

# Agathe Uwilingiyimana



Biography



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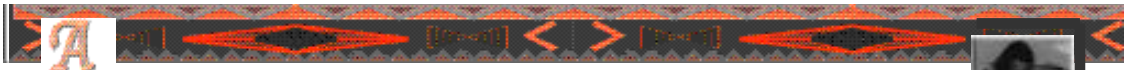
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Agathe Uwilingiyimana- The Rebel



Forum for African Women Educationalists  
(FAWE – Rwanda Chapter)



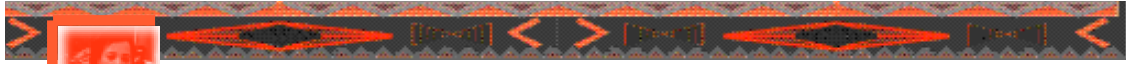
## Agathe Uwilingiyimana The Rebel



A Biography of the Former Rwandese Prime Minister Assassinated on 7/4/1994

1<sup>st</sup> Draft

February 2000

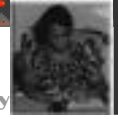
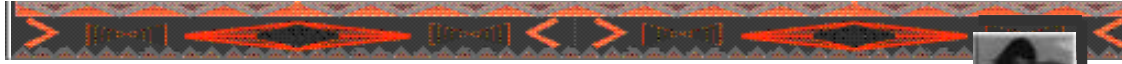


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## Brief Chronology of the Life of Agathe Uwilingiyimana

- 1953:**
  - Born in Gikore (Nyaruhengeri Village, Butare Province ) 5 km from the Burundian border.
  - Left with the whole family for North-Kivu (formerly Belgian Congo).
- 1957:**
  - Returned with family to Gikore
- 1960:**
  - Began Primary School.
- 1966:**
  - Succeeded in the National Primary Examination in Kansi and was admitted to the Notre Dame des Citeaux High School
- 1973:**
  - Obtained the Certificate of Teaching Humanities.
- 1976:**
  - A-Level Certificate in Science Subjects (Maths- Chemistry options).
- 1976-1983:**
  - Mathematics Teacher at the Karubanda Social School in Butare.
- 1983-1985:**
  - Student at the National University of Rwanda (UNR) at the Faculty of Science Majoring in Chemistry (B.Sc. in Chemistry).
- 1985-1989:**
  - Chemistry Teacher in the Butare Official Academic Schools (GSOB).
- 1989:**
  - Director of the Small and Medium Sized Industries (PMI) in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Cottage Industries.
- 16/4/1992:**
  - Minister for Primary and Secondary Education (MINEPRISEC).
- 17/7/1993:**
  - Prime Minister of the Government of Rwanda.
- 7/4/1994:**
  - Assassinated by the Presidential Guard.
- 7/4/1995:**
  - State burial at Mount Rebero.



Introduction

Introduction

## Introduction

Talking about the life of Agathe Uwilingiyimana compels a great liking for the character. Far more than a personality, the word character is more than appropriate. As though her life had been a novel. That of a small rural girl, determined from very early in life to leave the rural condition and make for herself a place in the city. Next, her commitment to promote herself through education and politics. Finally her determination to improve the existence of the girl child, the woman in particular and the people of Rwanda in general.

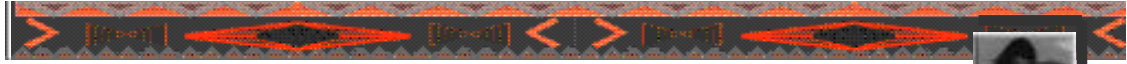
Moreover, her death makes of her a heroine whose affinity with each Rwandese and African is self evident. But again scientific research and historical investigation, apart from all the affection or admiration that Agathe Uwilingiyimana's personality inspires requires that a certain distance is observed with regard to the subject, based on methods that have long been proven through Humanities and Social Sciences. Hence affinity did not exclude neutrality.

All the authors of this biography are of Rwandan nationality. Biases or affinities may appear in this study. For regarding exemplary behaviour, for better or for worse, no other African or Rwandese woman, at least in the 1990s, attains a comparable stature to that of Agathe Uwilingiyimana. Besides for Rwandese women the "ethnic trap" is not yet totally defused. While Agathe Uwilingiyimana, agitated by patriotism, had done all she could from her tender age right to the corridors of power in order to combat ethnic and sexual discrimination and had pitifully attempted in vain to conjure up the macabre escalation of the genocide, which finally took her in its murderous fury.

She further serves as an exemplary model for Rwandese women thanks to her courage at the most turbulent period of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

At no time, despite her tribulations, both physical and verbal ( she was the most negatively caricaturised in the press for having studied sciences; subjects reputed for being completely out of reach for young girls at the time.<sup>1</sup>





## Chapter i

### Childhood

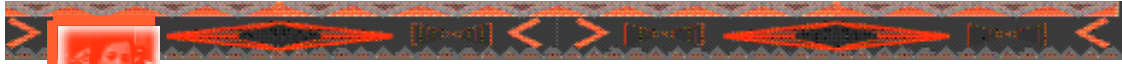
#### Family Background

Born in 1953, Agathe Uwilingiyimana was the fourth child in a family of seven, the eighth having died in early childhood. Her late parents Ntibashirakandi, who died on Friday 28th of January 2000 and her mother Severine Nyirantibagwa in 1990 lived on Nyamure hill at Nyaruhengeri hill, 21 kms South of the town of Astrida, which was renamed Butare in 1962 at Rwanda's accession to independence. Nyamure is situated 5 kms from the Burundian border. A few hills separate it from River Akanyaru. The people on both sides of the border are bound by multi-secular ties founded on intermarriages and cross border trade. This according to their dialects and names (Ntibashirakandi, Nyanzira, Ntibaziyandemye) they have closer ties with the Burundian border residents than with their fellow Rwandese.

In what circumstances does a destiny turn around all of a sudden? Agathe Uwilingiyimana's Burundian neighbours call their children "Hicintuka". Etymologically this means 'it is destiny which kills'. If the parents of Agathe Uwilingiyimana who had emigrated to the Eastern Province of North Kivu in Belgian Congo when she was still a baby had not been notstagic about their small village of Nyamure, which topped the Akanyaru swamps the future Prime Minister might have been Congolese today!

Questions cross one's mind as to whether she would have had the tragic end, she who according to her aunt Laurence Nyanzira, born in 1937, was destined for happiness. At the time the Belgian Colonial power unaware of the building tension with the advent of independence, had undertaken the development of the rich land in Kivu. For this it required cheap labour. The overpopulated protectorate of Rwanda-Urundi offered an inexhaustible source of agricultural workers who could be exploited at will.





## Studies

All the same Juvénal Ntibashirakandi, a robust thirty years old, rejected this condition of forced exile in Congo. His daughter inherited his independent character. He returned from North Kivu four years later (1957) in the company of his wife and four children. Agathe was the youngest in a family which later grew to eight; the eldest were Anselme, Généruse, Gaspard and Agathe.

The youngest who was a baby at the time of departure, returned as a little girl. Again according to her aunt, she showed signs of responsibility early because already at 4, she assisted in house hold tasks with a rare sense of devotion.

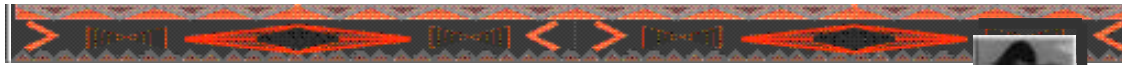
Agathe was a good child, very good. How did she later become an uncompromising, combative and determined leader of both men and women?

## Studies

Between 1960 and 1965, she started school at Gikore Central Catholic Primary School. She was a diligent child who later obtained her High School Certificate in the Maths –Chemistry option (1976), being





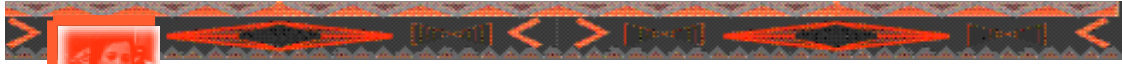


particularly gifted in Arithmetic. Her childhood friends talk timidly about her Tomboyish side for she enjoyed playing football with them. Everybody is positive that younger or older, Agathe Uwilingiyimana liked confrontation, but within the rules. Although, she was

combative she remained prudent as Rwandese cultured required. In 1965 the majority of her class mates left Gikore and went 7 kilometre further to study at Kansi. Gikore, a commercial centre of the lowest echelon, a village which radiates health, pride and rural well being lacks the prestige of the Kansi Parish.

And justifiably so, since Kansi hosts a very old Parish, a small seminary of ecclesiastic and civil Rwandese officers a common course for girls taking humanities in lower classes and an upper primary class that admitted girls from surrounding areas. The best pupil according to the Director of the Promotion of Women in the Ministry of Gender and the Promotion of Women is Agathe Uwilingiyimana. For, she used to say to her childhood friends that she could not go back to Gikore with nothing: meaning without an excellent school report.

