

6 *Transformative leadership from abroad: Marguerite Barankitse and the Burundian refugee community*

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Overview

Marguerite (Maggy) Barankitse established Maison Shalom in Burundi in 1993 to shelter children surviving the massacres of the time. Those first saved were Hutu children, not members of her own Tutsi ethnic community. In 2015, another crisis provoked mass refugee movements to neighbouring countries, and Barankitse began humanitarian action again. Using literature on leadership, grey literature on Maison Shalom (mainly unpublished annual reports and speeches) and Barankitse, and interviews with political and civil society and academic actors, this chapter examines transformative leadership theories to analyse Barankitse's approach to crisis management. The analysis uses a sociohistorical approach to demonstrate what constitutes Barankitse's leadership in practice, and what this implies for social change in Burundi and refugee camps in neighbouring countries. The analysis raises three aspects of transformative leadership: an original approach to Burundian conflicts, actions taken to break the structural causes of the conflict, and new dynamics of social and cultural changes in Burundi.

Introduction

Burundi has been affected by political and identity-based conflicts since its independence from Belgium in 1962. The Hutu and Tutsi communities are at the centre of these conflicts, which have led to several genocidal massacres over the past 50 years (Chr tien & Dupaquier, 2007; Lemarchand, 1996; Ngayimpenda, 2020). In 1993, the assassination of President Ndadaye was followed by massacres of Tutsis in Burundi, resulting in a civil war between the predominantly Hutu armed movement and political parties, and a Tutsi-dominated governmental army. Faced with the horrors of war and an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, the international community put pressure on the belligerents to negotiate and implement peace agreements, among them the Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation, signed in Burundi on 26 August 2000 (Nimubona, 2007).

It was during this war and its aftermath that Marguerite (Maggy) Barankitse emerged as an important humanitarian figure in Burundi and the Great Lakes region. She assisted child survivors and orphans of the civil war by creating Maison Shalom, NGO, as her incubator of hope (Martin, 2005). As the founder

of Maison Shalom, Barankitse has received several distinctions, among them the most emblematic award given by former President Nkurunziza, proclaiming her the 'Nation's Mother' on 1 May 2006 (Debetencourt Hoskins, 2012, p. 138; IWACU, 2013).

In 2015, President Nkurunziza opted to run for a third term in office, in violation of the Arusha Peace Agreement. This was followed by protests from both Burundians and the international community, as well as demonstrations by political and civil society activists who organised the Halt to the Third Mandate movement. The violent repression that followed these demonstrations brought Barankitse back to the forefront. As she publicly protested about young Burundians being killed by Nkurunziza's security forces (Roulette, 2015), she was forced to leave the country. Her property and that of Maison Shalom were confiscated by the Burundian government, and the NGO struck off the list of those licensed to operate in Burundi. In 2020, Barankitse was sentenced to life in prison by the same government that had previously proclaimed her the Nation's Mother.

Despite these problems, Barankitse has not given up. From Kigali, Rwanda, she continues to give hope to hundreds of thousands of Burundians who have fled, providing education for young people and defending the rights of children. This chapter interrogates her potential as an example of transformative leadership. Two questions are used to analyse Barankitse's actions and their relationship to transformative leadership theories: (1) What actions were carried out by Barankitse inside Burundi and beyond the borders as a refugee? and (2) Do Barankitse's actions qualify her as a transformative leader?

Sociohistorical analysis of a leader

A sociohistorical approach is used to understand Barankitse's leadership inside Burundi and abroad within the historical and social context of Burundi. The analysis draws on information from five sources: biographies of Barankitse (Debetencourt Hoskins, 2012; Martin, 2005), reports of Maison Shalom activities, national and international press articles, extracts from Barankitse's speeches and interviews, and eight interviews with political actors, collaborators, civil society activists, and members of the diaspora who know Barankitse. These sources provided diverse opinions about Barankitse's actions and her person as perceived by Burundians.

