. Its slopes are home to mountain gorillas and the furthest source of the Nile. They are also, Schilling says, "where God would have chosen to grow coffee."

Five years ago, no one had heard of Rwandan coffee. It sold for less than a quarter of some speciality coffees and it didn't take an agronomist to figure out why. "It tasted crap," Schilling said. "Worse. It tasted of potatoes." Schilling, 54, was tasked with reviving Rwandan agriculture for usaid. So with almost 40% of the country farming coffee — more than 3 million people — he became a coffee expert. The key to a good cup, he discovered, was processing and speed. The sooner and more expertly coffee cherries are processed — stripped, washed, sorted and dried — the better the coffee. In 2003, for \$120,000, he built Rwanda's first coffee-washing station on a stream next to some farms in Maraba.

The results were spectacular. The station started producing not just good coffee, but great coffee. Schilling built three more stations. Buyers from Mercato, Intelligentsia and Costco — even a British microbrewer making coffee beer — began showing up. In March 2006, 5,000 Starbucks outlets in the U.S. began selling Rwandan coffee. In their brochure this year, coffee roasters Green Mountain described Rwanda as "the hottest emerging origin in speciality coffee." Its coffee had "floral top notes of lemon ... sweet, caramelized sugar and wild honey evolving into the heady, well-toned presence of chocolate, dried fruit and dark cherry notes." Who knew? Not Rwandans, who don't drink the stuff. But they did notice the extra change in their pocket, and how foreigners were queuing up to buy their beans years in advance. "Suddenly, they're making more than \$1 a kilo, up from 25 cents," says Schilling. Other farmers noticed too. Almost overnight, 116 copies of Schilling's washing stations sprang up nationwide. "The impact is huge, just huge," says Schilling. "It's key to Rwanda's rise."

Coffee is far from Rwanda's only success. Its roads are some of the best in Africa, and the entire country will be wireless by the end of the year. Rwanda is also clean, thanks to a ban on plastic bags since 2005 and a mandatory national "tidy up" one afternoon each month, in which even government ministers clean the streets. Partly as a result, and partly because of careful rain-forest management and a mountain gorilla baby boom, Rwanda is also a growing eco-tourism destination. The government says the economy as a whole will grow 6.5% this year.

Rwanda also scores well on some perennial African problems. It is one of the safest countries on the continent. It boasts the highest percentage of women in parliament anywhere in the world — 49%. Its rate of HIV infection is at 3% — tiny compared to the figure in other small sub-Saharan African development stars, such as Botswana and Namibia — and all its 35,000 aids sufferers are on antiretroviral drugs. It is investing heavily in education. The government is also tackling overpopulation, which — in that it describes a situation of too many people on not enough land — was an underlying cause of the genocide. In Mayange, outside Nyamata, Ruxin has virtually eliminated hunger and malaria in 15 months, and the government is now scaling up his success nationwide. Most significant, foreign donors report no corruption, and in its World Governance Indicators released in July, the World Bank found Rwanda's government ranked among Africa's best, such as South Africa and Mauritius, scoring particularly well on control of graft. Repeat: World Finds Little Corruption in Small African Country.

These achievements, Kagame admits, are because "we are doing what we should have been doing in the first place." They are driven by the imperative of never returning to genocide: make people prosperous enough and build business relations between them, says Kagame, and "they value each other, rather than kill each other." Nevertheless, simply by doing what should be done, but generally isn't, Rwanda makes itself unique. "We all know the list," says Ruxin. "Law and order, electricity, water, sanitation, communications, education and health. But Kagame is the one African leader who gets the basics right."

And — say his critics — gets some of them wrong. Amnesty International says several thousand detainees are being held in long-term detention without trial. Human Rights Watch says Kagame has "equated 'genocidal ideology' with dissent from government policy." Paul Rusesabagina, the central character in the film *Hotel Rwanda* — in which he shelters Tutsis in Kigali's Mille Collines Hotel — accuses Kagame, a Tutsi, of pursuing vengeance. "Everything has been taken over by the Tutsi. The Hutu ... are intimidated." And it was two Rwandan army invasions in the late 1990s into the Democratic Republic of Congo, in pursuit of fugitive Rwandan *génocidaires*, that sparked a war that sucked in most of central Africa and killed more than 3 million people. Nor can the Rwandan army claim it was acting purely on a moral imperative. The Congo wars rapidly became a smash-and-grab for gold, diamonds and other minerals: at one point, Rwandan troops traded gunfire with Ugandans for control of the key central town of Kisangani.

The consensus among the diplomatic community in Kigali is that Kagame is a benevolent dictator. One senior Western official says that, contrary to predictions that Kagame would follow the African pattern of guerrilla leaders turning corrupt autocrat, he is devolving power and enforcing accountability. Last year, he gutted the central bureaucracies and handed many powers to local mayors, who now report every three months to the President. "It's democracy with constraints," says the diplomat. "You're free to criticize, but you can't bring up the ethnic question, or you'll end up in jail." Kagame points out that it was a free press that fostered genocide. (In the early 1990s, the Hutu supremacist Radio Mille Collines broadcast messages for Hutus to "weed their fields" and "eliminate ... the cockroaches" — a signal for the genocide to begin.) "With time, [freedom] is only increasing," says Kagame. "But if people expected us to start from 100% ... Take a moment, and look at what we went through. If we are making this mistake or that mistake, we are making it in the context of having overcome the most difficult situation ever witnessed. What do people want?"