While the other boys and girls went to Butare or Nyanza (administrative and judicial school centre – the Supreme Court's head office; historically the main house of the King), Agathe Uwilingiyimana's name was hung on the valve of the Nyaruhengeri locality, for having been a boarder in Notre Dame des Citeaux High School in the capital, Kigali, in the heart of the most prestigious district of the capital known as Plateau. Near the Radio, the largest Clinic of the country, the Belgian School banks, the Army Headquarters, the young girl spoilt by the Bernardines Nuns did not allow herself to be mesmerized by the mirages of the city.



Youth

## Chapter ii

### Chapter ii

#### Youth

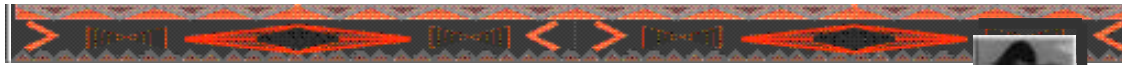
At the Notre Dame des Citeaux High School Agathe found herself in excellent conditions for studying, and passed with great distinction. During the vacations she did not remain in town but went back to the (hill) village. On returning to school, Agathe did not just devote herself to her studies, she manifested concern for fellow human beings in material and physical need. In this regard, she joined the Saint Vincent de Paul Movement. Within this youth organisation Agathe quickly became active in philanthropic activities. With her friends, she visited the sick in the Kigali Hospital (CHK). They went around the wealthy districts of the city collecting clothes and other articles of basic need in order to be of assistance to those in the local hospitals. This affinity with the needy, all those subjected to injustice, was one of Agathe's character traits. She also advised her friends not to throw their leftover food at table so that she could decently feed her proteges at the hospital. In addition to her charitable activities, Agathe Uwilingiyimana played basketball and volleyball with her school mates. But by far she loved to play guitar. Not only did she spend many hours playing, but she was often to be seen



dancing and organising school functions. Agathe, according to one of her school friends, was destined for happiness.

In her little village suspended between the greenery and the sun, people learned with joy that Agathe Uwilingiyimana had brought back a Certificate for her Teaching in Humanities.

Meanwhile in 1973, at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> term all the schools in the country were agitated. From the National University of Rwanda in Butare, Ferdinand Nahimana and Léon Mugesera<sup>2</sup>, two students from the Faculty of Arts had established the sadly notorious Public Salvation Committee, which was responsible for chasing Tutsi pupils from schools and from the country's administration. This Tutsi hunt was in itself the result of a search



Youth



for a scapegoat for the problems which Grégoire Kayibanda was facing. Therefore the "Gitaramienne Republic"<sup>3</sup> which was trapped in its own contradictions was in bad shape. Some of the influential members of the Parmehutu party were excluded. The President of the Republic only relied on politicians from his region of Kabgayi-Gitarama. In the midst of this tumult the Notre Dame des Citeaux High School remained calm. The Nuns that headed the school, with Sister Frieda at the head attempted with a lot difficulty to maintain cohesion in their school.

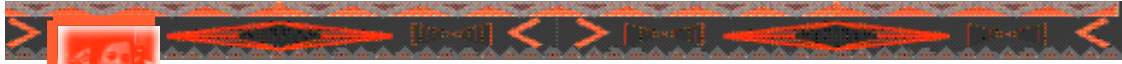
Unfortunately the sirenes of ethnism did not take long before making their appearance in the school. They came from the Saint André Secondary School situated in the Nyamiramba district, 5 kms away, but especially from the School of Medical Assistants



(EAM) located within Kigali Hospital. At the High School the pupils in lower classes started drawing a list of their Tutsi colleagues and transmitting them clandestinely to the School of Medical Assistants. Soon Sister Frieda could no longer control the situation and the Tutsi pupils were chased/expelled from the school. During these events Agathe Uwilingiyimana would try to calm the pupils down, she would urge them not to give in to ethnical hatred but rather to cultivate love, tolerance and harmony. In her Education class there were in total nine pupils, among them three Tutsi. The three were very close to Agathe, they were her close friends. She was concerned for them and fearing that they too would be chased away. Eventually the three Tutsi were chased. Much later, upon the instance of Agathe and her friends two of them came back and were able to complete their studies while the third did not return. She worked for Bralirwa and was widowed in the genocide. These events constitute proof



that Uwilingiyimana had a magnanimous heart. At that time her political awareness was not yet formed, but she rejected injustice and intolerance at an early age.



## Youth

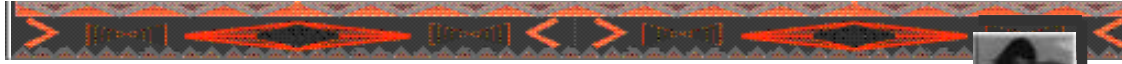


During the dry season of 1973 with abundant sorghum harvest and overripe bananas to make wine, a young girl of 20 with a promising future, impressed, encouraged those of her age. And yet, this girl to whom the Bernardine Sisters had given the responsibility of lowering the flag at sunset (she also had the

custody of the dormitory keys) did not resist the enchanting attraction of the boys. Agathe loved a boy of her age but their romance did not last since the boy left for Europe to further his studies.

At the end of their course in humanities, young Rwandese girls aspired to one thing only: enter the job market and get married as fast as possible. For Agathe, there was no question of doing this. She wanted to pursue higher studies at all costs and to go as far as possible in the quest for knowledge, preferably in the sciences in order to prove that young girls should not be lumped away in the arts or social sciences. But it was not easy to enter into teaching in higher education. The Education system in Rwanda is rigorous. In Rwanda a country which prides itself in having accomplished a popular revolution, completing the Humanities is already a feat. Therefore, following the conception of a paternalistic and popular regime based on the exaltation of levelling from the bottom, i.e. the mystification of the peasant condition and having roots in the soil, in order to go to university, if many have succeeded only a very small number is admitted. With this in mind, Agathe Uwilingiyimana considered that going to university was too good to be true; she therefore packed her bags and with her mother and sister-in-law Rose Musamiyimana, born in 1953 like herself, took the bus from Kansi to Butare.

The young girl of 20, in full bloom and happy left for the North of the country, namely to the banks of taught in a secondary school in the town once she was qualified in the pedagogy of Humanities. The attractions of the blue waters of Kivu did not seduce the young girl graduated from Notre Dame des Citeaux High School (LNDC) for long. A week later when she had just began to enjoy the charm of emancipation and freedom as a result of her first teaching post which added to her prestige and the promise of a salary; her neighbours and her sister-in-law brought her good



news. Her candidature at the Institut Pédagogique National (National Teacher Training Institute) in the Maths-Chemistry options had been accepted. She joyfully returned to Butare. This aspect of Agathe Uwilingiyimana's character is worth nothing concern for other, the sense of loyalty. Having a person for Sciences, Agathe could have chosen Agronomic or Civil Engineering with a view to become an engineer. However, she choose the teaching career that she could devote herself to educating and encouraging young people.

In October 1973, armed with a Rwandese Government Scholarship, the young girl from Nyaruhengeri registered at the National Teacher Training Institute (IPN) situated in the university town of Butare. The school, founded in 1966 by the Rwandese government with UNESCO funding, trained future teachers for Secondary Schools (lower and medium levels).

The IPN gave quality education. It was an elitist education in the pure tradition of the Belgian Colonial system where selection is of the strictest calibre. Nothing frightened Agathe Uwilingiyimana though, she was placed in the Mathematics – Chemistry section (option D ). She distinguished herself right from the first year of A-levels by her thoroughness and regularity in class, without ever losing her good nature. All the witnesses were unanimous on this point, Agathe loved life and lived it to the full. Her early friends described her as a girl that was always happy and gay.

During this first year Agathe met a young man, a student in the same year. She had persuaded him earlier to leave the Seminary in Nyakibanda for her future plans. She had previously been attached to a boy who unfortunately left for Europe to pursue his studies. Agathe's eager heart would not resolve itself to loneliness.

For long she had remained obedient to the rules and customs and the iron discipline inculcated respectively by her parents, school system and society under the rule of the Bernardine Sisters cane. And yet, her profound nature, her inherent generosity and





## Youth

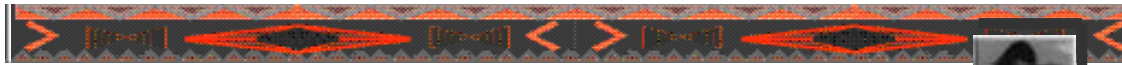
stubborn insensitivity to values spontaneously drove her to exchange love and normal relationships with persons of the opposite sex.