Maggy Barankitse and transformative leadership theory

Transformative leaders can be everyday citizens and are not necessarily heroic or so-called 'born' leaders. All people who have chosen to mobilise their creativity and to contribute to a better future for the society in which they are

living can be considered leaders (Montuori, 2010). Transformative leadership can be defined as creating the future in the present. The core of the concept is incremental actions and interactions, thoughts, and beliefs that aim at deep and equitable change. Small actions and gestures give direction to change the society in need (Montuori, 2010). The actions of the leader depend on the conditions of the particular society (Brown, Ekoue, & Goodban, 2019; Shields, 2010). Transformative leadership connects with the ethical dimension and with universal values, and it is usually focused on promoting ethical practices in the lives of people and within organisations (Caldwell et al., 2012; Ford & Harding, 2015). Hence, transformative leadership can be interpreted as a paradigm shift in leadership theories. As described by Montuori (2010) and Fletcher (2004), apart from focusing on individual achievement and meritocracy, the emphasis is on what can be achieved not only for oneself, but also for the larger community.

The term 'leadership from abroad' is coined here to help understand transformative leadership by focusing on three aspects: (1) there is a person sometimes unknown and socially unidentified that leads as a change-maker in the beginning, someone (2) who appears to have a broader social vision and objectives (3) that can promote change in a given society and push for the achievement of a better life, despite where they are or the situation they are facing. The term 'abroad', in this context, is used to imply being *outside* of classical notions of leadership in a given community, rather than having a geographical meaning.

The case analysed in this contribution is of an unusual leader. Barankitse, as a transformative leader, is an 'outsider' who provides an example of an alternative to the classic 'big man/woman' leadership, and shows how an ordinary person with transformative leadership qualities can have a major impact. Barankitse was not driven by the power that comes with a leadership position in a given society, but merely by the vulnerability of the Burundian people in the context of (post-) civil war, including exile and banishment. Her own vulnerability can provide lessons to help understand what inspires potential followers.

Barankitse's life as a leader began on 21 October 1993, when one of Burundi's longest and deadliest political crises started. When Barankitse began her humanitarian work, her purpose did not entail building a reputation, setting up an organisation, or cultivating potential leaders within any institutional structure. Nor was there a focus on a social vision for changing Burundian society. She acted solely to save the lives of innocent children whose parents were murdered during the 1993 civil war in Burundi. At that time, she was a secretary in the bishop's office and had no political involvement. Barankitse risked her own life to save children within a chaotic environment of conflict between Hutu and Tutsi (Debetencourt Hoskins, 2012; Maitre, 2008). She established Maison Shalom, a house of hope and peace, now linked to her name.

But, 22 years later, in 2015, Barankitse fled Burundi because the former president Nkurunziza considered her part of an attempted coup. Due to an international arrest warrant issued by the Burundian regime, she lost her citizenship, her organisation, Maison Shalom, as well as all the initiatives (such as hospitals, microfinance organisations, leisure centres, and residences for rescued children) she had put in place to save human lives (Kamikazi, 2020). While in exile in Rwanda, she continued her humanitarian actions to help fellow citizens who had taken refuge in Rwanda and in other neighbouring countries. In Barankitse's activities, one can see a deep conviction to continue everyday actions that lead society towards a better future.

Leadership is usually attributed to actors within an organisation, but Barankitse started to lead without an organisation. During the Burundian crises in the 1990s, she was recognised and supported by her fellow citizens in her own country and by the administration, who finally acknowledged her work (Marshall, 2013; Martin, 2005). In Rwanda after the 2015 Burundian crisis, Barankitse saw the new conditions refugees were facing and decided to lead again, as in the 1990s. At the core of her leadership approach is the belief that revolution requires rethinking and changing practices. Barankitse continues to foster dignity and self-respect in Burundian refugees in Rwanda by supporting various initiatives, including education and training for youths, the promotion of entrepreneurship (training and financing of small trades), and the empowerment of refugee women.

A post-heroic leadership portrait

Barankitse is not what would be considered a conventional leader. Her sphere of operation is not political, but rather personal. She can be seen to embody the 'post-heroic' leader (Fletcher, 2004) in terms of her traits of empathy, community, vulnerability, and collaboration. According to Fletcher (2004), post-heroic leadership has three characteristics that distinguish it from heroic or traditional leadership: leadership in practice, leadership as interactions between self and others, and leadership as learning. Barankitse demonstrates all of these characteristics. She is, as Montuori and Donnelly (2018, p. 321) have stated, an 'everyday citizen' but her actions have 'butterfly effects'. She is not drawn into politics, but wants to push politicians towards an ethical perspective. This orientation of non-directive leadership has been overlooked in leadership research.

