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In Rwanda we say...The Family that does not speak dies (Video Documentary). Anne Aghion, Director. Brooklyn, NY: First Run-Icarus Films, 2004. 54 min.

There has been much interest in the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda lately due to the ten year anniversary which was commemorated in April of 2004. Even Hollywood came out with a Rwandan themed film titled *Hotel Rwanda* to coincide with the anniversary. I think that this is a good development, and we should not let the genocide be forgotten lest it be repeated. The film *In Rwanda we say...The Family that does not speak dies* is not a big budget film like *Hotel Rwanda*, but it is a low budget documentary filmed on location which lets the survivors speak for themselves about their experiences ten years after the genocide took place. For that reason alone, it is a valuable document for students of the Rwandan genocide. The film is almost exclusively in Kirwanda, with English subtitles. This film is a sequel to the documentary "Gacaca, Living Together Again in Rwanda?" also directed by Aghion. This sequel begins with the release of hundreds of prisoners who had gone through the Gacaca court system, had confessed their crimes, and were pardoned.

The documentarians specifically follow the path of one Rwamfizi, a rural farmer from a village in the hills called Rubona. Rwamfizi tells his side of the story; which is that he was part of the Hutu night patrols who occasionally murdered people, but that he was falsely accused of killing specific people in Rubona. On the other side we have returned Tutsi men and Hutu widows who were married to slain Tutsi men who claim that Rwamfizi is a liar. It is impossible to know who is telling the truth here, ten years after the fact, and the filmmakers leave it to the audience to form their own opinions. Importantly, the survivors tell the film crew how *they* feel, except for when someone rattles off the official Rwandan government party line on reconciliation. Also telling, is how the film shows the divide between those willing to forgive and pardon, and those who refuse to reconcile with those they consider to be the former assassins of their families.

The widows also say "These whites ask us if we are happy.... These whites ask the strangest questions!" This brings up the issue of the role of the filmmakers. Their style is to remain out of sight. They want the story to tell itself from the mouths of the survivors. Yet this presents problems. The director never states what their reasons are for making the documentary, who invited them, and how they persuaded their informants to talk. This raises the following questions. Were these people paid? Did they fear not talking to the film crew? Did they fear straying off the official party line? And were the encounters between ex-prisoners and survivors drinking beer together in the local boutique staged for the camera when presented as everyday moments captured on film? Unfortunately, we don't know because the director never addresses these methodological questions. The other shortcoming of the film is that the background to the Rwandan genocide is not presented, so the uninitiated audience soon becomes confused about why the informants are acting certain ways and saying certain things. The filmmaker mistakenly

assumes a real knowledge of the background of the genocide on the part of the audience.

Secondly, the informants are only identified by their names, not as either Hutu or Tutsi. This may be in keeping with current official policy of the Rwandan government that all citizens are simply Rwandan, and there is no ethnic divide. However, if no informants are identified (except by their names) the audience has to guess based on their testimony whether they self-identify as either Hutu or Tutsi. Only then does the testimony begin to make sense. For example when one informant says “We must get along with them, they outnumber us”, the initiated know that he is talking as a Tutsi man, surrounded by a Hutu majority. Unfortunately, again for the uninitiated, it may be difficult to make these identifications independently.

Therefore in sum, this film is a valuable historical document. It should be viewed critically by students of the genocide. Other viewers will need some basic background knowledge to be able to make any sense of this film which is dialogue heavy, and in which the informants speak with many of the same assumptions concerning background understanding on behalf of the audience that the filmmakers seem to take for granted.

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