Quickly, they started going out together. Uwilingiyimana, true to herself passionately loved this man whose shy nature did not match the exuberance of his fiancée. Soon the entire student community was aware and wondered who the lucky man chosen by Agathe was. They learnt that his name was Ignace Barahira, that he was her classmate and came from the same village. He turned out to be a young self-effaced introvert, an image that remained to his death. The love between the two students was sealed by marriage in 1976 when they were in their third year of A-levels.

However, their wedding preparations had to be hurried. Agathe had unexpectedly become pregnant. Family solidarity united everyone's effort so that the two young students who were madly in love could find a place in society. What a beautiful ceremony it was on that sunny afternoon in Kansi in 1976. In the Church behind closed doors all Nyaruhengeri crowded at the couple's wedding. Quite happily the lucky couple were not only classmates, they also came from the same region. All the family members from the town as well as relatives and neighbours from Nyamure hill all contributed. Both local and foreign beer flowed freely. Agathe Uwilingiyimana wedded in all dignity and honour. A cow was paid to the bride's parents as dowry in keeping with the custom.

The couple left joyfully for Butare, amid the ullulations of her agetates and cheers of the young men. The couple moved to live near the Hotel Faucon right in the middle of town. They were supported by their relatives and friends from Rukore village, civil servants in Butare who lent a hand from time to time. Life was not without difficulties but the couple managed to make ends meet. Agathe turned out to be an excellent manager of the household budget, that is why they lived in the heart of the town despite their students status.

In the course of that year the couple was very happy to have their first child. It was a boy whom her parents named Iréne Barahira. He was quickly followed by a little girl Christine Umuhiza and her young brother Gasore. Two more children were yet to come. Some say she was pregnant when she was assassinated.



Youth



Agathe, hardly 23 (1976) obtained her A –level certificate in the Maths-Chemistry options, and left with a baby and a husband to teach sciences in the Ecole Sociale de Karubanda ( the Karubanda Social School). Agathe Uwilingiyimana lived very happily surrounded by hibiscus bougainvillea and other flowers. She was a little frustrated at having three households to take care of: her own, her parents and her parent-in-laws. As a student she had already built a house with tiles for her parents. Later as Minister for Primary and Secondary Education she added a kitchen to the main house. For a long time she had paid school fees for her parents' farm workers, looked for employment for her brothers and clothed all her extended family.



From an early age Agathe Uwilingiyimana showed signs of great responsibility. Jean Nkulikiyinka, 52, a Maths and Physics teacher at the Karubanda Seminary and one year Agathe's senior at the IPN, and from the same village affirms that she was both extremely competent and strict. She did not believe in giving free marks. Of course pupils

passed because she was an excellent teacher. But others failed because of her strictness and the high standard of the classes. According to the same witness from the National Teacher Training Institute in Butare who had taken the Maths-Physics option (1976-1983): "the grandaunts from the IPN could not be admitted to pursue higher education at the University of Butare". He added: "Only candidates having followed the Maths –Physics option could continue to degree level. The other students had no choice but to forego their ambitions." Later, in the 1980s when at last admission became possible for ex-IPN students at the University of Rwanda, the couple applied for further studies. However, they had to find a compromise. Between Agathe Uwilingiyimana and her husband, one of the two would have to make a sacrifice in order to support the family and educate the children. Despite the fact that she was brighter than her husband, the future Prime Minister accepted to bow out for her husband. People with bad intentions, in a bid to hurt Agathe Uwilingiyimana said that she called the shots in the house. She bowed out good heartedly, the same witness is categorical about it: as a couple relations with her





## Youth

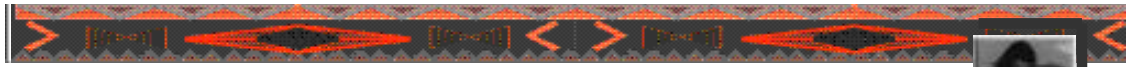
husband were balanced, even though Agathe's modern outlook made her more open and independent". For Jean Nkulikiyinka this reputation was forged piece by piece by her detractors when she climbed to the country's top. This attitude contradicts the opinion whereby Agathe dominated in her home. Nevertheless, Agathe Uwilingiyimana was born under a lucky star. Her husband's application was rejected while hers was fortunately accepted.

Even as a newly wed, she had shown total devotion to work, her family and her relations. She would leave Ngoma on Sundays, two and half kilometers from the Social School to go and help the students with problems while she prepared her lessons and marked assignments. She still found time to care for her children and for the neighbourhood. In turns, the teaching community of Karubanda (Social School and the Small Seminary) organised get-togethers. Agathe was in every party. She blossomed. She participated actively. It was always a pleasure to host her in one's home, confided Jean Nkulikiyinka, her senior at the National Teacher Training Institute (IPN), because nobody else could create such an atmosphere.

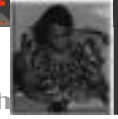
In spite of her departure for the university there was no visible break in the household financial status. This was made possible by the fact that her husband obtained a post at the University Laboratory. His salary as a Maths teacher at the Small Seminary of Karubanda was thus multiplied by two. The forty thousand (40,000) Francs constituted enough earnings to comfortably support a middle class family in Butare.

She embarked on a brief and brilliant venture at Ruhande, site of the National University of Rwanda, where she quickly obtained her first degree in Chemistry in 1985. She had just defended her final dissertation entitled " The cardiotoxic activities of hydronae yahannis beccara (umutima wisi)". This project earned her the commendation of the jury. Uwilingiyimana left Karubanda with merit and was received with great respect a few metres away at the prestigious "Groupe Scolaire de Butare" ( Butare School Group) where she taught sciences, namely Chemistry. All those who met her then admired her for one thing, her independence, solidarity and devotion. This was because she would not hesitate to come to the defense of a student being expelled. One of her former students told me "We used to call her Tina Turner. For us she symbolized modernity". She added: "It was impossible to cheat with her. She wrote on the blackboard with her

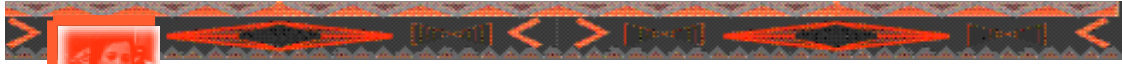




Youth



back to the wall, then supervised us". She would perch herself on a chair and watch the students attentively. Sometimes, she would send one of us students to the blackboard to copy out the assignments. It was impossible to cheat with her". He added "we feared and loved her at the same time. A real tigress she was", he swore. Agathe, mother of three never hesitated to sacrifice her family life to come and initiate her students to mysteries of Chemistry on weekends. In the evenings the young woman of 30, teacher at Groupe Butare, also assisted an expatriate group at the National Rwandese University (UNR). Then, because she could not afford to buy a car for herself, she would ride back to her husband and 3 children on a bicycle<sup>4</sup>.



Maturity

Chapter iii

## Chapter iii

### Maturity

Agathe prepared her lessons, marked her assignments, breastfed her babies, supervised the cooking. However, she was sometimes discouraged. Her friends who went back and forth (to visit her) at the Groupe Scolaire de Butare talked of her pathetic condition.

The status of the teaching profession deteriorated dangerously. The Chemistry teacher was challenged by her colleagues who were anxious about their precariousness and the progressively impoverished officials of the civil service. Agathe was a decisive, thoughtful woman she wanted to find a remedy to the situation. While the earnings were minimal, the human resources earnings were enormous. One April morning in 1986, she glowed as she shook her wet hair in the middle of town. Under her umbrella, winding about on her bicycle the young woman at 33 felt inspired. Since there were so many employees at the Groupe Scolaire de Butare, why not create a self-help cooperative society?. Esteemed and respected, Agathe Uwilingiyimana succeeded in creating a Savings and Credit Cooperative Society bringing together all the middle and low levels employees of the Groupe Scolaire d'Astrida. Each of them contributed one



hundred (1000) francs from their salary and soon Agathe Uwilingiyimana was managing a very large sum of money.

She would arrive back home late in the evening harassed but happy. She would also have to draft the statutes late at night and apply for registration. She worked hard with her male colleagues in order to get their Cooperative Scheme officially registered by the authorities in Kigali. The Administrative Council (C.A.) sent a letter to the Minister in charge of Cooperative Movements requesting him to register the teachers Self Help Association.

Colonel Augustin Ndindiriyimana, presently exiled in Belgium, who was in charge of the Department granted his approval. The only reservation: Agathe Uwilingiyimana was not to keep both the positions of Administrator and treasurer of the self-help society. She could choose one of the two.



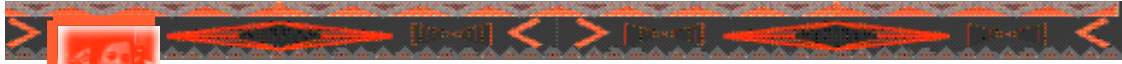
Maturity



Men were fascinated by her. The words that are used to describe her in Kinyarwanda are "Ingare", a term which is impossible to translate into English but which can be interpreted to mean "rebel". She defended her ideas tooth and nail both within and outside the school.