After the Rwandan genocide of 1994, Barankitse risked her life to hide Hutu children whose parents had been assassinated by hordes of revenge-seeking Tutsi youth. This action opened a new avenue for her. Barankitse was a young woman with neither a home nor provisions to feed and care for these children, but the number of children under her protection swelled as others were picked up on

the hills above the town of Ruyigi. The environment in which Barankitse was acting was one of ethnic balkanisation throughout the country. She was taking a great risk. On the one hand, her actions were not understood by the inhabitants of Ruyigi, especially her friends from the Tutsi community. Saving the lives of Hutu children, whose parents were alleged perpetrators of the foregoing genocidal massacres against the Tutsi, was a considered to be a serious crime, tantamount to treason or a crime of *lèse-majesté*. On the other hand, Barankitse wanted to raise these Hutu orphans in an environment that was not partisan. These children needed food, water, clothes, and a roof over their heads. In this endeavour, she experienced problems not only with the ecclesiastical community of Ruyigi, but also with the leaders at both the local and national levels. Her reward for her good works was the epithet 'Maggy the Mad'. Often, she had to resort to stealing corn from neighbours' fields and sometimes to begging in downtown Bujumbura (as she described in a meeting of Burundian urban refugees in Kigali, 2018).

Barankitse established Maison Shalom in Rwanda in 1994. Initially intended to serve about 50 children, Maison Shalom received thousands more orphans and children separated from their families. Her name, which had begun to be noticed by the international press, is associated with the fight for the dignity of children. International organisations engaged in children's rights started providing her with support in terms of living expenses, school supplies, and coverage of the cost of administration services at Maison Shalom.

At the end of the Burundian civil war in 2005, Barankitse focused on reconstruction and peace building through building a children's hospital open to all. Such a peace-development nexus is well established in the post-conflict discourse (Uvin, 2002). As Marc Georges, a Belgian doctor and military officer who was at the Rema Hospital during construction, so aptly writes, '[Maggy] has such faith in the future that she is convinced, despite the complexity of the subject, that she can only succeed' (Georges, 2007, unnumbered [author's translation]). Barankitse remained faithful to her initial commitment that children and families are the pillars of all development. Her first project after returning to Burundi was the building of the Rema Hospital, a specialised hospital for children on her family property in Nyamutobo. It is a modern, well-equipped hospital that welcomes renowned doctors from Europe, Canada, and America and trains nurses and health auxiliaries. It has quickly become a regional referral hospital for the care for children from Burundi, Eastern Congo, Tanzania, and Rwanda. In addition to medication, patients are given milk and other foods, something new for Burundian hospitals.

Barankitse's second significant investment in peacebuilding was establishing a microfinance bank called Iteka (meaning dignity or honour) Microfinance (IWACU, 2013). This microfinance institution had two major objectives: to

restore dignity to farmers and small traders and to train them in cooperative entrepreneurship. Practically, the microfinancing system provided the farmers with money for survival during the planting season, and at harvest time, it helped them to sell their crops through their cooperative. The solidarity credit was given to small traders to carry out their activities. The interest rate was only 2 per cent, whereas conventional banks charged up to 20 per cent (Interview with GB, former employee of Iteka Microfinance, Burundi, 2021).¹

However, in 2015, Burundi faced another political crisis. The outbreak of violence was related to the presidential elections and mostly to the anti-constitutional decision of then president Pierre Nkurunziza to run for a third term. This caused political violence and ethnic tensions (Hugon, 2017). The Nkurunziza third-term crisis rushed through Burundi like a tsunami and unearthed the traumas from previous conflicts buried in the collective memory. Barankitse saw the recent turmoil as similar to the turmoil of the earlier conflicts, but this time it was caused by a man who had previously awarded her the symbolic title of the 'Nation's Mother' (Debetencourt Hoskins, 2012, p. 138). She decided to act and save lives as security forces were killing young people demonstrating in the streets of Bujumbura (Roulette, 2015).

