

The Guardian (London)

July 5, 1994

SECTION: THE GUARDIAN FOREIGN PAGE; Pg. 12

LENGTH: 646 words

HEADLINE: TOWN WHOSE SENSES ARE DEAD TO SLAUGHTER;  
Chris McGreal in Kibuye finds evidence everywhere of a terrible massacre, but  
the people still deny anything happened there

BYLINE: Chris McGreal

BODY:

THE citizens of Kibuye, neat and clean in their Sunday best, squeezed on to the pews of their only church. Their voices rose in unison to praise life and humanity. Only the smell of death was between them and their God.

As the congregation filed in, the stench drew glances at the newly turned earth, rare acknowledgments of a terrible crime. Some had tried to scrub the church clean, but the smell filtered in from the grave at the door and the blood that worked its way deep into the stone crevices.

It lingered as a reminder of the extermination of a section of Kibuye's population that, if the townspeople are to be believed, never occurred.

There is no shortage of evidence of what happened at the church, only an unwillingness to admit it. The bullet holes speckling the corrugated iron roof; shattered windows and chipped walls; the bloody hand print of a dying Tutsi - perhaps once a member of the congregation; the thin metal toilet door sliced through by a machete in search of a victim: all testify to the murder of 3,000 Tutsis at the church on a single day in April.

Even the Tutsi priest was killed.

As if that were not enough, limbs stick out of the shallow graves sloping from the church. A skull and backbone lie on the soil, probably dragged from the grave and picked clean by dogs. Scattered amid the human remnants are shattered church icons adapted as weapons for futile self-defence against guns and knives.

But the smell of rotting flesh is the most overpowering evidence. As it enveloped the congregation, some rubbed their noses, others moved outside. The service made no mention of the massacre at the church and a nearby stadium, in which almost all the town's 10,000 Tutsis were slaughtered. There was no remembrance of the victims, no plea for forgiveness. There was only denial and lies.

One woman said it was a lie that anyone had been murdered there. Another

□  
2

PAGE

The Guardian (London), July 5, 1994

worshipper admitted there had been a slaughter, but claimed that rebels had been holed up in the church, protected by the priest. A group of boys pointed to the grave and laughed. One started to talk, but his friends hushed him. Kibuye's silence is its admission of guilt.

Guilt is not universal. Across Rwanda, brave Hutus protected Tutsi friends and neighbours. Most people were quite possibly terrified into inaction in the face of mass murder. But there is the guilt of denial, of the refusal even to acknowledge a terrible crime.

The woman who said it was all a lie refused to look at a foot protruding

from the earth, the skull on the bank or the dried blood on the church walls. She denied there was an unusual smell. Everything is normal. Nothing happened here. Where are her Tutsi neighbours? They went away, she said. All at once? She marched on, into the church to celebrate a religion that condemns murder and lies.

Only an old man who works at the church expressed regret and sorrow. In halting French, he told of the murder of entire families, of small children, of a mass of innocent people. He had wanted to tell someone that he thought it was a crime, and the only safe people to tell are outsiders.

The United Nations has recommended that those guilty of Rwanda's genocide - one of the most rapid and orchestrated slaughters of modern times - be brought to justice. In Kibuye, UN investigators could begin by examining the role of the prefect and the local army commander, his troops and the gendarmes.

But who will give evidence in a town that refuses to admit its crime? There were enough murderers: perhaps some can be persuaded to turn witness. Otherwise the killers will probably go free.

In any case, they have achieved their aim. In towns such as Kibuye, most of the Tutsis are dead. The rest are gone, or will go at the first opportunity. Kibuye has imposed a final solution on its Tutsi problem.

LOAD-DATE: July 5, 1994