

The genocide in Rwanda was one of the most horrifying events of the 20th century. It happened in front of the UN troops, which did not manage to prevent the slaughter of almost 800 000 people, mostly Tutsi. In spite of extensive research we still do not know how it happened. The problem is that if we are speaking about genocide we usually focus on the perpetrators while the victims are seen as passive actors. If we leave the notion of genocide outside the micro level of historical research, we can more clearly focus on strategies, which the people engaged in order to survive.

Their strategies were rooted in their historical memory, which was profoundly affected by the colonial history of Rwanda and Burundi and the authoritarianism which came afterwards. Economic crisis and global geopolitical change at the beginning of the 90's pushed the Rwandan regime towards democratization. Ongoing civil war and the assassination of the president of Burundi made the situation very tense. The genocide started when an airplane carrying the president of Rwanda was shot down. In Kigali the killings were very fast and intense. Initially people got the information from the extremist radio RTLM, but their next steps towards survival were more dependent upon their personal relationships, which provided them the possibility to be informed, to be hidden and to be rescued by the rebel forces or the UN forces.