Leading up to these protests, the population had been struggling through much of Nkurunziza's two terms in office due to his administration's poor political, economic, and social governance. Nkurunziza's injurious governance prompted Barankitse to hand over the medals and titles previously bestowed on her by the head of state (Barankitse's testimony, Refugee leaders meeting, Kigali, 2019). This had affected relations between her and Nkurunziza's regime. When the protests broke out in April 2015, Barankitse was devastated by the murder of a young teenager called Komezamahoro, who, although not participating in the demonstrations, was fatally shot by a policeman. This prompted Barankitse to begin her humanitarian work again. She cared for injured young people, took food to those in prison, and paid the hospital and burial costs of young people injured or killed during demonstrations. As a result, she was put on the list of 'enemies of the nation' by the president's regime and threatened by the intelligence services. This eventually led to her going into exile in Rwanda (La Croix, 2015), where she found thousands of other Burundians who had fled the repression.

Barankitse left behind the devastated Maison Shalom. This organisation was removed from the list of local NGOs, and all its infrastructure (hospital, microfinance, cinema, swimming pool, residences, and so on) was looted and

¹ Initials are used for personal communication interviews to conceal and protect the identity of the interviewees.

closed by the Burundian government. But Barankitse did not accept these setbacks and fought to rise from the ruins of her accomplishments. She was often heard paraphrasing the famous quote from Greek poet Dinos Christianopoulos: ‘They tried to bury us, but they didn’t know we were seeds.’ Maggy’s version (taken from unpublished reports from Maison Shalom) was ‘They buried us, but they forgot that we are seeds. We grow back’ (Barankitse, Maison Shalom, interview, June 2019). In Rwanda, she was inspired by the memory of Komezamahoro, and in the young refugees in Mahama refugee camp in Kigali, she sees Burundi’s salvation. She wants to divert these youths from their involvement in the rebellions, and for them to return with dignity to rebuild their home country.

With support from the Friends of Maggy, a voluntary association in Europe, Barankitse set up an English teaching programme for young people in the Mahama refugee camp and the city of Kigali. The aim is to help them to continue their secondary and university studies in an education system that has English as the primary language, to fit in with the Rwandan education system. This training serves to boost the morale of these young people who have been traumatised by the repression faced during and after the demonstrations. To date, Barankitse’s extensive education programme has enabled more than three hundred students to return to school. The first cohort has already completed their studies and is serving the refugees’ society as well as the Rwandan nation. Barankitse justifies her programme in these terms: ‘We have to show that we refugees are normal human beings in a strange situation. We were useful, we must continue to be. This is what should make our dignity’ (Barankitse, Maison Shalom, Kigali, 2018, unpublished speech [author’s translation]).

Currently, some political actors want to return to Burundi, some advocating an armed path, but Barankitse seeks lasting peace in Burundi by encouraging young people to make the most of their talents. In a speech to the refugees and friends of Maison Shalom in Kigali, upon receiving the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity (2016), she said: ‘We are at school, we are going to return with doctorates, skills and capabilities. When we go home, our contribution to the reconstruction of peace will be in actions, and in all areas’ (Barankitse, Maison Shalom, Kigali, 2016, unpublished speech [author’s translation]).

A system providing access to Rwandan universities for young Burundian refugees to enter bachelor’s and master’s degree programmes has been running since 2017. The programme has already benefitted more than six hundred refugees, enabling these young people to become engaged in the Rwandan labour market. For urban Burundian refugees, Maison Shalom established the Oasis of Peace community centre in Kigali, which provides sociocultural events, internet access, and many other forms of support. Maison Shalom also established the Ubuntu Academy to promote the human values of compassion, integrity, openness to others, and solidarity. This academic hub is developing a

large training programme offering a new space for collective therapy after years of exile and violence. In sum, these programmes with their inter-ethnic approach aim at collective and community work involving the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa refugees in the refugee camps, the Rwandan communities living near the camps, and Burundians who have taken refuge in urban centres. These programmes and the many other activities reported (Maison Shalom International, 2020) demonstrate Barankitse's commitment to an authentic transformation of the Burundian society from within and abroad.

Leadership in practice: An original and risky approach to conflict and development

The aim of this section is to understand Barankitse's leadership approach and practices. In general, any leader must have a vision that encourages others to follow them (Northouse, 2016). Analysing Barankitse's approach indicates four different aspects of leadership that help to explain why she is influencing practices beyond Rwanda and Burundi. The first two aspects put the emphasis on upholding dignity in times of crisis; the third aspect is the impact that learning has, especially on young people; and the fourth shows how entrenched social practices of domination can be transformed into everyday practices of compassion when carried out by a committed actor.

