

# Intercultural barriers in film: hotel rwanda essay sample



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Intercultural communication is “ a method of communication that aims to share information across different cultures and social groups” (<http://www.uslegal.com/>). The challenges that may occur during this type of communication stem from misunderstanding or lack of trust of people customs that are foreign to the listener. This can cause many barriers when trying to initiate intercultural communication. I will be discussing the film Hotel Rwanda while analyzing the different intercultural barriers and diversity issues that are presented within the film.

Hotel Rwanda was released in 2004 and based on the story of the heroic acts of Paul Rusesabagina, played by Don Cheadle, during the Rwandan Genocide in the spring of 1994. Paul Ruseabagina was a hotel manager at the Hotel Des Mille Collines when these atrocities began. He managed to house over a thousand Tutsi refugees during the war that was led by the Hutu militia. This war started on April 4, 1994, one day after Tutsi rebels shot down the airplane of Rwanda’s Hutu president, Juvenal Habyarimana. The war lasted until July 15th of that year; nearly a million Tutsi men, women, and children were slaughtered. The movie was written by Terry George and Keir Pearson, George also produced and directed the film, an adaptation of a screenplay written by Pearson.

There are many characters within the film that had a direct or indirect impact on Paul Rusesabagina and the Tutsi refugees he sheltered. Paul’s Tutsi wife, Tatiana Rusesabagina, was his top supporter; she was the main force pushing him to help those in need. Mr. Tillens, the president of the Belgian company, Sabena, which owned the Hotel des Mille Collines. He also supported and encouraged Pau, he tried to send help and do as much as he <https://assignbuster.com/intercultural-barriers-in-film-hotel-rwanda-essay-sample/>

could from his headquarters in Belgium. Colonel Oliver, the only fictional character in the film, was based after Canadian Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire. He was the commanding officer of the UN peacekeeping mission; they were brought into Rwanda before the war started to keep the peace after the Rwandan president signed a peace treaty with the Tutsi rebel leader. Colonel Oliver tried to assist during the Rwandan war with no support from his superiors.

Dube, a hotel worker was Paul's right hand man, assisting him when needed to uphold the standards of the hotel and help the Tutsi guest. American Photographer, Jack Daglish was determined to show the world what was really happening in Rwanda; he revealed many gruesome images, his role was very small but an enormous impact on Paul's mindset. George Rutugunda, the supplier for many businesses in Rwanda, including Paul's hotel; he is Hutu and a big supporter of the war, as the broadcaster of Hutu Power radio, his character embodies the hatred that many Hutus felt toward Tutsis. There was also the Hutu militia leader, General Bizimungu, the man in charge of the army sent to kill all of the Tutsi in Rwanda. Paul established a business relationship with him before the war and was able to manipulate the General into sending some of these soldiers to the Mille Collines to protect the Tutsi refugees they wanted to slaughter.

I would first like to give a little back story on the history of division between the Tutsis and Hutus, in order to give a better understanding of what may have led up to this event. There were some strategic activities by outside forces that caused most of the division and led up to this massacre. Rwanda is made up of three ethnic groups, the Twa, the original inhabitants of the <https://assignbuster.com/intercultural-barriers-in-film-hotel-rwanda-essay-sample/>

land, the Hutu were the first settlers there, and the Tutsi migrated there many years later. All ethnic groups lived peacefully before colonization by European forces. Although there was division between the Hutu and Tutsi based on class; the Hutu were farmers/working class, while the Tutsi were of the ruling class/wealth and power but with hard work and monetary gain Hutus could become honorary Tutsi. Rwanda was colonized by the Germans and Belgians, who separated the Hutus and Tutsis based on physical characteristics. The Tutsi were seen as the more intelligent, elegant group because their height, complexion, more “European” features. Due to this the colonial rulers thought the Tutsi were the superior group and treated them as such while discriminating against the Hutu; they eventually issued pass books to further divide each group. Before the Belgian colonizer left the country they put Hutu in power, causing unrest and acts of revenge, which finally led to the genocide.

The film, *Hotel Rwanda*, starts during the height of the unrest, the Rwandan president has just signed a peace treaty with Tutsi leaders but soon after his plane is shot down by Tutsi rebels. There are a few scenes in which intercultural communication barriers were present. In one scene UN Colonel Oliver, who is visibly upset, is sitting with Paul after meeting with the UN to ask for the world leading nations to intervene and send aid to the Tutsi refugees. The Colonel is sadly trying to explain to Paul that there will be no intervention from the western world. Telling him that the world does not care about what is going on in an African country, “You’re black” he states, “you’re not even a nigger.”

You're African". In this scene the intercultural communication, ethnocentrism is present. It seems that the Western powers feel superior to the Rwandans; they are not even worth the assistance because of the differences in culture and traditions. I feel that this made Paul feel alone in this struggle, he was left to fight for his people on his own. I also believe that this had an effect on the Colonel, although he did not feel this way, at that moment he was representing his country and he was ashamed of these beliefs. The best strategy for this barrier, I believe, is becoming other-oriented. If there was any consideration for the people of Rwanda, if people took the time empathize with what was going on the situation could have been stopped much sooner and thousands of lives could have been saved.

In another scene George Rutaganda, the Hutu rebel leader and hotel supplier, can be heard speaking over the radio. He says, " When people ask me, " why do I hate all Tutsi", I say, read our history". The Tutsi were collaborators for the Belgian colonist, they stole our land, and they whipped us, now they have come back, these Tutsi rebels. They are cockroaches, they are murderers. Rwanda is our Hutu land. We are the majority. They are a minority of traitors and invaders, we will squash the infestation" (www.imdb.com). I think this scene shows the stereotyping and prejudice intercultural communication barrier as well as ethnocentrism.

This type of thinking is what caused the separation between Tutsi and Hutu in the first place. The continuous spreading of this hate speech by Hutu rebel leaders caused the two groups to turn on each other, ultimately leading to the mass slaughter of Tutsi by not only the Hutu army but citizens as well.

The two groups should have applied the barrier strategy of developing  
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knowledge to assist in eliminating these barriers. The leaders could have asked question to clear up any problems from the past. They could have come to the realization that events from the past should not dictate how they live in the future. They could have worked out the problems on more of a local scale, instead of nationally and may have been able to create a unified third culture.

I believe that the film, Hotel Rwanda, is an amazing example of the lasting impact of intercultural communication barriers. Most of these atrocities could have easily been avoided if the people were able to realize the error in their thinking. I also feel that the film does a great job in showing intercultural communication barriers in groups of the same race. It is much easier to dissect and see problems when the differences are obvious in appearance. It shows that we must be mindful in all of our actions; we have to take the time to put ourselves in the other person's shoes and ask how certain behaviors would make us feel. We have all, in some way or another, been affected by intercultural barriers, it is what we do upon realization that matters the most. If we take these steps we as a people will have the ability to eliminate intercultural communication barriers all together.

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