

Sometimes in April

Reviewed by Patsy Toland

In 1994, almost 800,000 Rwandans were massacred over the course of 100 days. It has been called a purge or act of genocide by Hutu nationalists on their Tutsi countrymen and their Hutu supporters. These terrible events have been captured in two recent films – *Hotel Rwanda* and *Shooting Dogs* – so is there need for another? The answer is yes: *Sometimes in April* is the most provocative of the three and a stunning film.

The title refers to the onset of the rainy season in April which now serves as a reminder of the beginning of the 100 day genocide. The film brings us into the life of Augustin (Idris Elba), a Rwandan soldier, married to Jeanne (Carole Karemera), a Tutsi woman, whose normal, secure life crumbles as he realises that nowhere is safe and no-one is spared as the Hutu massacres unfold. The outside world is aware of the events, but fails to intervene in the ongoing genocide seemingly more preoccupied by the death of Kurt Cobain or debating the subtle differences between ‘acts of genocide’ and ‘genocide’.

The film certainly leaves the viewer with a desire to learn more about the situation in Rwanda, and provides additional benefits as a resource for development education. It briefly reviews Rwanda’s history of European colonisation, and addresses the controversial issues of inaction on the part of the United Nations and the world as a whole during the events of 1994. The DVD’s extra features contribute to its educational value. Director Raoul Peck’s commentary allows us to learn his political motivation for this project and offers insights into his craft. There is also an excellent ‘Making - *Sometimes in April*’ feature which allows us to listen to the main actors and their motivation for getting involved in the film and playing the characters who bring the story to life – an excellent resource for film study as well as insight into the Rwandan people. The film was made in Rwanda and derives greater authenticity and poignancy from the use of locations where human rights abuses were perpetrated in 1994.

The story is observed through the relationship between Augustin and his brother Honore and their roles on opposite sides of events during the genocide. The film opens with the United Nations’ trial of Honore for his part as a radio journalist in provoking the Hutu massacres and is contrasted with Augustin’s efforts to come to terms with his personal loss in events supported and incited by his brother. Honore’s journey is also witnessed by Martine, a teacher from his daughter’s school, who now lives with him. Her physical and emotional journey carries us through much of the horror of the events culminating with her participation in the Gacaca (open community

trials) of those accused of participating in the massacre at her school.

The role of the USA and echoes of the war in Iraq are pointedly drawn in a telephone conversation between Colonel Bagosora (Abby Mukiibi Nkaaga) and Assistant General Secretary to President Clinton, Prudence Bushnell (Debra Winger). When threatened with the might of the US army he replies ‘We have no oil here, no diamonds, we have nothing you need in Rwanda – why would you come?’.

This is a film that strives to be honest in its portrayal of the Rwandan genocide, not just through the feature itself but through the additional information on the conflict and making of the film provided by the extra features. When you get the DVD - watch it all!

Sometimes in April (2005) [Film]. Peck, R. Languedoc-Roussillon: Cinéfacto.

Patsy Toland is the Development Education Coordinator for Self Help Development International.