The active interethnic approach

When the massacres began in 1993 in Burundi, Barankitse mobilised ordinary citizens, regardless of ethnicity, using a new and different approach. Although the Hutu and Tutsi had been in conflict for decades, she believed that 'we will celebrate the victory of love over hatred' (Kingsley, 2016, para. 17). She believed that it would be better to preserve Burundi by sowing new seeds. She wanted the new focus for Burundi to be interethnic action against hatred and community conflict, rather than interethnic violence. By saving and supporting infants, children, and young people of both ethnic groups, Barankitse strove to create a new sense of living together. Beyond sharing the experience of being disaster victims and survivors of the massacres, they learned to share a new civic mindset: living together in difference, accepting each other, and defying the ethnicising views of the past.

Replacing the concept of an orphanage

From the beginning, Barankitse refused to define Maison Shalom as an orphanage. Perhaps it was her former condition as an orphan that led her to take a different approach (see her founders story, Maison Shalom International,

n.d.). She believes that nothing can replace the family, especially the mother, and that an orphanage setup would in no way reduce the trauma endured by those children who had lost their parents. At Maison Shalom, mothers were brought in to take care of rescued infants in their everyday life and to give them the necessary maternal affection. In a second step, Maison Shalom attempted to locate remaining members of the children's families and to organise reunification. In this way children kept their family identity, whereas orphanages often disengage children from their heritage. Maison Shalom gradually became a house of safety, friendship, and transition before family reunification, where this was possible, and acted like an extended family. For the children who were old enough, Maison Shalom built homes called 'Angel's houses' where two or three young people lived together, sharing daily life as brothers or sisters. Rather than feeling like orphans, their substitutional relationship continued until they were able to return to their nuclear families or start their own homes and families.

Education: Helping young people to dream again and think of giving back

A cornerstone of Barankitse's convictions is the right of youth to a good education. Trauma impedes dreaming about the future. However, education can constitute a detraumatizing space as children experience new life. For Barankitse, if the ethnic conflict persists in Burundi, it is partly because education has been perverted by political mobilisation. Education is a process that begins in the family and continues through school into everyday life, through individuals' commitment to observing a certain ethic in a profession. According to Barankitse's approach, education must work to produce independent citizens free from fear, greed, and selfishness who would not think of engaging with a political party that promotes demagoguery and hatred of others. Education should be inspired by common values. The end of higher education should lead to various forms of empowerment for young people in the observation of common values. Young people who are trained are called upon to serve the community. If there is no giving back, the training will have failed to produce people who are empowered and committed to the cause of the general Burundian community.

A decolonial approach to relations with donors and external partners

To succeed in building Maison Shalom as an organisation with the intent of promoting peace and reconciliation, Barankitse initiated a new approach to dealing with donors and international funders. This is a unique example of a very particular leadership practice. By focusing her communication on the human values of dignity, compassion, humanity (ubuntu), and integrity, she has been able to engage those who believe, despite the crisis of values, in the remaining minimum of humanity. In practice, this approach assumes that victims and

survivors need not only clothes, food, and schools, but also compassion and contact with supportive people. This orientation changed the approach for aid from different NGOs and foundations in times of crisis. The various organisations that funded Maison Shalom were not content to merely receive reports on how funds were used, but sent agents who went to live in Burundi, stayed in contact with victims, and shared in the everyday lives of the recipients of the aid. Some came to teach, others to heal, and yet others to build houses. Thus, the colonial attitude that the hand that gives is always above the hand that receives has been continuously deconstructed by Barankitse and her organisation. The volunteers have an interest in giving their time, money, and care. The assessment of the funded programmes offered by Maison Shalom show positive results due to volunteer participation in the life of the organisation. This was the case with the construction of the Rema Hospital by the Belgian military in 2011, and the Elite Center in Mahama refugee camp, where Western universities are involved in giving programmes and delivering online teaching to young refugees.

Is Marguerite Barankitse a transformative leader?

This section reflects on interviews with different Burundians, conducted by the author in 2021, who have worked, shared ideas with, or met Barankitse. These interviews help to answer questions around whether Barankitse can be considered a transformative leader. As has been shown by some authors (Montuori & Donnelly, 2018; Shields, 2010), transformative leadership focuses on a broader social vision and critiques inequitable practices and injustice. As stressed by Shields (2010), the promise is not only greater individual achievement, but also a better life lived in community with others. While the approaches mobilised relate to leadership in practice and reflect on the interactions between Barankitse and the Burundian community inside and outside the country, this section challenges the definitions of leadership in practice through the interviewee's perceptions of Barankitse as a humanitarian leader in Burundi.