Women admired her. At the time when the only (political) party was declining, tongues loosened and began to contest the dominance of the North at the expense of the South.





Ascension

# Chapter iv

## Chapter iv

### Ascension

The Rwandese security services who were omnipresent at this time carefully monitored the beautiful intelligent woman who was both determined and ambitious. In order to appease the discontented people of the South, the authorities in Kigali decided to recruit some senior officers, both male and female from the South into the decision-making in education.

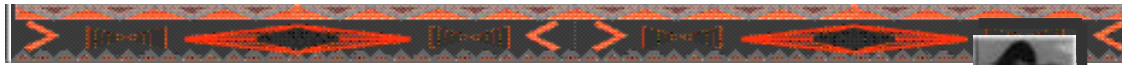
To what position would they appoint Agathe Uwilingiyimana? Deputy or Senior civil servant? They consulted URAMA (Rwanda Women's Union). Without her knowledge, intense lobbying was carried out in Kigali. In

1989, Agathe Uwilingiyimana was promoted to Director of the Small and Medium Sized Industries (PMI) in the Ministry of Commerce and Cottage Industries in Kigali. One of her colleagues gave her profile ,“ When she arrived she amazed us by her sense of dialogue, debate and uncompromising spirit” She added; “When she had made a decision which she, considered to be right, she never changed her mind”. Decidedly, Agathe Uwilingiyimana was no coward.

She would stand her ground before her superiors when knew she was right. Yet when she was not sure, she would change. Her feminine side would appear and men appreciated her for this.

More interestingly, one of her subordinates who had known her since 1989 made the following observation:” she was the only female senior officer in the Ministry. She was admired for that. Then we watched her carefully. Not only did the men accept her for her competence but the women adopted her for her generosity”, she added.





Ascension



“When Agathe travelled on a mission she would ask us if we had any recommendations to make her. Those who dared to do so made some. She would bring them gifts. To some perfumes, to others dresses. Similarly she always insisted that women should not remain behind. They should fight for equal rights with men”.

For instance, one of her former colleagues told us, that having been sent to her home region of Butare, as the Director of PMIs (Small and Medium sized Industries), she did not hesitate, in a memorable report, to thrash the observed dysfunctions during the auditing of a project funded by the German Technical Assistance in Butare. To the great detriment of her superiors, the German expatriates and their Rwandan counterpart, Agathe Uwilingiyimana had no hesitation in rejecting their connivances. According to her, the project supposed to support cottage industries did not serve the interests of the people but that of the foreign and local experts. Her colleague confided, “She was uncompromising and without inhibition. A modern woman”.



Her actions in favour of the liberation of Rwandese women

## Chapter v

### Chapter v

#### Her action in favour of the liberation of Rwandese women

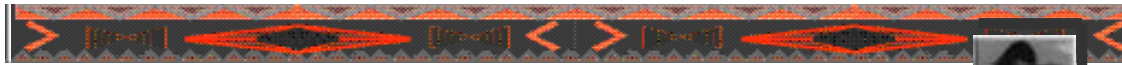
Agathe Uwilingiyimana major action in favour of the liberation of Rwandese women was undoubtedly the courses of her career. Through her courage and patriotism, her moral and intellectual qualities, her university qualifications, she proved that a Rwandese woman had no reason for harbouring any complex in relation to men.

At the National Teacher Training Institute (IPN), the National University of Rwanda (UNR), and later as a very committed woman politician, Agathe proved, that women were as capable as men in penetrating the mysteries of science and galvanising crowds to resist dictators.

Long before she entered her short but very rich political career. Agathe had made a bitter observation. In some regions of Rwanda if not in all, women were systematically subjected to forced labour. It was they women who collected wood for fuel, fetched water from rivers (sometimes several kilometres away from their homes), and especially had to look after their numerous offsprings while their husbands were idle or whiled away the time spending scarce family resources in the amusement places.

As a leader, Agathe Uwilingiyimana made contacts with other women intellectuals and together they set up the "Seruka<sup>5</sup>" Association, (which means "Show Me"). The Association's general objective was to promote Rwandese women's active contribution to development, to fight so that the Rwandese women could take her place in the world and actively participate in the development of her country.<sup>6</sup> Agathe devoted herself body and soul to the formation and establishment of this association. She personally drafted the statutes and filled all the procedures necessary for the registration of the association. This was done on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1992 while the association had been created on 14th December 1991.

In order to achieve it's goals and be useful to its beneficiaries (including women and young girls) the Seruka Association concentrated its efforts in five areas of activity: these were education, women enterprises/business,



### Her actions in favour of the liberation of Rwandese women



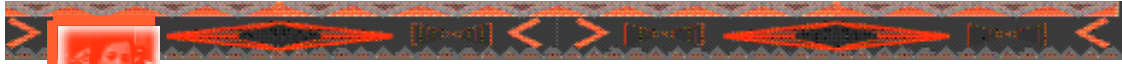
habitat and environment, institutional and technical support through training. When she was appointed Minister, Agathe was able to hand over the association endowed with a solid and fully set sustaining secretariat.

Agathe Uwilingiyimana's first decision as Minister for Primary and Secondary Education was to allow unwed mothers to continue their education. Before, in a Judeo-Christian system where pleasures of the flesh were prohibited, becoming pregnant was an abomination. While the men responsible for the pregnancies escaped scot free; the unwed mothers were ostracised. They were purely and simply expelled from school. Doubly punished from the social and educational point of view, they were also prey to numerous and multiple vicissitudes.

What made Agathe show concern for the fate of these young girls who had severely suffered morally and materially? Let us remember that a decade earlier Agathe had nearly become an unwed mother herself. In 1976, when her young fiance whom she had persuaded to leave the seminary (the Grand Seminaire de Nyakibanda) made her pregnant, her schoolmates had urged her to have an abortion as it was a disgrace to become an unwed mother. But the instinct for life which proved stronger had stopped her. Especially as her lover had accepted to marry her. Thus the future would meet with the past.

Later Agathe zealously continued her liberation action. So well did she do that school inspectors watched with satisfaction as women were appointed in the sector.<sup>7</sup> She tried to place them, not without difficulty in decision-making positions in education. Agathe Uwilingiyimana knew only one female inspector in the Nyarugenge area. A Tutsi from Ruhengeli and a close relative of Habyarimana, Angeline later turned around in a bloody bid to rid her country of fellow Tutsis and moderate Hutus including Agathe.





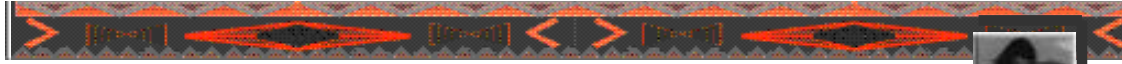
Her actions in favour of the liberation of Rwandese women



For the first time women appeared on the social scene. School is indeed the royal path to success in life. Some time later, at the head of the Government, Agathe Uwilingiyimana tried to appoint some women to the position of burgomaster. But this coincided with the time for men and women to take up the challenge of overthrowing the Habyarimana's autocratic regime .

Promote women yes, but first overthrow the dictatorship. Agathe Uwilingiyimana's assassination did not leave her the time to achieve her dream: to appoint women "burgomasters" - the highest local decision-making office.





## Chapter vi Chapter vi

### Consecration

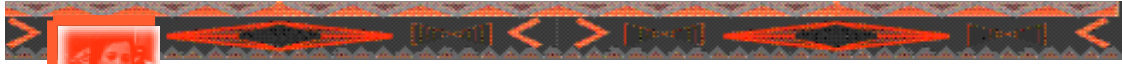
The highlight of Agathe Uwilingiyimana's professional and political career coincided with the beginning of the decline of Habyarimana's regime.

At the end of the 1980s the Rwandese were subjected to the most ruthless dictatorships the world has ever known. Any semblance of opposition was violently suppressed. All opposition members real or imagined, were assassinated. This is how Colonel Mayuya, Abbey Silvio Sindambiwe and Felicula Nyiramutarambirwa were put to death in circumstances that were to say the least obscure. The intellectuals had no alternative but to pledge allegiance to the "great manitou"<sup>8</sup> and become courtisans in the hope of gaining a place in the ranks.

Moreover, popular consultations were regularly organised and the great barons found the opportunity to get themselves elected by a resigned people. The National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MRND) declared itself a de facto one party and made every Rwandese a member by obligation, from birth. Evidently in such a climate democratic debate was prohibited, and the press controlled if not censored.

