

RWANDA KOMERA!

Angela Neumann

A Country on the Rise



This is about our past and our future;
Our nightmares and dreams;
Our fear and our hope;
Which is why we begin where we end...
with the country we love.

Kigali Memorial Centre, Rwanda

Aya n'amateka yacu n'amateka yo mugihe kizaza;
Inzosi zacu mbi n'nziza;
Ubwoba bwacu, ndetse n'ibyiringiro dufite;
Ninayompamvu tuzatangirira aho twagejeje...
Twubaka igihugu dukunda

Introduction

The air is clean and fresh; the valleys are filled with thick fog. Morning dew glints on blue shimmering fields when the sun is rising over the thousand hills of Rwanda. Watching the stunning scenery of endless mountains, it is hardly conceivable that this beautiful country in East Africa has not always been as peaceful as this.

In April 1994, Rwanda's beauty was covered in darkness during one of the most savage genocides in the history of mankind. In a span of 100 days, an estimated one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were systematically butchered by a Hutu paramilitary organization.

"It was the most efficient mass killing since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki", US journalist Philip Gourevitch states in his book *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families. Stories from Rwanda* in 1998.

The massacre was the culmination of longstanding ethnic competition and tensions between the minority Tutsi, who had controlled power for centuries, and the majority Hutu peoples, who had come to power in the rebellion of 1959 – 62 and overthrown the Tutsi monarchy. The assassination of the Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana in April 1994 set off a violent reaction, resulting in the Hutus executing Tutsis and pro-peace Hutus, who were portrayed as "traitors" and "collaborationists".

Men, women and children were murdered by their neighbours, schoolmates, classmates, colleagues, relatives and supposed friends. The killings took place openly, everywhere – in private houses, on the street, at roadblocks, in public stadiums, hospitals, and schools, where groups of Tutsi had gathered for safety. Some of the worst massacres took place in churches, where church officials often joined in the massacres themselves. Almost everyone who was born before 1994 and is still alive has witnessed killings and lost friends or relatives.

Although the scars run deep, Rwanda has done a remarkable job of healing its wounds. The tiny country that is a bit

smaller than Belgium is working hard and turning towards the future with a surprising measure of optimism. The government has eliminated the differentiation of tribal identities and successfully unified the population. "Le Pays des Mille Collines" or "The Land of a Thousand Hills" as Rwanda is called means home for about ten million Rwandans who are one people.

Although the past will never be wiped out, the country and its citizens are moving on. Each of the eight chapters of this book stands for one special project that supports the progress of the country. The classic export products, tea and coffee, are becoming more and more exquisite and hence boost Rwanda's economy. Teambuilding and conflict resolution workshops for coffee farmers not only influence the coffee quality but also contribute to the immense task of reconciliation. In order to facilitate agricultural economy, forestry experts are working on the improvement of Rwandan soil and planting new trees.

Apart from agriculture businesses, the beer industry is growing in the country, whereas for scientists and energy developers the biggest Rwandan lake, Lake Kivu, is a real attraction because of its extremely high methane gas concentration that is used to generate energy to light up the country. And of course, the cultural aspect of the country's development is not missing in this book. The first women's drumming group of Rwanda demonstrates that not only men are able to play traditional drums. And last but not least, two very special projects for children and teenagers are presented.

This book is not about the genocide. It is about hope. "Komera!" is a greeting in Kinyarwanda, the language of Rwanda. It means "Be strong! Have courage!". This is what the book stands for. For the present and the future. For the sunrise and the beauty of a country.