The interviews have elicited three main learnings: (1) Barankitse challenges the *ethnic* dimension at the heart of the Burundian conflicts; (2) she is a woman who challenges the *misogynistic* (or chauvinistic) view of the Burundian wife; and, finally, (3) she challenges the *elitist* approach to conflict resolution in Burundi and other countries.

Challenging the ethnic dimension at the core of the conflicts

The first specificity of Barankitse which reinforces her position as a leader is that she takes a rather difficult approach to reconciliation – she urges reconciling in times of crisis, when people do not want to reconcile. Her interethnic approach to reconciliation and compassion is a challenge to Burundians of all ages, but even

more so to political actors in times of crisis and after. Of course, the 2015 political crisis showed that there is a long path to reconciliation, but Barankitse has shown that there is a good alternative. This challenge is emphasised by an interviewee:

I found a woman who made a name for herself in Burundi. I appreciated her approach toward reconciliation on the ethnic issue. In Burundi, there is this binary reading of the conflict. If you are a Hutu, you are in conflict with a Tutsi. I see a woman who has suffered on both sides and who manages to endure it and does not let herself be carried away by the ethnic and patronage winds. This continuity in social work without looking at ethnic and social origins, I find that very important and especially courageous.
(Interview with AM, international cooperation, DRC, 2021)

And another interviewee pointed out:

I appreciate what she does. She is driven by an ideal that is based on values. She wants young people to identify themselves as Burundians, not that of ethnic groups. She is convinced that Burundians must live together like Burundians, not like Hutu or Tutsi.
(Interview with JGN, academic, Canada, 2021)

Barankitse wants a country in which living together challenges institutionally entrenched paradigms. Despite the fact that ethnicity is a social and scientific construction, it is an important factor in domestic politics, both in times of peace and conflict. The Arusha Peace Agreement itself refers to it to offer a model of living together. So far, Barankitse's approach to interethnic peace has shown itself to be successful. As another interviewee put it:

[T]he active interethnic makes her a unique character in the Burundian political and social landscape. We do not know of other people who have been able to indiscriminately save people and give them human dignity regardless of ethnic, regional or other origins.
(Interview with VN, civil society activist, Belgium, 2021)

Barankitse develops her leadership practice by mobilising positive energies and by being an instrument of change. As she built a 'garden of Eden' in a country in ruins in 1993, she also built an oasis of peace in a desert of underprivileged refugees in 2015 in Rwanda. Her example calls all Burundians to transcend ethnic stereotypes and ethnic-based conflicts. The value of her leadership has brought her the recognition of many international organisations; awards she has received include the Chirac Foundation's Prize for Conflict Prevention in 2011 and the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity in 2016.

Defying the chauvinist view of women

For most members of Burundian society, the social place of women is in the home. A woman is considered the 'home boss' (*Inarugo*). Women should take care of the children and family goods. In Burundian culture, a woman is deprived of certain basic rights; for example, she cannot make a speech when her husband is present. An unmarried woman is treated as a child. Constitutionally, a female quota of 30 per cent is required in political institutions, but, in reality, this proportion varies according to the moods of male leaders.

Barankitse, however, is an unmarried woman who has been recognised as being exceptional and who is seen as a role model, contrary to the child status that Burundian culture dictates. She became a mother, and was further elevated to the status of the 'Nation's Mother', who raised over 20 000 orphans (Martin, 2005). The considerable admiration Barankitse has received for her humanity and work and the recognition of her involvement in Burundian society have deeply challenged the stereotypes surrounding her femininity.

Stressing this admiration, one civil society activist said: 'She is a determined woman, fighter, rigorous, sometimes too rigorous. It is open. She cannot be silent in the face of acts of injustice. Bold actions have made her more of a human rights activist than a mere humanitarian' (Interview with VN, human rights defender, Belgium, 2021). A certain unanimity seems to have emerged over her leadership, even within political organisations. A Burundian politician working in exile goes further: 'We must recognise the extraordinary work that she has done in Burundi and that she is doing in Rwanda. If the Burundian regimes were serious, [her] development model would have been generalised in Burundi' (Interview with LN, political actor and scholar, Belgium, 2021). Finally, this admiration for Barankitse as a Burundian woman extends beyond borders and generates hope for a better tomorrow. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan summarised this by saying: 'When you see what a woman is capable of doing for so many children, you think Africa is not lost' (Fondation Chirac, 2011).