Nevertheless, in the early 1990s the system was beginning to fall apart. Symptoms of wear and tear as well as fatigue were increasingly perceptible. A group of intellectuals seized the opportunity to demand the establishment of multipartism. Some observers even picked up the first signals of the end of an era. It was after the above events that the Rwandese Patriotic Front began its liberation war. Its goal for the society was the installation of a democratic regime in Rwanda.

Pressurised on every side, Habyarimana eventually accepted the installation of multiparty politics in Rwanda. The system was run down. Rwandese democrats were getting lost in there. It was in this context that Agathe Uwilingiyimana entered the scene. Without abandoning her position as Director of Small and Medium Sized Industries, she was very active in reviving the MDR party. She and friends intended to set up a political force capable of serving as a counter balance against the weight of the MRND party which was already well rooted on the ground, besides being



## Consecration

supported by a network of administrative authorities, Agathe believed it was necessary to revive the old Parmehutu MDR but on condition that it was reformed.

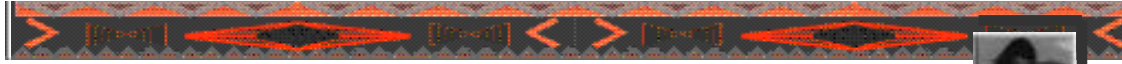
Sadly, for Agathe, a large part of the Rwandese population continued to regard this party with sinister suspicion. Consequently it had to shed off

its ethnic ideology which it had not originally donned, in the 1960s. For her there was no question of founding the party on sectarianism excluding a part of the Rwandese people.



Unfortunately as ensuing events would prove, the majority of the personalities who revived the Parmehutu MDR were still espoused in their ethnist ideology. For these leaders the objective was to get rid of Habyarimana first and take over power after that by massacring the Tutsi. Agathe was therefore surrounded by unscrupulous extremists. But they did not reveal their intent at first and pretended that they wanted to negotiate with the Patriotic Front which in the meantime had obtained several victories against the dictatorship both military and political.

His back to the wall, Habyarimana accepted the principle of including some elements of the opposition into the government. But he appointed Mr. Sylvestre Nsanzimana at the head of that government in 1991. The opposition rejected this appointment. Leaders of the opposition including Agathe Uwilingiyimana staged a demonstration demanding the departure of this man who was "clean" and came from velvet offices of the OAU<sup>9</sup>. A peaceful demonstration was organised. Finally the authorities accepted to form a government led by the opposition. In May 1992 the Cabinet led by Dr. Dismas Nsengiyeremye was sworn in. Agathe Uwilingiyimana was appointed Minister for Primary and Secondary Education. Within the MDR Party this position went uncontested to Agathe Uwilingiyimana. She was technically competent being a teacher and knew better than anyone else the problems that confronted education in general and teaching in particular. Agathe remained at the head of this very sensitive Department for only a year but she accomplished an enormous amount of work.



At the helm of the Ministry of Education



## Uwilingiyimana at the helm of the ministry of education (17/7/1993)

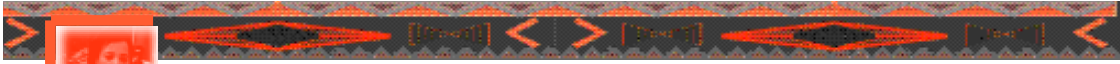
No sooner did she take up the office than she made a very important political decision which not only earned her enmity and hostility of the former hawks of the regime but also immense popularity among the down trodden. For the first time in September, 1992 the Minister published a merit list of the Primary Schools.

Let us remember that since 1973 the authorities had established an ethnic quota system. The system baptised "ethnic and regional balance" caused untold harm to the Rwandese people. It involved allocating the places in secondary schools and universities according to the proportions of each tribe of the Rwandese population. The colonial authorities organised regular census whose results were clearly manipulated. Thus according to the census the Hutus constituted ninety percent (90%), the Tutsi nine percent (9%) and the Twa one percent (1%). The allocation of available places in public schools and free scholarships was based on these figures.

Agathe Uwilingiyimana immediately denounced this system and published lists exclusively based on merit. The extremists, mostly in the party of Coalition for the Defence of the Republic Party (CDR) and which in 1994 outdid themselves in the execution of the genocide plan, reacted violently to this decision. They attacked the Minister's residence which was located near Kigali airport in the East of the town. Agathe Uwilingiyimana was manhandled. Her father, the Juvenal Ntibashirakandi who had come to visit her was not spared. The next day pupils from Kigali schools staged a demonstration in support of their Minister.

As for the police, hardened by their allegiance to the MRND party, reacted quite differently. An investigation was started but no results were obtained. The Chief of Staff of Gendarmerie Colonel P. Céléstin Rwagafirita,<sup>10</sup> visited the place but was simply putting on





### At the helm of the Ministry of Education

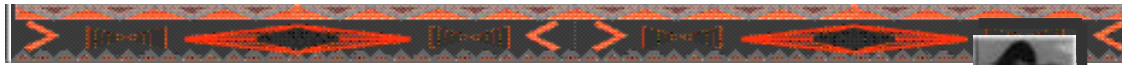
an act and never made any arrests. This deed perpetrated by the CDR men was the beginning of a series of acts which led to the assassination of Agathe Uwilingiyimana.

Another action credited to the new Minister for Education was no doubt encouraging young girls to pursue scientific options. Traditionally young girls from Rwanda, sometimes with the complicity of their parents preferred to read social and literary subjects. They believed that sciences were reserved for boys. This led women to stop their studies after Secondary School, while those who went on to University were regarded as marginal.

Having studied sciences, Agathe considered this situation as infectious and humiliating to the feminine sex. She, who had never harboured any complex towards men could not understand why women underestimated themselves so much. She urged more girls to orient themselves into Mathematics, Physics, Biology, Chemistry. The result is that today there are more and more women doctors, agricultural as well as construction engineers.

During her term at the head of the Education Ministry, Agathe Uwilingiyimana also appointed women to head school sectors. Before, these positions were almost exclusively reserved for men.





## At the helm of the Ministry of Education



Lastly, before leaving the Ministry, Agathe took an important measure in the social domain. It is common knowledge that the Catholic Church is very influential in Rwanda, and that the school girls who became pregnant were expelled from school, mercilessly without any concern for the future of the poor girls and their babies. This practice penalised these girls excessively while the authors of the pregnancies who sometimes were state civil servants or respectable heads of families escaped completely scot-free.

Agathe naturally found this measure excessive and unjust and to put an end to it, decreed that the pregnant girls should be left to continue with their studies. In such cases these pupils would be transferred to other schools to avoid problems of discipline or the sensitivities of bishops and other religious authorities who ran the schools. There is no doubt that had she remained Education Minister for long, Agathe would have undertaken profound reforms, but she did not because after only fifteen (15) months other tasks awaited her. Indeed in July 1993 she became Prime Minister. She became the first Rwandese woman to occupy that position and the second on the entire African continent.

And yet men did not always appreciate the competent and committed woman. One day she confided in a childhood friend, a year the Prime Minister's junior and who is presently the Director of the promotion of Women Affairs, Venantie Mukarugomwa: "I am sick and tired of being insulted and persecuted. I miss the good old days when I was only a teacher and enjoyed a peaceful life". They were on a flight to Dakar for the follow up on the New York Summit on Childhood, and later at the Teranga Hotel where they stayed, she continued her confidence: "Venantie, this is a tough struggle. The dice are cast, we must live with the consequences". Only Agathe Uwilingiyimana, with such a passion for life, did not imagine that her enemies and the enemies of justice would actually kill her.





As a Prime Minister

### Agathe, prime minister (18/7/1993 – 6/4/1994)

In July 1993, the MDR party and the Rwandese political circles in general were rocked by serious discord.

Negotiations between the FPR and the government had reached a stalemate. The internal opposition did not want the serving Prime Minister, Dr. Dismas Nsengiyaremye. It reproached him for having exonerated Habyarimana of his responsibility for the Bagogwe massacres.

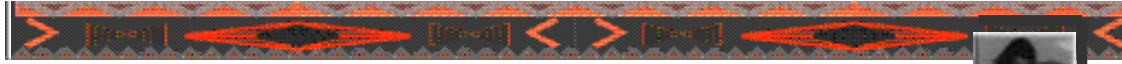
Curiously even Habyarimana did not want the Prime Minister who could become a liability for him in the long run. Besides a split in the main opposition party would be beneficial to him. Consequently he fanned the discord between the MDR party and President Faustin Twagiramungu and



his second Vice-President Dismas Nsengiyaremye.

The opposition parties consulted and agreed on the replacement for Nsengiyaremye. The MDR (or more exactly its President) proposed Agathe Uwilingiyimana. The Proponents of this crisis, Faustin Twagiramungu and Habyarimana believed that they had a stroke of genius in appointing this fairly unknown woman who they could manipulate. They were grossly mistaken, especially Habyarimana for within a very short time the woman would prove to be uncompromising and adamant, particularly when the authorities wanted to oppose the Arusha Peace Accord.

