

# Town founded on genocide licks its latest wounds

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**After the massacres a return to something like normality brings its own perils for devastated Rwanda. Robert Block reports from Nyamata**

The Nyamata Parish Church was empty on Christmas morning but for a statue of the Virgin Mary, looking down at a large dark bloodstain on the wall, and one small 13-year-old girl. Chantal Clementine Nizeyimana stood silently in the thin streams of light pouring, in the manner of a planetarium, through thousands of shrapnel holes in the metal roof. She stood for a long time taking in the bloodstains on the floors, altar and walls before she spoke of how she survived a massacre here last April by hiding under a pile of mutilated bodies.

Her mother, father and two older sisters - and 2,000 other people - were slaughtered in three-days by soldiers and militias of Rwanda's former Hutu extremist government. The victims were minority Tutsis or politically moderate Hutus. Chantal said she just wanted to visit the building before attending Christmas Mass at a church near by. "I feel sad coming here," she said, tracing her finger round a bullet hole in a brick pillar. "But I want them to rebuild this church so I can pray here again."

Nyamata is a microcosm of

Rwanda. The social structure as well as the infrastructure of this market town, an hour's drive south of Kigali, the capital, has been ripped apart by politically orchestrated ethnic violence and left to rebuild itself with little outside help. But conflict, death and reconstruction are not new to Nyamata. The town was first settled by Tutsi refugees who survived a Hutu uprising in 1959 which ended a long Tutsi dominion and killed or exiled hundreds of thousands of people. Massacres - in 1963, 1967 and 1973 - were used by Hutu governments to settle scores and prevent the Tutsis regaining power. After each, Nyamata licked its wounds and rebuilt.

In 1992, two years after the invasion of Rwanda by the Tutsi refugee army of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) hundreds of Tutsis were killed in the region. Hutu militias were incited by poisonous radio broadcasts which told the Hutus that if they did not kill their Tutsi neighbours, their neighbours would surely kill them. That, say human rights groups, was a rehearsal for the genocide in April 1994 which killed as many as a million people in 10 weeks.

Of the 36,000 Tutsis who lived in the Nyamata region before April 1994, all but 2,000 were killed, according to the town's mayor, Hyacinthe Mukanta-

bana. She said the vast majority of the 68,000 Hutus who lived in the area, including many who participated in the massacres and others fearful of the RPF, have fled to refugee camps in Zaire or the south-west of Rwanda. Many of their houses have been taken over by 18,000 Rwandan refugees from Burundi, who escaped earlier anti-Tutsis programs and are now taking advantage of the RPF's July victory in Rwanda.

But the RPF took over a country looted by its former rulers. Rwanda is destitute in everything from buildings to the judicial system. The world failed to deliver any substantial aid to the new government in Kigali. There are no police in Nyamata and no local magistrates. There is no electricity, no communications. There is no way to investigate any accusations made against the Hutus who are supposed to return to the area if the government closes down the remaining camps.

Ms Mukantabana, told by the government to prepare for the return of the displaced Hutus, expects trouble. "After what happened here, there is no confidence among the people," she said. But reviving a multi-party state for both Hutus and Tutsis is a main aim of Rwanda's new government.

The mayor is meeting town's people to prepare them for the Hutus' return and to tell those squatting in abandoned houses that they should be ready to move if the owners return. But she has no car and the telephones do not work. She has been unable to reach people in the countryside, where most of the trouble is expected. So far, Ms Mukantabana, a Hutu who escaped the massacres after her Tutsi husband and one of her three children were killed, said there

had been only a single case of a squatter refusing to surrender a house. Attempts to make way for people returning to their homes elsewhere in Rwanda have largely failed. The group Human Rights Watch - Africa has documented cases of owners threatened, attacked or falsely accused of participating in killings and thrown into jail. It is particularly difficult to repossess a house taken over by an RPF soldier or someone with military connections.

To avoid false accusations against those returning to Nyamata, Ms Mukantabana insists an accuser must put his or her name to a statement which will be read in court, when there are courts. An accuser who has lied for personal gain could be made to spend the same time in jail as the person falsely accused.

But it is unclear if this will work. In Nyamata's main market on Christmas Day Laurent Katete and his roommate, Romonard Sebakunda, both refugees from Burundi squatting in an abandoned house, said that they had been told to leave their squat but were resisting because the authorities had not found another house for them. Others said the two men did not want to leave the house for a Hutu family; many Burundians view all Hutus as killers. "The Burundians are difficult," said Gaston Rutayisire, another survivor from last April. "Some have arrived with an arrogant attitude even towards their fellow Tutsis. They say that we [Rwandan Tutsis] owe our survival to Tutsis like them from the outside who fought for the country. They say that they deserve special treatment."

Such tensions were foremost in the mind of the town's new priest, Fr Jean-Pierre Kaberamanzi, on Christ-

mas Day: “My Christmas message is that the time of suffering is over. It is a time to think as a family. It is important that the message of reconciliation, not the message of what happened in our parish church, is communicated here.”