Challenging the elitist dimension of conflict management

In Burundi, as elsewhere in the world, diplomas and other qualifications constitute significant status. Those who have these qualifications tend to have a certain disregard for those who do not. Barankitse, while having a rudimentary teaching qualification, does not have a university degree, and therefore does not consider herself a member of the educated 'elite'. In addition, many of the political leaders in Burundi and Rwanda, considered to be 'elites', are frequently blamed for the countries past turmoil (Uvin, 1999). From a grassroots perspective, these

elites created ideologies of ethnic hatred and implemented policies of exclusion and discrimination that resulted in the genocide and violence of 1993 and 2015. Some see the elites as the root of state failure and institutional bad governance. Barankitse embodies someone outside the elite, from whom little is expected. As one interviewee underlined:

I do not know [what] the King of the Belgians studied, [or] President Ndayishimiye or President Kagame, he did what studies? I don't think it's the degree that makes you successful... What is important is to have the courage to go all the way. Seeing her strength for continuity, her capacity for continuation that I find by looking at her activities in exile abroad, I find that she is an inspiring personality.

(Interview with AM, international cooperation, DRC, 2021)

This inspiration was also recognised by an interviewee from a civil society organisation, who said:

If we had about 50 Maggy [Barankitese], Burundian society would have changed. She talks about things or ideas that today no longer have a place within the ruling elites and in Burundian society: dignity, love of neighbour, reconciliation, mobilization for the lives of children. She says what she does, and she does what she says. She does not just talk, she takes actions. She is unique.

(Interview with VN, human rights defender, Belgium, 2021)

In short, Barankitse has made considerable progress in the areas in which those in power have been less successful. This is because she recognises that to achieve real success in a society or nation, the important issues are people's values, how people live with each other, and developing that society's youth. Barankitse, despite her lack of a diploma, knows how to link theory to practice and gives people what they really need, as one interviewee pointed out:

Leadership or values do not depend on diplomas. The values that were transmitted by parents are fundamental... [Maggy] does reflect some leadership. She insists on the case of education, which is an object of transformation of each society. She has a lot of impact on young people to whom she has offered new perspectives. She is a figure of peace like Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, and others.

I consider her to be a super transformative leader.

(Interview with JGN, academic, Canada, 2021)

What Barankitse's actions have shown is that by promoting fundamental values in society, the impossible becomes possible.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated, through the character and the actions of Maggy Barankitse, the exercise of transformative leadership in an exceptional situation involving ethnic violence, exile, legal proceedings, and a government implicated in destroying her humanitarian work. Her vulnerability strengthened her leadership. Ultimately, as shown, her actions intersect with the intrinsic characteristics of transformative leadership. The actions, sacrifices, and commitments of Barankitse are not far from the revolution advocated by Burns (1978) to explain the purpose of transformative leadership.

Transformative leadership requires the conviction of ethics and responsibility in the management of an organisation and in the pursuit of its objectives. At this level, 2015 was a test. Barankitse showed that her morale and courage were high, and she did not give up on the beliefs and ideals she had held since 1993. Finally, transformative leaders always seek to understand universal truths and incorporate them into people's and organisations' everyday lives. The interview passages give evidence of Barankitse's post-heroic leadership. She is seen as someone who embodies and defends true and worthy social values and has deeply challenged male, ethnic, and elitist domination.

#TransformativeSocialAction

Marguerite (Maggy) Barankitse is a social activist whose actions contrast with authoritarian, 'big man', and elitist leadership, and who shows how an ordinary person with transformative leadership qualities can have an impact on many people's lives.

Questions for discussion

1. Who in your own context is a post-heroic leader like Maggy Barankitse, and what can be learned from their leadership actions?
2. In what ways are people like Maggy Barankitse an alternative to the 'big man' leadership that remains prevalent in African contexts?
3. Would you agree that Maggy Barankitse is a transformative leader? What makes her so? What actions might be missing?

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Interview

Barankitse, M., Maison Shalom, Kigali, June 2019.