Agathe was thus appointed Prime Minister with a mission: to finalise the negotiations with the FPR and to set up the Transitional institutions. This appointment lent a period of grace to the MDR party. The party was divided: those reminiscent of the Parmehutu and the so-called "Moderates" in favour of direct negotiations with the FPR.



As a Prime Minister



The Parmehutu supporters met at Kabusunzu in an extraordinary Congress following which the moderates were excluded from political office. The Congress was dominated by Froduald Karamira who later on in 1994 became an excellent planner of the genocide. During the Congress, the group reminiscent of the Kayibanda era when the Tutsi were regularly massacred came up with what was called the "Power Movement", whose aim was to deepen the hatred and hunt of the Tutsi by the Hutu.

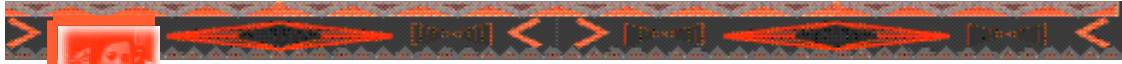
It should further be noted that Agathe Uwilingiyimana was present at this Congress. She was the only moderate invited to the congress. She had attended believing that others in the moderate faction would be present and that they would have an open debate which might bring the "Parmehutu" back to reason.

Agathe fought tooth and nail during the shameful Congress to try and make the participants understand and accept the negotiations with the FPR without ulterior motives. For her, the members of the Rwandese Patriotic Front were their fellow countrymen, their brothers and sisters with whom they would have to cohabit. The MDR extremists spent the whole night trying to subjugate, even threaten her. She was forced to sign a letter resigning from the post of Prime Minister to which she had just been appointed. In order to save her life Agathe Uwilingiyimana accepted to sign it and returned immediately to her house. Once free, she made a statement on the national radio denouncing the machination and threats she had been subjected to. She stated that she had been forced to sign and that the signature was null and void.

Following this situation, a total split between the two MDR tendencies occurred and the "Power" branch joined forces with the MRND and especially the latter's militia, the "Interahamwe" and the "Impuzamugambi" of the CDR. The militias earned notoriety for their cruelty during the 1994 massacres and genocide.

The beginning of Agathe Uwilingiyimana's mandate as Prime Minister stirred immense hope among the peace loving Rwandese. In fact the negotiations between the Government and the FPR which had stalled because of the internal wranglings in the MDR Party were revived and concluded within a very short time.





### As a Prime Minister

But the hope was quickly dampened with Habyarimana's refusal to allow the establishment of the Transitional Institutions. In addition, the "Interahamwe" militias, rearing to start the killings, were preparing their weapons, only waiting to use them.



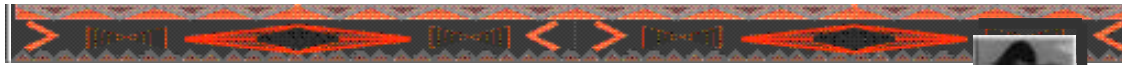
Agathe Uwilingiyimana's appointment left some observers skeptical as they could discern in this woman who was fairly new on the Rwandese political scene a puppet for Habyarimana and the President of the MDR, Faustin Twagiramungu. This analysis revealed grotesque ignorance about this former teacher who was reputed for her dynamic vision of Rwanda's problems. Indeed, this woman whose intellectual qualities were way above average harboured no inhibitions towards any individual whatsoever.

Agathe Uwilingiyimana's government chose as its primary mission to conclude the peace negotiations with the FPR and to prepare for the establishment of the Transitional Institutions extended to include the FPR<sup>11</sup>.

In the beginning, everything went according to plan, the final protocols were negotiated and signed in Kinihira (in the Byumba Province). The Prime Minister had briefed her Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Dr. Anastase Gasana so that the negotiations would progress smoothly.

According to Patrick Mazimpaka, then First Vice President of the FPR and later Minister in the Office of the President, things became easy because Agathe had no double standards like the barons of the Habyarimana regime. Moreover, according to this key player in the negotiations between the two parties, the new Prime Minister was above all preoccupied with resolving the Rwandese people's problems while recognising that the FPR members were their brothers and sisters with whom they would have to live with.





As a Prime Minister



Once the last points of the agreement were negotiated nothing could stop the signing. But Habyarimana and his partisans would hear nothing of the agreement as it was synonymous with the end of their privileges and the dictatorship they had imposed on the people of Rwanda.

Finally, after long delays, Habyarimana went to Arusha and the Peace Accord was signed on 4th August 1993. In the regime's radical camp nobody believed in the implementability of the Accord which their leaders had described as a "piece of paper". Agathe Uwilingiyimana was not discouraged. She intended to take her responsibilities fully towards the people of Rwanda and for posterity. Habyarimana and his supporters sought pretexts to prevent to installation of the broad-based Transitional Government. They did not want the FPR to come to Kigali, so they proposed that the broad-based Transitional Government be set up in Byumba or Kinihira. The Prime Minister disagreed and demanded that all the members of this Government work together in the capital.

Agathe Uwilingiyimana remained adamant before Habyarimana's capriciousness, trying to gain time to allow his "Interahamwe" militias prepare for the final confrontation.

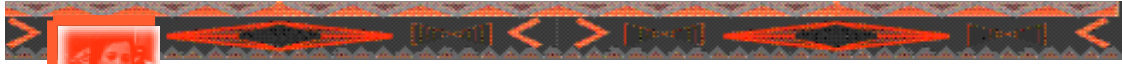
According to Dr. Anastase Gasana, Habyarimana wanted the FPR battalion which was expected to come to Kigali to protect the Ministers and Deputies from the rebellion, to be housed in the swamps which separated Kacyira hill and Gacuriro located in the northern outskirts of Kigali. This inhospitable place infested with mosquitoes was dominated by two



*Caption*

military camps, Kcyiru camp and Kami camp. For Habyarimana then, this was a strategy aimed at annihilating the battalion in case of war. Agathe Uwilingiyimana and her Foreign Minister opposed the decision and in the end the battalion was housed at the CND.

The Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana spared no effort to give a chance to



### As a Prime Minister



the Peace Accord in order to put an end to the suffering of the people of Rwanda.

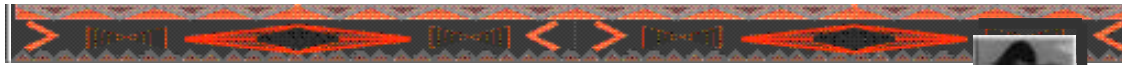
Mr. Patrick Mazimpaka remembers at the arrival of the Battalion officers responsible for their protection, Agathe Uwilingiyimana gave instructions to the Minister for Public Works

and Energy to supply clean water to the CND building. She further ordered that the doors of the CND building should remain constantly open so that those who wished to visit the FPR battalion could do so. This measure was rendered extremely important by the fact that the powers that be carried out a heinous campaign against the FPR. Thus, the Rwandese from the interior realised that the combattant rebels were not the monsters as they were portrayed as by certain media controlled by the regime.

While Agathe Uwilingiyimana did everything possible to hasten the establishment of the Institutions, the extremists of the regime did their best to counter her efforts. The "Interahamwe" sowed panic in the country while they awaited the grand evening of the genocide.

During this first three (3) months of 1994, the Prime Minister organised meetings almost daily to try and clear the situation. These meetings provided her with the opportunity to denounce the attitude of the President and his MRND partisans who were the main obstacle to the implementation of the Peace Accord.

During this time national and international observers discovered the determination of this woman who did not fear to oppose Habyarimana despite his fame for being cruel.



As a Prime Minister



Mr. Patrick Mazimpaka remembers one of the meetings where different proponents tried in vain to find solutions to the problems of installing the broad-based Transitional Government. "It was on 8th January 1994, there was a meeting



scheduled at the Presidential Palace between Habyarimana, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, the OAU Representative, the Representative of the Facilitator (Tanzania) and ourselves from the FPR. The meeting was scheduled to begin at 10.00 a.m. and the Tanzanian Ambassador was to pick us up at the CND building. On that day the "Interahamwe" staged a demonstration in order to abort the meeting. They raised barricades everywhere on the major roads. On her way to pick us up the Tanzanian Ambassador was arrested at one of the barricades. She would have had an unpleasant experience were it not for a militia, a fellow Moslem who recognised her because they prayed together at the Nyamirambo Mosque. She immediately went to protest to Habyarimana and the demonstrators were dispersed straight away.

