

100 Days in Rwanda

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Shot at the actual scenes of the mass murders of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, "100 Days in Rwanda" is a new film about the horror that took place there. Before "100 Days," director and co-producer Nick Hughes had already made documentaries about the genocide—but in this new endeavor, he and co-producer Eric Kabera created a historical fiction, using a love story to humanize the slaughter. Brooke speaks with Hughes about "100 Days in Rwanda."

BROOKE GLADSTONE: One Hundred Days is a feature film, the first that depicts the 1994 genocide in Rwanda where Hutus massacred at least half a million of the Tutsi minority. It was shot at the actual scenes of mass murder with people who saw it all, but it is not a documentary. The director and co-producer, Nick Hughes, already had made many documentaries of the horror. This time Hughes and his

co-producer, Eric Kabera, who lost 32 family members during those one hundred days, wanted to find a new way to tell the story. So they hired witnesses – Tutsis and Hutus – as actors - and Hughes created a love story to put a human face on the slaughter. The result is One Hundred Days.

MAN: The Tutsi came here; they refused to live with us, to marry us or to share power with us. There is only one solution. [SHOUTING] They must go! [CROWD CHEERS] So that they never come back! [CHEERS] You are going to clean the land for your children. You must not be frightened. The decision has been made for you. You only have to do it once. But it has to be done once and for all, and it will be – forgotten! [CHEERS] Get rid of women and their baby rats! Don't leave any rats for the future! [CHEERS] The time for work is now! [CHEERS] What we have waited for is – happening! [CHEERS] Hutu power! Power! Hutu power! [MUSIC]

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Director Nick Hughes joins us now from Rwanda. Welcome to the show.

NICK HUGHES: Thank you.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: So you're a documentary cameraman who has covered the war in Rwanda. You have hours and hours of powerful footage of the genocide. Why did you decide to tell the story of such a dramatic historical event as a fictional drama?

NICK HUGHES: I, I worked on so many documentaries after the genocide, and in many ways documentary is the best way to tell the history of such an enormous event as the genocide in Rwanda. But documentaries about Rwanda aren't watched, and if they are watched, they're watched by people who already know and have assumptions about Rwanda. And therefore you're preaching to the converted, and *A Hundred Days* is made to explain in a dramatic form – to explain what happened to – in Rwanda – to an audience who has no interest in Rwanda.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Two of the most important characters in *A Hundred Days* are Josette and Baptiste, both young lovers. Was this lovers subplot a way of drawing people in?

NICK HUGHES: You know, love is a universal theme. The audience, even if they're in Tokyo or Toronto can immediately relate to the hopes

and fears of that couple.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: I'd like to share with you my reaction to the movie. It seemed to me that when you cleaved closest to the actual events, it had the most impact, and when you moved off to the plots that you had imposed to attract the audience, because the actors were, frankly, rather wooden, it was when my mind began to wander.

NICK HUGHES: Indeed. I mean none of the actors are professional actors. But they are Rwandan, and they were portraying something under whose shadow they lived and from which they had lived. Maybe the film fails on this, and maybe we should have had very professional actors from Europe or wherever, but they weren't going to be Rwandan. Some people find the acting wooden; some people find that because they're Rwandan acting their own story, twice as powerful. I think it would be terribly wrong to have a full glossy Hollywood film made because at that point that's where you bring in all sorts of stories which have absolutely nothing to do with the genocide, and that's what's going to happen in the next year – there's going to be many films made about people who did little in the genocide or portrayed people in the genocide and they're going to be presented as – as heroes. *A Hundred Days* doesn't do that.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: And I was fascinated by your use of the extraneous characters who came through the, the UN soldiers, the journalists. You have journalists – people holding cameras – just as you yourself did during the actual genocide – scattered all through. [SOUNDTRACK FROM A HUNDRED DAYS]

MAN: Yes, hold on, hold on – [SHOUTING] Catherine! Just wait right there. [RUNNING]

WOMAN: Were they Tutsi?

MAN: I, I, I don't know - yes, they– they were Tutsi.

WOMAN: Is that why they killed them?

MAN: I don't know. I don't think so.

WOMAN: Who were they?

MAN: They were friends! Mr. Kabera [sp?] was not liked! He was in an opposition political party.

WOMAN: Is that why they killed him?

MAN: I, I don't know - maybe, maybe. I, I don't know. Maybe. [BOTH SPEAK AT ONCE]

WOMAN: Who killed him?

MAN: I, I can't tell! I don't know!

BROOKE GLADSTONE: They're generally in the way; they're irrelevant; they're taking no moral stand and they have no impact on what's going on around them – it's as if they were dropped from the moon!

