

Remembering Isidore Munyakazi (1952-2016)

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Isidore Munyakazi, who lived in Kigali, Rwanda describes himself: "Linguist, Former Diplomat, Cattle and Chicken Raiser, Above All I Am Peace Activist."

Isidore was a survivor of the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. The following excerpt comes from *The Graves Are Not Yet Full* by Bill Berkeley

"I was very much surprised," said the man with the quizzical eyes. "Looking at my neighbors, I thought they were friends. I was very much surprised that they were among the people who came to try to kill us."

Isidore Munyakazi was forty-two years old and balding. He wore a dirty blue shirt and faded brown, threadbare trousers and rubber flip-flops. It was June 1994. We were sitting on benches in the filthy remains of an abandoned corner store, in Kabuga, the rubble-strewn, rebel-held town on the outskirts of Kigali. Rwanda's genocide was still unfolding in the south. The climactic siege of Kigali was under way. Hundreds of dazed survivors of the massacres, some of them wrapped

in gauze that barely concealed their ghastly machete wounds, loitered amid the wreckage of their lives in the looted and gutted ruins nearby. Isidore and a friend of his, Bonaventure Niyibizi, both Tutsis, were trying to explain to me how tens of thousands of their fellow countrymen could have been lured, incited or coerced into participating in mass murder.

Isidore, a career civil servant, had survived with his wife and children but lost twenty immediate relatives...

Sitting now in that abandoned store in Kabuga, I put the old familiar question to Isidore and Bonaventure: How is such a horror possible?

"We cannot understand it ourselves," Isidore conceded. "We are still at a primitive level," he said, "where people think they have to resolve a misunderstanding with a machete."
(*The Graves Are Not Yet Full* by Bill Berkeley)

An interview with Isidore Munyakazi is also featured in *The Book of Calamities: Five Questions About Suffering and Its Meaning* by Peter Trachtenberg

Isidore invited me to attend a presentation about the Rwandan genocide held at Vassar College in 2005. The presentation showed the terrible brutality. Incomprehensible. Though I could feel a little of Isidore's pain, I doubt I can ever fully know his suffering. I have never seen Isidore smile.

On his Facebook page a friend of Isidore has written:

"A person that departs from this earth never truly leaves, for they are still alive in our hearts and minds, through us, they live on. The problem is not the time we will last at this earth rather the legacy we left behind. Anyway words are not merely adequate for your impressive and indebted engagements, nevertheless this is to imply my extreme loyalty and ultimate salute to you. RIP"