The meeting started four hours late. Agathe Uwilingiyimana protested vigorously to the President and made it clear to him that this attitude was not worthy of a Head of State, accusing him of having let his militia loose in order to abort the meeting"

Agathe Uwilingiyimana had thus become an iron-fisted lady who would not be pushed around. Her attitude and determination to implement the Peace Accord earned her the affection of the democratic forces and all peace loving Rwandese, but also the enmity or rather hatred of the extremists in power. The Prime Minister had become the black sheep for Habyarimana and his supporters. She became the number one target of



### As a Prime Minister

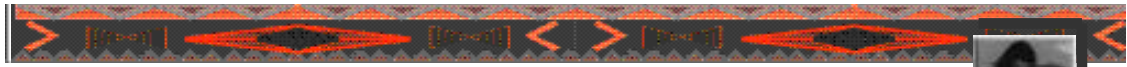
the “Interahamwe” militias who launched a hateful propaganda of lies against her.

The extremist media, sponsored by the Presidential party, set out to destroy the reputation of this responsible mother<sup>12</sup>. She was accused of all the wrongs. Terrible scandals against her were aired on the pitifully notorious Radio et Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (Free Radio and Television of the Thousand Hills) while the Karunga Newspaper regularly featured caricatures which portrayed Agathe as a woman of loose and depraved morals who was obsessed by sex. Nothing was spared the respectable mother and exemplary wife. In a country such as Rwanda which is puritanical and where the Catholic Church has immense influence, this campaign of defamation against the Prime Minister was simply meant to humiliate her and point her out, when the time was right to an enraged people.

Thus, a short time before the genocide all the observers agreed that it would take just a single spark to set the country on fire. Agathe felt threatened. She was sure that sooner than later the militias would want to assassinate her as they had done with Félicien Gatabazi another stalwart of the opposition who was from the Prefecture of Butare like herself. Lists of opposition personalities to be killed were circulated around Kigali. Agathe Uwilingyimana’s name featured on the top of the list.

At the end of February 1994 bitterness and fatigue could be discerned in the Prime Minister’s various statements. There was wrangling too within the ranks of the Rwandese Armed Forces (FAR). Only the officers from Gisenyi and Ruhengeri (President Habyarimana’s region) enjoyed privileges and promotions.





As a Prime Minister



Those from the South were held in suspicion. According to the extremists in power it was impossible to trust these people from the Central and Southern regions where the Tutsi and Hutu were mixed, thanks to intermarriage. Some militias wrote to the Prime Minister to express their discontent.

Having obviously overestimated the discord within the army, Agathe Uwilingiyimana felt obliged to organise a meeting with the officers from the Central and Southern regions of the country. The highest among these did not respond to her invitation. Major-General Augustin Ndindiriyimana, although he was originally from Nyaruhengeri like the Prime Minister .

During the meeting, Agathe Uwilingiyimana who was aware that the group was infiltrated avoided any confidences to these officers, no political subject was broached. She spoke of her desire to get to know them, and yet it was the same officers who later spread the rumour about the Prime Minister's plan to stage a coup d'Etat. This imaginary coup d'etat which existed only in the minds of MRND supporters was the pretext evoked on occasions by members of the pro-genocide Government set up after 7th April 1994 to justify the Prime Minister's assassination<sup>13</sup>.





The assassination

Chapter vii

## Chapter vii

### The assassination

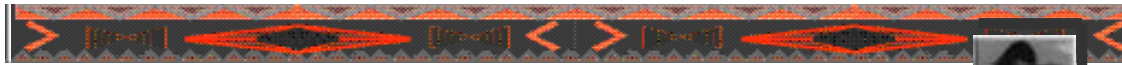
During the morning of 6th April 1994 Habyarimana, was leaving for Dar-es-Salaam, flanked by a large delegation. At the time the President-General travelled often, no doubt to try and gain time and thus find new strategies to avoid the Peace Accord. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, regarded as the right hand of Agathe Uwilingiyimana was part of the delegation but was hesitant about going on this trip. He considered it useless, particularly as the Presidential camp did not want to install a broad based Transitional Government .

He telephoned the Prime Minister to inform her of his apprehensions. Agathe Uwilingiyimana, a fine politician ordered him to go on the trip. She told him that Habyarimana told lies everytime on the subject of the situation in Rwanda. It would therefore be necessary to have someone who could deny the allegations (at least in private).

This conversation between Anastase Gasana and Agathe was to be the last between the two personalities. What followed is common knowledge.

Habyarimana went to Dar-es-Salaam where once more, he tried to show the regional Heads of State that it was the FPR which was responsible for the stalemate in setting up a broad-based Transitional Government.

On the return journey from Tanzania the aircraft which transported Habyarimana and his Burundian counterpart, C. Ntaryamira was shot down just as it was preparing to land at Kanombe Airport. All the flight passengers died in the accident. Mr. Anastase Gasana had stayed behind in Dar-es-Salaam with a few others from, the Rwandese delegation including the then Interior Minister and the influential member of the MRND, Faustin Munyazesa. On hearing the news of the accident which had cost the lives of the two Presidents, the latter is said to have declared to Gasana: "It's over, we must forget Rwanda". He is supposed to have repeated this three times.



## The assassination



Agathe Uwilingiyimana was at home with her family when she learned the terrible news. Friends called her at home, among them an old friend from High School and the IPN days. She was a journalist for the Orin for and correspondence of the French news agency, Agence France Press (AFP) in Kigali. The Prime Minister listened with interest to the woman (whose name is withheld) who was a sort of official advisor and confidant for her. She was also the God mother of her daughter Christine.

The journalist asked the Prime Minister what she intended to do. Agathe replied that she was not very sure what she should do but that she would think about it. Her friend advised her to flee since the "Interahamwe" militia would probably come to assassinate her.

Agathe would not listen. She wanted to hear nothing of fleeing. She intended to shoulder her responsibilities and show that she was in control of the situation. She did not want to abandon the Rwandese people in their hour of need.

After this conversation Agathe called her political advisor, Ignace Magorane who lived in a house adjacent to the Prime Minister's home. She asked him to prepare a statement appealing for calm which she would read the next day on the National Radio.

During the night she held talks with different personalities including the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, a Cameroonian named Roger Boh-Boh who informed her that the army rejected her authority<sup>9</sup>.



### The assassination

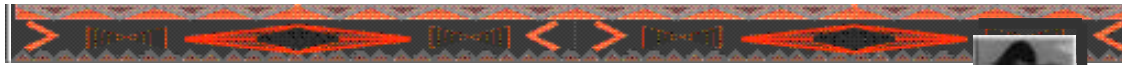
A question therefore comes to mind. How did this diplomat whose attitude towards the Rwandese crisis was far from impartial, know that the army did not want the Prime Minister? Was it the entire army or a few extremist elements who wanted to execute the genocide plan which had been prepared long before?

At dawn on 7th April 1994 the residents of Kigali were woken up by the noise of gun shots. Those who had not listened to the RTLM the night before<sup>10</sup> or who did not have a telephone were surprised. They wondered if the powers that be had once more concocted another of those acts they were so good at in order to arrest the so-called FPR accomplices and opposition members. In Kigali nobody had any confidence left in the National Radio whose demagogical language was becoming increasingly boring and which censored the substantial. It was therefore normal that a good number of people turned the button off their transistor radios. The international radio stations talked of nothing but the terrible news of the terrible accident had cost the lives of the two Heads of State.

At 6.30 a.m. Kigali time Agathe Uwilingiyimana answered on telephone questions by Monique Mas, a journalist of RFI. She stated that her people were terrified, that they were hiding under their beds and that civilians had no responsibility whatsoever in the death of the Heads of State.







## The assassination



At that very moment a commando from the Presidential Guard was attempting to penetrate into the Prime Minister's Official residence located on Avenue Park VI in the Kiyovu district.

Agathe Uwilingiyimana tried then, with the help of some Ghanaian Blue Helmets to go over the wall separating her residence from the residence of the First Counsellor of the USA Embassy in Kigali. Alas, she did not succeed and took refuge in the home of a UN volunteer from Senegal. Her husband and children joined her there shortly afterwards. The commando searched the Prime Minister's residence and all neighbouring ones. Finally at 8.40 a.m. Agathe Uwilingiyimana was forced out of hiding. The soldiers ordered her back to her house. Her husband followed behind. A witness under cover nearby told us that the soldiers did not intend to murder the Prime Minister's husband but that since he had followed them, he too was assassinated.

Just as the group arrived in the house, Ignace Magorane entered with the speech he had prepared. It is at that moment that gun shots rang out, they were different from the rest. The Prime Minister, her husband and her advisor fell to the ground. This is how "Agathe" (this is what the Rwandese affectionately called her) who had symbolised hope for the people died.

The Prime Minister's children remained concealed in the house where their parents had been found. They arrived in Switzerland after a long journey through the Hotel des Milles Collines, Bujumbura, Paris and finally Geneva. These children who were as generous as their parents maintains correspondence with the other members of their mother's family in Nyaruhengeri.

