**Nyamata Genocide Memorial Site**  
*Visited July 6, 2017 with guides Kate and Rachel*

The Nyamata Genocide Memorial is one of the six nationally recognized genocide memorials in Rwanda. It is located on the site of the former church about 18 miles south of Kigali.

In March of 1992, Antonia Locatelli, a Catholic missionary and educator from Italy, was murdered by the Interahamwe militia for calling attention to their plans to massacre Tutsis around Nyamata. She had alerted the Vatican and BBC to the situation. Antonia is buried at this site. Her memorial is included as part of the genocide memorial even though it predates 1994.

Beginning on April 7, Tutsis from the community began gathering at the church seeking safety and protection from the Interahamwe. 10,000 people from the surrounding areas came to Nyamata seeking refuge.

On April 11, the Interahamwe came to the church. The Tutsis tried to defend themselves with sticks, stones and whatever was available to them.

Many were killed outside the church. The Interahamwe used grenades to blow open the gates that opened into the church. Over the next two days, the Interahamwe killed all the people inside the church. There were appalling acts of violence against men, women, and children.

Survivors of the genocide were challenged by the best way to care for and remember their dead. In 1997, the Catholic Church and the Rwandan government worked together to transform the church into a memorial site and mass grave. In 1999, the site at Nyamata become one the six nationally recognized sites. There are 45,308 people buried on this site. In 2015, at new church building was constructed so that the parishioners had a worship space.

When walking into the church, visitors are confronted with the holes in the brick pathway where grenades were used to blow open the doors. From then, visitors see:
- The door to the sacristy, scarred by machete marks - the lock hacked off. Women were hiding in this area and were raped and killed when they were found by the Interahamwe.
- A statue of Mary, the mother of Jesus, unscathed by the massacre that happened the church.
- Pews filled with clothing of the victims.
- The altar, stained with blood and covered with identity cards, rosaries, and machetes.
- The tabernacle and baptismal font, filled with personal belongings from the victims.
- A staircase descending below the church floor. In this area, there are the skulls of hundreds of victims as well as a single coffin. The body within the coffin is symbolic of all the women who were sexually assaulted during the genocide.
- Three mass graves outside the church. Visitors can walk down into the graves where there are hundreds of coffins each filled with the remains of many victims.

There are no pictures allowed in the memorial out of respect for the victims of the genocide. However, pictures outside of the memorial are permitted and several photos of the memorial have been published by other organizations.

Here is a link to those images with descriptions: [http://bit.ly/2fLK71M](http://bit.ly/2fLK71M)  
Ntarama Genocide Memorial Site
Visited on July 6, 2017 with guide Innocent and Kate (genocide documentation site researcher)

Ntarama is one of the six national memorial sites that is managed by NGO’s, the Rwandan government commission, and local communities. There are over 200 genocide memorials in Rwanda.

Innocent, our guide, believes it is his role to serve the people of Rwanda by “inoculating against hate.” He shared with the group a brief history of the genocide in this region:

- The so-called ethnic divisions of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa were originally social/economic divisions for the people of Rwanda. Colonists and missionaries began using these divisions to separate the people of Rwanda. They started by spreading the Hamitic myth or the idea that the Tutsi people descended from one of the twelve tribes of Israel and not the Bantu people of the south. The colonists and missionaries claimed that the Tutsi people were taller, had lighter skin, Anglican features, and were more intelligent than the Hutu people. They discriminated against the Hutu people by setting quotas in jobs and schools. The Belgian colonists issued identity cards so that the people of Rwanda were divided.
- When the colonists left in 1959, the Hutu majority ran the government. In the Bugesera district, were Ntarama is located, Tutsis were brought to the area to be killed.
- Innocent stated that the Hutu government relocated many Tutsis to this region because they could be easily controlled. There were swamps and harsh conditions surrounding the area which made it difficult to escape. Despite this, many Tutsis went into exile in Burundi and Uganda especially in 1973 before the Second Republic.
- In 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front entered into peace talks with the Hutu government. As a response, Hutu extremists began secretly planning a final solution to the “Tutsi problem.” Anti-Tutsi propaganda flooded the airwaves and newspapers like Kangura distributed propaganda including the Hutu Ten Commandments.
- In 1992, simultaneous to peace talks, Hutu militias or Interahamwe, began training and arming themselves (with the help of the French).
- When the president was killed on April 6, people were fearful, but they didn’t fully understand the plan that was about to be carried out. They went to the church in Ntarama because this is where people went for safety during other times of unrest. Because this parish was fairly remote, it did not have a priest designated. The priest who said Mass traveled to the church on Sundays and did not live on the grounds.

As people took refuge in the church, Interahamwe came on busses to the area. On April 15, they attacked the church killing the 3,000 Tutsis who were hiding there. There are an additional 2,000 people buried on the site from the surrounding region. As our group toured the site, we saw the following as Innocent shared the story of the final days for those 3000 men, women and children:

- As you enter the church, there are shelves with skulls of the victims. The windows and roof of the church are riddled with bullet holes and blown apart by grenades. The pews are empty and broken.
- On the altar, there are notebooks, weapons, rosaries and identity cards.
- After the massacre, bodies in the church were stacked so high people could not see over them.
- Several people hid in a kitchen house behind the church. The Interahamwe lit mattresses and dried banana leaves on fire and burned down the kitchen with everyone inside. You can still see the black smoke stains on the walls. No one survived the kitchen fire.
- On the site, there is a Sunday school. Many of the children went here for safety. The Interahamwe broke into the Sunday school and killed the children inside by hitting their bodies against the wall. The walls are still stained with blood.
As the memorial is ever evolving, there is a storage shed that houses artifacts from the victims. There is clothing - which Innocent says people still use to identify their relatives. There are bags of beans, tools, cooking supplies and personal items of the victims. All of these are kept in remembrance of those who were murdered.

On the site, there are mass graves (which were undergoing some structural improvements when we visited). There was also a wall of remembrance with the names/pictures of the victims and a lantern that burns from April to June each year. It is a sign of hope - a flame burning in the darkness to light the way. Innocent described other additions to the site including a reflection garden and plans for an education center/exhibition hall.

Images from the site can be viewed here: http://bit.ly/2g7NTje