NICK HUGHES: Yeah, well I

think that's exactly what happens - you had UN soldiers from the West; you had aid workers; you had ex-pats; you had journalists – all of them betrayed the Rwandan people. The media took absolutely no part in the genocide [and in ?] exposing it to the international community it brushed it off with cliches, caricatures. The aid workers, 99 percent of them, just got on the plane and left. The ex-pats just left their servants to be slaughtered and evacuate - while they evacuated their dogs. And the UN who were there brought in to protect the Tutsi population – to keep the peace – just ran away! And there's a worrying thing, I think, at the moment that the – particularly in the media – in film, in documentaries, in books – is that there is now a sort of myth-making about Westerners in Rwanda – that somehow they suffered. They didn't suffer at all. I didn't lose anybody there. You know – compared to someone who lost their entire family - generations slaughtered in a, in a month.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: It's clear that you don't have much respect for those characters who wander through your story. You don't pay much attention to them at all, and yet you yourself – when you were there – videotaped a machete-wielding man beating a woman and her daughter pleading for their lives – and it was broadcast all over the

world in 1994. Do you think it did nothing?

NICK HUGHES: Well it was something very, very small. I mean I didn't save anybody. I didn't put my camera down and save any children. And nor did anybody else. And, and nor did those people who, who sat at home and watched those two women being murdered – watching their television in, in Europe or America – nothing happened. There was no great outcry for something to be done.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: In an effort to tell your story in a way that would be popular and not cheapen or distort it, you tried to cleave a sort of middle course. You put in a love story, but you offered no redemption for any of the characters. There isn't anybody who is saved. There isn't anybody who isn't irreparably damaged. Here's a clip of a little girl talking to a UN soldier in, in front of one of the mass graves.

UN SOLDIER: Did you see what happened?

GIRL: They put all the Tutsis in the ground and [...?...] pit latrines.

UN SOLDIER: Did you know them?

GIRL: My friend Anton [sp?] is there with his whole family.

UN SOLDIER: If he was your friend, don't you miss him?

GIRL: No! He belongs in a pit latrine! It's natural! He was a Tutsi.

[SOUND EFFECT] They killed all the Tutsis because Tutsis smell bad!

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Given that the story ends on a note of absolute despair, is there any technique, including a love story, that you think would be able to keep the audience there?

NICK HUGHES: There is nothing positive about genocide. You can't come out with some glimmer of hope. Genocide is all negative. It is all dark and evil, and the suffering that people go through is beyond imagination. But if there's some understanding and some sympathy and, and there's some belief that Rwandans are human beings amongst an international audience, then that's – that's a great step.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: What has been the different reactions of the audiences you've played this for? For instance, how are they reacting in Rwanda?

NICK HUGHES: In Rwanda it was really too much. The audience just sat in silence for a moment at the end and then just fled from the cinema. I think very few people in the audience in Rwanda actually watched the film. I think most of them went inside themselves. When we show it to an audience in the West, particularly in America, I have to say, in Canada where the, the interest in A Hundred Days has been great, when the film is finished there's so

many more questions that the audience have. They want to know much more about Rwanda. We normally get thrown out of the cinema after about sort of 30 minutes or 40 minutes if Eric Kabera or I are answering questions from the audience.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: It's been shown in the U.S. mostly at film festivals and I assume you're searching for a distributor.

NICK HUGHES: One of the problems, particularly in, in the United States is that the film doesn't present Africa in a positive light. Some people would say that it sort of continues the, the negative story about Africa. The problem with that is, is what about those people who died? What about that one million people? What about their history? What about Rwanda? If you just want to tell positive stories, then you can't talk about Rwanda and you can't talk about those people and their suffering and the survivors who to this day are suffering. You just have to say, well, you know, blow you, because it's not a possible story - and that's, that's not right.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Nick - now that you made the film that you wanted to make, do you think you can find a way to forgive yourself a little bit?

NICK HUGHES: Well- it's not really a matter of forgive-

BROOKE GLADSTONE: I guess

what I mean is-

NICK HUGHES: Yeah?

BROOKE GLADSTONE: - it's obvious that you came away with an enormous burden and a sense of responsibility that you don't feel you've fulfilled and that the rest of the Western community in Rwanda certainly didn't fulfil, and you made this film - so my question is, is can you leave it alone now?

NICK HUGHES: Well, it- the film gives me an opportunity to speak about Rwanda, but I don't get the opportunity to go back and stop by the side of the road and pick up a child who's going to be murdered by the [...?...] and take him out of the country to safety - and nor does anybody else get that opportunity to do that again. And nobody said anything about stopping it happening next time. So no, I don't think there is anything really to feel positive about or redeemed about. Not at all. The genocide is the opposite of redemption. There is no redemption. You can't go back. Those people are dead, and it will happen again.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Nick, it's been a pleasure talking to you.

NICK HUGHES: Thank you.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Nick Hughes is the director and co-producer of One Hundred Days. The film will play at the African Diaspora Festival in New York this month. You can find more information at One-

HundredDaysinRwanda.net.

BOB GARFIELD: That's it for this week's show. On the Media was produced by Janeen Price and Katya Rogers with Megan Ryan; engineered by Dylan Keefe, Rob Christiansen and George Edwards, and edited— by Brooke. We had help from Sharon Ball and Natasha Korgaonkar. Our webmaster is Amy Pearl.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Mike

Pesca is our producer at large, Arun Rath our senior producer and Dean Capello our executive producer. Bassist/composer Ben Allison wrote our theme. You can listen to the program and get free transcripts at onthemediaweb.org and e-mail us at onthemediaweb@wnyc.org. This is On the Media from NPR. I'm Brooke Gladstone.

BOB GARFIELD: And I'm Bob Garfield.