The remains of Agathe, her husband and her advisor Ignace Magorane were taken to the military hospital mortuary in Kanombe very near Habyarimana's family residence. A reliable source told us that the other Agathe, the late President's wife had demanded to see the body of the Prime Minister for her to believe that she was really dead.

In any case everybody knew that Agathe Habyarimana passionately hated Agathe Uwilingiyimana, the woman who had dared to defy her husband, the late Juvénal Habyarimana and whose prestige was beginning to overshadow the Presidential couple.



The life of Agathe's family after her death

Chapter viii

## Chapter viii

### The life of agathe uwilingiyimana's family after her death

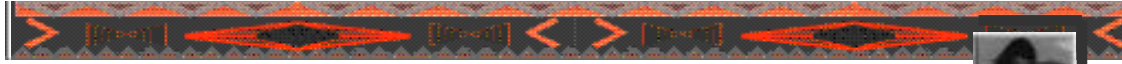
After the death of Agathe Uwilingiyimana, foreign radio stations made live coverage of the event. Her enemies then launched a campaign of slander. Her family was stupefied and watched this organized crime powerlessly. With her death, hundreds of Tutsi families were subjected to torment in the locality of Nyaruhengeri while a gang of enraged killers hung around the area; her family decided to make a run for it.

It should be remembered that by now, the fracas of gunshots could be heard right up to the Burundian border. The guard mounted by the Rwandese Patriotic Army left the board residents of Akanyaru trembling with fear. Angelique Mpinganzima 23, at the time, in her second year at Kansi and the young Fiacre Niyomugabo, aged 20 who is presently a pupil in first year at Save, and their parents took the road to exile.

But Agathe's nephews and nieces as well their parents suffered ostracism in the Kirembe refugee camp in the Ngozi province in Burundi. Particularly in April 1995 when Agathe Uwilingiyimana was buried as a national heroine at Mount Rebero. The same killers who had threatened her family in Nyaruhengeri continued to harass them outside. They therefore decided to return clandestinely. Their hearts filled with joy, Agathe's family returned to their childhood home built by the ex-Prime Minister while still a young student.



Back home, they organized their lives as well as they could. Agathe Uwilingiyimana had been the backbone of the family. Two of the children had already left school for lack of means. Angelique Mpinganzima



### The life of Agathe's family after her death

requested the Seruka Association to give her a loan to buy a sewing machine on hire-purchase. The earnings from this activity served to pay school fees for her young brother Fiacre Niyomugabo. Good seed pedigree is never. Agathe Uwilingiyimana's niece had inherited the sense of sacrifice.

## Conclusion

Talking about Agathe Uwilingiyimana is attempting an task. We have carried out the exercise of going back to her childhood origins, her adolescence and her happy youth. This intelligent young woman who men envied so much attained a national dimension. As Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana had a unique ambition: the unity of the Banyarwanda.

She was particularly preoccupied with the fate of her fellow sisters, desiring their self realisation through education. In a good sense, the women also devoted themselves to pursuing the scientific discipline. Agathe Uwilingiyimana had made this challenge her principal battle but in a healthy competition with men.

During this time, people spoke of Gender. Lastly, Agathe was ahead of her time. We carefully noted women participating in decision-making positions. Also thanks to the initiatives launched by FAWE, an association that Agathe Uwilingiyimana had adopted and become the highest promoter.

Assassinated at 40, Agathe Uwilingiyimana did not have the time to fulfil her ambitions. Nevertheless associations such as Seruka or FAWE are living proof of the woman's actions. They are a model image to all young girls who are committed to their studies and professional life.

Six years after her brutal disappearance, Agathe Uwilingiyimana has become a symbol of courage and patriotism, tolerance and the struggle against dictatorship, etc.

In Rwanda, in Africa and the entire world, the former Chemistry student serves as a model to men and women in love with peace, harmony, development and gender equality.



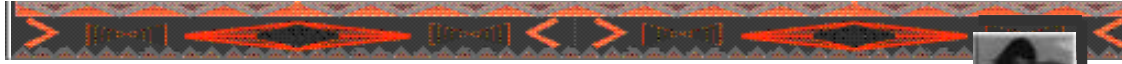
### **The life of Agathe's family after her death**

To honour her memory and pay her homage, the Forum for African Women Educationalist (FAWE) created the award which is named after her. In addition, this Forum has just opened a school for young girls in Gisozi in the northern outskirts of Kigali.

Moreover, it is in the same order of things that the creation in Canada of the International Foundation of Agathe Uwilingiyimana (FIAU) by Monique Mujawamaliya (who is reknowned in Rwanda in the area of the Defence of Human Rights before 1994) should be viewed. This foundation is very active especially in the area of unity and national reconciliation.

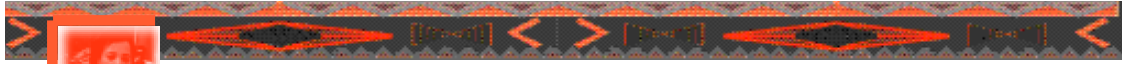
Without any doubt, Agathe Uwilingiyimana still had goals to achieve for her country, her people and her family . The latter, at least what remains of it is still reeling under shock, because she carried her extended family in her hands. It is she who paid school fees for her nieces and nephews, who paid the workers on her father's farm. Her death was consequently a very great loss for her family.

In concluding, we must make only one wish: that the people of Rwanda would once again find the unity for which Agathe Uwilingiyimana fought all her life and also that young girls of Rwanda may benefit from the same rights as their male counterparts. In this case, Agathe's blood will not have been poured in vain.



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5. Lamine, S. Les princes Africains, Hattier, Paris, 1979.
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7. Primier, G. The Rwanda Crisis, History of Genocide, Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 1995.
8. Sehene, B., Le piège ethnique, Dagorno, Paris, 1999.
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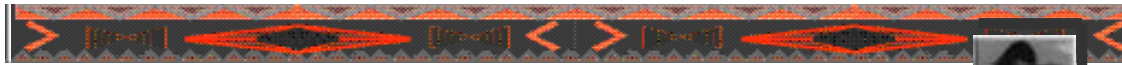


## Abbreviation

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- CDR:** Coalition for the defence of the Republic
- EAM:** School of Medical Assistants.
- FPR:** Rwandan Patriotic Front
- IPN:** National Teacher Training Institute
- MDR:** Republic Democratic Movement
- PM.I:** Small and Medium Size Industries
- UNR:** National University of Rwanda.



## Further reading

Further reading

- 1 For further reading refer to Le piège ethnique by B. Sehene; Dagorno , Paris, 1999.
- 2 Later these students having become teachers outdid themselves in the conception and planning of the 1994 genocide. F. Nahimana was detained in the ICTR prison in Arusha and L. Mugesera was detained in Canada.
- 3 Lugan B.L. Histoire du Rwanda de la Préhistoire a nos jours, Bastillat, 1997\*
- 4 Some sources indicate that Agathe Uwilingiyimana intended to pursue Doctorate Studies, that she even had a project for her thesis.
- 5 See Seruka, Resignement concernant l'Association SERUKA A.S.B.L. unpublished.
- 7 The educational sectors were administrative entities of a locality. The Sectoral education inspector was therefore in charge of an entire educational in a locality.
- 8 The expression is borrowed from Seydou Lamine in his book Les Primes Africains, Hallier, 1979.
- 9 Sylvestre Nsanzimana had been Chancellor of the National University of Rwanda before becoming the Deputy Secretary General of the OAU. Some sources reveal that this was a man of integrity and that he was preparing to form the opposition. Habyarimana recruited him very quickly and used him as his instrument.
- 10 Colonel P. Celestin Rwagafilita was one of the brains behind the genocide. He was one of the founders of the "Interahamwe Militia" sadly famous for the 1994 genocide.





#### Further Reading

- 11 See book by Kamanzi, N.R., Rwanda Du génocide à la défaite, ed. Rebero, 1997, Kigali.
- 12 For further reading see Chretien, J.P. Les médias du génocide, Karthala, Paris, 1995.
- 13 Rakiya, O. Death, Despair and Defiance, Africa Watch, 1999  
Human Right Watch and FIDH Aucain témoin ne doit survivre.
- 10 The RTLM (Rwandan Radio) had announced the death of two Presidents the day before, a little before the closing of the station at 11.00p.m. Most of Kigali's residents were busy watching the African Nations Football matches aired live from Tunis . Even the Vice President, Paul Kagame was watching the same tournament.

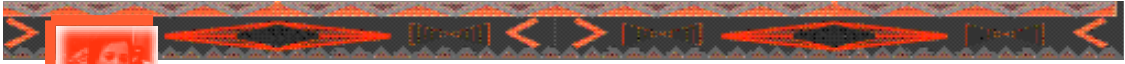


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