In a continent full of distrust for the West, Kagame has more reasons than most for ambivalence. It was Rwanda's second colonial rulers, the Belgians, who formalized the division between Tutsis and Hutus in 1932 by issuing identity cards that specified ethnicity. That divide festered through two Hutu supremacist regimes, which were latterly supported by France. Then it erupted in genocide and the world was nowhere to be seen.

Kagame's misgivings about foreign powers leads to his suspicion about aid. "In the last 50 years, you've sent \$400 billion in aid to Africa, but if you look back, what is there to show for it?" he asks. "Why should the West spend so much without bothering whether that is making a difference? How does Africa accept that its affairs are run by ngos and other groups from outside? It's really something that needs to be corrected." So Rwanda is trying to build a new model of development. Though foreign assistance

makes up around a third of Rwanda's gdp, Kagame refuses to limit himself to talks with aid organizations and foreign governments. "This and that department, the World Bank, human rights blah blah blah, over and over, it becomes so boring," he says. He's also courting corporate America. In the last few years, Kagame has met with the bosses at Microsoft, Google, eBay, Starbucks, Costco, Merrill Lynch and Bechtel. He's hosted Starbucks chairman Howard Schultz and CEO Jim Donald, and in March was the star speaker at the coffee giant's AGM, at which he described Starbucks and Rwanda as parts of an "extended family very closely linked by the business we do together and the passion we share." Says Schilling: "It's like this great love affair. Rwanda is becoming America's African sweetheart."

This is no casual fling. Either in a private or philanthropic capacity, or as part of doing business, American CEOs are now assisting Rwanda on energy, water, a railroad from Tanzania and IT. Scott Ford, the CEO of Alltel, is advising the Minister of Infrastructure, Google is donating software while eBay decided to build an ecolodge. Since March, the hills of Rwanda have been teeming with thousands of bright green "coffee bikes," designed by mountain-bike maker Tom Ritchey with a lengthened frame to carry a sack of coffee. This isn't all about altruism. Illinois-based stock trader Dan Cooper, who set up Friends of Rwanda with partner Joe Ritchie to coordinate what he calls "this contagious enthusiasm," says: "You get the head of Texaco/Chevron calling Kagame and asking him: 'Can you help me with Ethiopia?'" Meanwhile in Washington, Kagame's new friends fixed him a meeting with the then House of Representatives Speaker Dennis Hastert that helped lead to a write-off of Rwanda's debt. "There is no African nation that carries as much favor with corporate America," says Cooper. "These people don't invest in Africa because they don't have a tolerance for corruption and all that garbage. But when they sit down with Kagame, they realize something here is different."

Though Kagame's authoritarianism worries human-rights groups, the commercial world has no such qualms. American Chris Lundh is CEO of RwandaTel, the country's Internet and mobile-phone giant, and has worked in telecoms across Africa. Asked about Kagame's human-rights record, he replies: "So what? In Congo, they'd shoot them." Kagame and business, he says, prize the same thing: results. "There is a focus here. People whinge about the lack of political opposition. But if you look at what happened in 1994, lack of opposition looks pretty small fare." Dabbs Cavin, 42, a lawyer and commercial banker, moved with his wife and family from Arkansas to Rwanda last year to set up an arm of the microcredit lender Opportunity International and merge it with a local bank. "Kagame has a vision, he's doing all the right things, and that's attractive," he says. "No country has ever risen as fast, and from as low a point. It's an exciting thing to be part of."

Many ngos inside Rwanda share that view. Says Schilling, who has worked in Africa for 20 years: "This project wouldn't work anywhere else. It would get picked apart, taken over, held up or crushed by corruption. Here you have an honest government with the political will to develop the country." Ruxin

says Kagame is fixing an old problem. "How do countries develop? Enterprise. What made us think that institutions set up to fix Europe after World War II would do well at African poverty in the 21st century?"

In Nyamata, Jacqueline Nyiramayonde, 42, describes her journey across the country in 1994, as she fled the genocide with her children. She was living in Kigali when the killing started, then spent a week with her boy and girl hiding behind a cupboard in a neighbor's house. When the killing reached the street outside, the neighbor took her and the children to a military camp. The *génocidaires* showed up there asking for them, so he hid the family under some sacks of rice on a truck heading south to Butare. They were discovered en route at a Hutu militia roadblock, but the truck driver bought their freedom. Once in Butare, Jacqueline was reunited with her husband and the family hid for a further three years. Finally in 1998, with their home in Kigali destroyed, they returned to their ancestral village, Nyamata. Four years later, it was still littered with bodies. "My three brothers and two sisters had been killed," she says. "My uncle was killed with all his children. My husband also lost all his brothers and sisters. We lost all hope."

But in the ruins of Nyamata, they found some orphans from their extended family. Jacqueline and her husband eventually added five to their own three. "And that was when I started thinking of the future again. If the children were there, we had to work for them." Jacqueline opened a small stall, baking bread and sewing dresses. In time, it became a shop. Her husband began working a small farm, growing maize, sorghum, sweet potatoes and cabbages and tending two cows. Since 2005, he has also sat on the Nyamata traditional court, presiding over genocide reconciliation hearings. "We have many problems with all these children. But I believe the future will be better for them. They will study and they will become entrepreneurs. And Rwanda will forget the past and be united." Such an oblique reference to the genocide makes me realize that, in all her descriptions of 1994, Jacqueline has not once used the words Hutu or Tutsi. When I ask why, she says she prefers the term Rwandans. "Our children's future will be bright," she says. "It's the same for our Rwanda."

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