In the depths of a night (Spring 2006), soft voices of survivors speak of their emotions of anxiety and worries as their silhouettes walk. Their yellow candle flames light up. The darkness blankets the night of commemoration.

a personal space,  
a broken mirror,  
a burning truth,  
a light in darkness.

On March 4th, 2013, six Rwandans drove from Boston to Lewiston, Maine. Five years earlier, they also flew to Chicago to see *Behind This Convent* at the Rwanda Convention.

After returning from Berlinale Talent Campus in Germany, Professor Alexandre Dauge-Roth, who has been following my work for years, introduced *The Rwandan Night* to two hundred students and professors. Maine was a very perfect venue for a movie preview and debate. I am a trained fiction film director, but I also make nonfiction films. When I work on a documentary, I film an event and then for a number of years, I never go back to the same place and film again. And day by day, I discover the central theme by going back and forth into the footage. I can see the characters unfolding in front of the camera. Mostly, I listen to stories, without looking at the videos and then constantly edit the audio, thus rearranging events I have filmed.

After directing *Behind This Convent* (2008, 66 min), I enjoyed a bigger audience. The screenings were always followed by an hour-long questions and answers session.

*Behind This Convent* was shown at prestigious documentary film festivals that respect filmmakers at risk. I travelled intensively around the world to places I have never dreamed of like Chicago, Thessaloniki, and Verona. However, I did not get into Sundance Film Festival.

For two years, I went back and forth into my footage and perfected a non-linear film *Rwanda: Beyond The Deadly Pit* (2011, 104 min), which has been nominated for over fifteen Best Documentary Awards.
THE RWANDAN NIGHT is a 100 minute ethno-documentary that features the haunting memories of the oldest survivor of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

Both poetic and moving, Ndahayo’s use of original Rwandan music of commemoration, produces a vivid cinematic rendering of this unique voice forcefully testifying to the long ordeal of his people during so many decades before April 1994.

Alternating between footage filmed in Kigali during a commemoration night and more recent testimonies of survivors and genocide scholars in the United States, Ndahayo’s second feature documentary creates a fascinating dialog between survivors and those who seek to understand the roots of genocide.

THE RWANDAN NIGHT is the sequel to filmmaker’s autobiographical documentary about the murder of his family Rwanda: Beyond The Deadly Pit (104 min, 2012 Best Documentary African Movie Academy Award® nominee). THE RWANDAN NIGHT is the first film in a planned trilogy set to be released for the 20th genocide commemoration.

After releasing Rwanda: Beyond The Deadly Pit, I felt the need to make a film about a survivor whose life is far removed from the common depiction of commemoration of genocide. I have always been wondering about how to talk about the genocide. Maybe, a monologue can do it. I imagine that one voice can experience the experience of many.

I am always stunned by the lasting impact of a monologue. “One voice” that shatters the prevalent “they” versus “I” discourses. I could see a story already in editing and I could predict the impact of superimposing testimonies of “many voices” to the “one voice”. But I spent three years attempting to find the story.

In The Rwandan Night, survivors live the moments of commemoration. It is a struggle to rebuild memories of life – memories of genocide that are unbearable to recall. The audience is not given an explanation or hegemonic framework that they need to follow in the way they produce meaning.

The majority of documentary films on the genocide against the Tutsi uses voice-overs to give the audience synthetic information. A voice-over in documentary is also useful when the filmmaker does not have enough footage nor understand subject.
Voice-overs oversimplify the narratives and create distance between the audience and the characters even when the shots are close-ups.

The Rwandan Night is written as a supposedly monologue from the testimony of Sakindi. His memories offer seven vantage points. Sakindi, 51, is the cornerstone of the film as he bears witness to the genocide for the first time before a trusted audience a night in the spring of 2006. Sakindi recalls, “Does one kill his fellow human being, eat his cows and then set on fire his home?”

On the screen, half of Sakindi’s face illuminates. He is often shot in low angle, which makes him look menacing, large, and in-charge of his testimony and life. Sakindi has a scar on his forehead where he was hit with a club studded with nails (known as ntampongano or “without pity”) in 1994.

Sakindi has spent almost five decades alone with the sorrow of losing his parents and family members. He accounts of his family drowned in Ndiza river located in one of the hilly villages of Rwanda where he grew up in the film sequence “Second Death: Rivers of Blood (1960 – 69: Cockroach Attack)”. In our [Rwandan] tradition, we always bury the dead in a decent way.” At the age of four, Sakindi is stuck in smoke and almost burnt when he is saved by a jigger-infested Hutu during “umusambira wa Secyugu” (the 1959 Hutu revolution waves code-named “The Lizard’s Share”). Sakindi grew up and watched the Rwandan drama unfold over him, his country descent into the genocide in 1994 genocide.

