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ANALYSIS OF HOTEL RWANDA AND ITS CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

After the independence of Rwanda from Belgium, chaos erupted between the two main tribes in Rwanda i. e. The Hutu and the Tutsi. The resentment stemmed from the fact that the minority Tutsi who had been favored by the Belgium colonialist had been left a lot of wealth and controlled much of the land. The country was filled with ethnic tension which boiled over in 1994 when the country's president Juvenal Habyarimana, who was a Hutu, was killed after his plane was shot down. The genocide that followed was one of the worst ever recorded in the history of mankind.

The movie Hotel Rwanda, created by Nick Nolte and Keir Pearson shed light on a man called Paul Rusesabagina who helped rescue more than 1200 people by sheltering them in the hotel he was a manager of. At the height of the tension between the Hutu and the Tutsi, the main character Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle) is a hotel manager of a 4 start luxury hotel in the center of Kigali called Hotel des Mille Collines. Paul is a Hutu but his wife is a Tutsi, this does not go well with his friends who are anti-Tutsi. As political tension worsens, Paul and his wife watch as their neighbors are beaten and tortured. However when he finds himself in charge of Tutsis who are in grave danger, he takes upon himself to protect them from the prowling Hutu militias who are out for blood. Paul uses his political connections and even bribes people of influence to keep his family and all those he is protecting safe.

The whole world including the UN does not take any assertive actions to help the people in need, rather they air lift all foreign people to safety, leaving the

innocent Tutsi in the hands of the Hutu militia. The film also showcases the efforts of a Canadian Colonel Oliver (Nolte) who rebels against his superiors' orders of not intervening in the conflict. The Colonel carries out a daring rescue mission to save the refugees in Paul's hotel. Soon after, all the refugees and hotel guests are rescued and are able to cross over to the Tutsi rebel lines where they are safe.

When Rwanda gains its independence, Belgium leaves a state of disarray and confusion in the country due to their use of 'divide and conquer' method. Tribes are spread all over and the ethnic difference is strongly felt in Rwanda. They experience a major bout of culture shock which makes them unable to deal with the ethnic tensions that soon lead to genocide. The inability of the Hutu and the Tutsi to adapt to a modern interethnic world led to their own demise. In the movie, a reporter stated that he did not see any physical difference between the Hutu and the Tutsi. This clearly shows that if the culture shock had been addressed, genocide would have been avoided.

What is the key turning moment?

Paul Rusesabagina had earlier lived ignorant of the ethnic tension that surrounded him. His brother's warnings fell on deaf ears and he was unwilling to accept that his country would be turned into a war zone. Paul was also keen in protecting his family alone and did not feel the need to save others, the movie shows how Paul watched the abuse meted to the Tutsi without lifting a finger. The turning point in the movie came when Paul's son came running into the house drenched with blood, at first Paul and his wife

were horrified by the site but later realized that it wasn't his blood but their neighbor's blood. This horrific incident brings out something in Paul that makes him take his neighbors to the hotel and any other refugees that came to him for protection.

What value conflicts are in the movie?

There are two instances where there are conflicts in values. Firstly, Rwanda's president creates a peace pact between the Tutsi and Hutu. Being a forward thinking man, he acts against the majority view of chasing the Tutsi away from Rwanda and continues to advance for peace in his country. During a UN dinner party at Paul's hotel, the Hutu military men toast the president " may he find peace". This seemed to be a death threat to the president and it showed that the Hutu wanted the president dead because they believed he had betrayed them. When the president he dies, they put all the blame on the Tutsi and use this as a reason to attack and kill them.

Finally, the use of corruption by Paul to protect the ' guests' in his hotel seems ironical. This however does not make him a bad man, rather shows his forward way of thinking. He acknowledges power of bribes and sweet talk. He bribes himself through almost every situation by using money, beer and cigars. This use of street smarts helps him to maintain the image of a well-functioning luxury hotel which keeps the refugees safe.

What can be learned from the culture in the movie?

As stated earlier, the divide and conquer method applied on Rwanda was the main cause of ethnic tensions. It is clear from the movie when Paul's courier, who supplies him with hotel goods, depicts his hatred for the Tutsi. His

remarks, efforts to make Paul attend a Hutu rally and his allegiance to the Hutu militia Interahamwe shows the extent to which he valued ethnic prejudice.

The Rwandese culture shows openness to corruption. People do not seem to fight it but rather accept it as part of their daily lives. It is evident that the only way a person could acquire any service was by bribing their way out. The movie shows Paul bribing the courier with a cigar and also bribes the army general with expensive beer.

What cultural dimensions can be applied to the culture(s) portrayed in the movie?

It is apparent in the movie that physical might or political standing does not protect people during dangerous situations. The Tutsi leading elite were executed regardless of their worth to society. Paul uses his family's powerful connections to smoothly grease political wheels. Paul knows that only by remaining as the hotel manager can he save the people who are under his protection, He remains calm and encourages those around him even when he himself is gripped with fear and is even unable to tie his own tie.

What are the effects of communication differences between cultures and how do they affect the movie?

Paul's brother-in-law tries to warn him of the impending danger but Paul does not feel the urgency to act. This was because his brother-in-law was a Tutsi and Paul was a Hutu. The fact that he did not experience imminent danger because of his ethnic orientation led to a breakdown in communication. Another instance where culture brings about communication

differences is seen when a Canadian Colonel tries to ask his superiors permission to intervene and rescue some of the Tutsi tribesmen. The fact that his superiors were not African isolated them from the sorrow caused by the death and misery of the Tutsi. The international community did not respond to any requests to send help to Rwanda.

In summary, Hotel Rwanda was a true depiction of the African culture and its relationship to the international community. It showed how the Europeans had left Africa in cultural disarray where opposing tribes were placed on the same land consequently leading to conflict.