

BBC NEWS | UK | 'I forgive but I still remember'

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This year's

Holocaust

Memorial Day

- held in

Northern

Ireland - is

remembering

the 800,000

who died in

Rwanda as

well as the six

million Jews who perished at the hands of the Nazis.

BBC News Online's Finlo Rohrer speaks to a survivor of the slaughter in central Africa who is desperate for the present to learn the lessons of the past.



Beatha Uwazaninka-Smith is 24 now and is still coping with the loss of almost her entire family.

Now living in Nottinghamshire and married to a British man, she has been aware of violence and hatred for much of her life, even before the massacres of 1994.

"There was killing years before the genocide. We would hear 'somebody's missing, somebody's been killed'."

“ My mother had been thrown in the river - I saw a neighbour wearing her skirts and blouses ”

Beatha Uwazaninka-Smith

In 1987, she was sharing the same bed as her grandmother when neighbours dragged her out and beat her to death with a hammer.

During the 1994 genocide, Mrs Uwazaninka-Smith was staying with her uncle when the violence finally arrived at her doorstep.

"It was the Hutus. They were killing Tutsis, they were calling them cockroaches, calling them snakes.

"It was about 10 in the morning. They wanted to rape my cousins. My uncle refused, so they killed him with a machete."

Her four female cousins were also killed by the gang. She and a male cousin fled through the back door but were soon separated.

"I didn't see him anymore, which means they killed him."

Roadblock beatings

She then stayed with friends but had to face the threat of death every time she left the house.

"Every day we were stopped at roadblocks and beaten. Many died. It was horrible for me to see such things. People were being killed, women raped, and one time I had to lie with dead bodies to pretend I was dead."

On another occasion she narrowly escaped the clutches of Hutu militiamen who planned to rape her, having part of her finger cut off in the struggle.

Soon she discovered that her mother had not been able to escape the militia.

"My mother had been thrown in the river. I saw a neighbour wearing her skirts and blouses.

"After the genocide surviving when you are 15 years old and an orphan is hard. Memories came every day. I was missing my mother. I went to see another uncle but the house had been knocked down. Everything was like a dream."

She is sure that the genocide in Rwanda - like the Holocaust - was premeditated.

The world did not prevent the slaughter in Rwanda



"The interahamwe, like the Hitler youth, had uniforms. The roadblocks were prepared, they had meetings every week, there was a list, and there had been killing in 1992-3.

"One time a man was beating me very hard. He said 'I'm going to beat you until you forget your name - one day there will be children who will have to ask what Tutsis looked like'. It was the hatred that was in their minds."

Mrs Uwazaninka-Smith said she thought as many as 90% of the Hutus were involved in either genocide, rape or wholesale theft and demolition of Tutsi property.

Physical differences

And she can see the parallels between the crimes of the Nazis and those of the Hutus.

In school she remembers being made to take off her clothes by Hutus wanting to show that there were physical differences and resemblances to Ethiopians, trying to suggest that Tutsis were inherently foreign.

Before World War II, Belgian colonialists had measured noses and heads to establish differences between Hutus and Tutsis. Mrs Uwazaninka-Smith says there are similarities to the Germans attempts to sort invaded peoples in eastern Europe.

She added: "Also during both the whole world was watching. The newspapers in Germany tried to teach people Jews were bad, and in Rwanda they showed Tutsis as cockroaches and as Death.

"Nobody was there to speak either for the Jews or the Tutsis. And the pain in our hearts is similar.

"The past can touch the future. I can say I forgive but I still remember what happened. You still have your sadness. I miss my mother."