The Rwandan Night is principally shot in the stadium to record on tape the commemoration event. In editing, the testimonies are superimposed prior to the “one voice” of Sakindi. The camera shifts from shots offering the view of the eleven thousand commemorators. Their yellow candle flames light up. Yet, the darkness blankets the night of Rwanda.

Gilbert Ndayayo speaking at the International Conference on Genocide in Sacramento.

Mathilde Mukantabana, (Ambassador of Rwanda to the United States and a survivor of genocide)

In the film, sequences are arranged by shooting locations. I had to blend the original theme of “a night of commemoration in Kigali” with the third international conference on genocide at Sacramento State University in 2011 (Sacramento, California) and a panel discussion on forgiveness in Silicon Valley (California).

As with everything that I have filmed, the characters in the documentary do not have an equal participation in bearing witness. In Kigali, they have been exposed to the genocide.
In the United States, they are making efforts to understand why and how the crimes of genocide have been committed. The inter-cut of the footage of commemoration explores the foreground and background of the stadium thus exploring the impact of listening to the testimony.

The ending sequence of the commemoration is a mode of exorcism. The memories of genocide impact those who survived. There is pain and despair. Sakindi’s hope is an illusion, as one scholar puts it forward (in the film)... sadly. However, his testimony builds intensity, nuances the examination of dramatic memories and the aftermath trauma.

My job as a writer is to find the interconnectedness of the characters in the documentary. *The Rwandan Night* is another episode about how I made the documentary, got involved with the characters. The film doesn’t isolate my presence but shows more of the unscripted response and emotions of the characters in attempt to grasp moments of our contemporary life in trouble of genocide. I am what my film is.

In the interview process, the characters became so involved that they forgot the presence of my camera. I sat there, asked one question and then listened.

I directly confronted them, thus asking questions that are completely different from what I have scripted.

*The Rwandan Night* uses original music of commemoration to transit from his footage a night in Kigali and day in America. Both poetic and moving, the music shapes the experience of indelible memories. The use of music gives to the film a poetic value and makes reference to the imagery of genocide as a film, in its cultural context.

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**New York City**

August 8, 2013

GILBERT NDHAYO
ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

BIOGRAPHY

Born in a traditional village of Astrida, so named after Queen Astrid of Belgium, southern Rwanda in 1975, Gilbert Ndahayo migrated to New York City in 2008. After five years working as country coordinator and writer for BaobabConnection – an Afro-Dutch Youth Online Magazine, his passion for storytelling drove him to cinema in 2005.

Ndahayo’s debut narrative short Scars Of My Days (30 min) aired on French television TV 5 Monde and premiered at Tribeca Film Festival in 2007 in the presence of an audience that included former US President Bill Clinton, Hollywood celebrities namely Robert DeNiro, Whoopi Goldberg and Everybody Loves Raymond’s producer Jane Rosenthal.

His documentary Behind This Convent (66 min) received Verona Award for Best African Film and Signis First Commendation for Best African Documentary at Zanzibar International Film Festival in 2008 and subsequently toured European film festivals and screened at American universities. The Dutch film critic, Frank Witkam, brings out a comparison of Ndahayo’s film Rwanda: Beyond The Deadly Pit, “Ndahayo’s documentary makes me think of a few number of the best action filmmakers such as Hara Kazuo or, with the best work of Michael Moore.” Ndahayo admits to having watched French New Wave movies when he was a boy.

Rwanda: Beyond The Deadly Pit (104 min) documents on tape the last hour of Ndahayo’s parents and 52 members of his immediate family who were massacred during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Recipient of Paul Robeson Fund for Independent Media, the film was released in 2011 on DVD and is subject of scholarly scrutiny. Rwanda: Beyond The Deadly Pit features in two Routledge’s publications: Contemporary French and Francophone studies, Volume 14, Issue 5, 2010 under the title The Pertinence of Impertinent Storytelling in Gilbert Ndahayo's documentary Rwanda: Beyond the Deadly and AFI Film Readers Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of suffering in the section of Mediating genocide: producing digital survivor testimony in Rwanda.

Often, Ndahayo works with professors in African cinema and genocide programs, and facilitates study-tour to Rwanda for American and European universities including Yale University, Webster University, Drury University Steven Spielberg's USC Shoah Foundation Institute and the Spanish’ Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo (UIMP).

Speaking to Deutsche Welle at the 2013 Berlinale Talent Campus, Gilbert Ndahayo announced the making of his trilogy The Rwandan Night, The Rwandan Day and The Rwandan Silence set to be released in 2014 for the 20th commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda.

FILMOGRAPHY

THE RWANDAN NIGHT, (2013, Documentary, RWA/USA, 100 min, HD)
RWANDA: BEYOND THE DEADLY PIT (2011, Documentary, RWA, 104 min, SD)
BEHIND THIS CONVENT (2008, Documentary, RWA, 66 min, SD)
SCARS OF MY DAYS (2006, Narrative, RWA, 30 min, HD)

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