

Drama, reality merge in Rwanda feature film

KIBUYE, Rwanda (AP) — The human bones the actor found behind the movie set were real.

When he pried the rest of the skeleton from the soft, dark earth with his hands, his fellow actors cried.

Some were Rwandans who may have known the person who fell under the blade of a machete and whose remains were left to rot in the weeds.

Day after day, the makers of "100 Days" faced reminders of horrors they want the world not to forget.

"The country is a graveyard," said Nick Hughes, who directed and wrote the script for the feature-length film, a love story set during the days of madness in 1994 when Rwanda's Hutu government orchestrated the slaughter of at least 500,000 people, most of them minority Tutsis.

"There are so many ruined houses, so many bodies," said Hughes, who covered the bloodbath as a free-lance TV cameraman. Five years later, he returned to Rwanda as a filmmaker, hoping to show the world what really took

place. "The international community, the international public, does not realize what happened in Rwanda," Hughes said in an interview, as three months of filming drew to an end.

"What happened in Germany in 1941 to 1945 has been reworked and reworked and reworked, and every year it is reworked more. The Rwandan genocide is not reworked. It is slowly dying, apart from the memories of the people who experienced it and lost everybody."

The British-born Hughes, 38, wanted a sweeping movie that would draw an audience not particularly interested in Rwanda. But no one would finance it.

He peddled his script from Europe to Hollywood, pleading for financing from independent film companies and broadcasters in Europe and North America.

Holocaust organizations and Stephen Spielberg, maker of the Academy Award-winning "Schindler's List," did not respond either.

"One person even suggested I change the script

to be one that was based around Bosnia," Hughes said.

But that was unthinkable to the filmmaker. Hughes had covered violent events all over Africa, but none had affected him like the Rwanda genocide.

For three months, people were chased into maize fields and banana plantations and hacked down by machete-wielding soldiers bent on ethnic extermination. The 100-day slaughter was "of a different magnitude, something incomprehensible."

Rwandan producer Eric Kabera helped raise \$500,000 from Rwandan businessmen and local hotel owners and entrepreneurs.

With another \$150,000 of his own money and \$750,000 in equipment, time and personnel from Vivid Features, his Kenya-based media company, Hughes hired a handful of professional Kenyan actors and a mostly inexperienced Rwandan cast and crew, and went to western Rwanda to film.

It wasn't difficult to get into character. The effects of the genocide pervade the tiny,

beautiful country in the heart of Africa.

St. Jean Roman Catholic Church in Kibuye was abandoned after thousands of Tutsis, sent there by Hutu officials who promised them security, were slaughtered inside the building.

Like so many parishes that dot Rwanda's hilltops, the church still bears the stench of death. It was the perfect setting for many scenes.

On the first day of filming, the cast and crew reverently entered the church, and some wept as survivors told their stories, Hughes recalled.

Many quickly fled the church, unable to tolerate the grief.

But a few weeks into a grueling filming schedule, they were sleeping inside the church. It was, he said, as if making the movie had exorcised the demons from the gray stone building.

Hughes, whose videotape of a machete-wielding man hacking a woman pleading for her life was broadcast all over the world in 1994, based his script on what he saw and on stories from dozens of survivors.

"This is not Hollywood coming to Africa," said Steve Parr, who is producing a one-hour documentary on the filming called "The Making of 100 Days."

"Actors are actual survivors. Some have physical scars, all have emotional scars."

Centered on two young lovers, the film follows their families through the horrors of being Rwandan Tutsis as the world around them goes mad with the desire to kill.

Young Josette's family is murdered in the church, but she is saved by a priest who later rapes her, and she bears his child.

As one of the film's characters says: "This is not Rwanda, this is hell."

As the reality of the genocide unfolded, so does the film.

It portrays how the killing gains pace, how officials become not just killers, but master planners of the slaughter, and how priests, through their actions or simply by silent acquiescence, become willing accomplices.

U.N. peacekeeping forces

in Rwanda at the outbreak of the genocide abandon the victims just days after the nightmare begins. And troops from France, which had close ties with the Hutu government, help Hutu officials and clergymen escape while Tutsis are left behind.

Hughes is seeking another \$100,000 to produce the documentary and a final copy of the film by the end of this month, in time for the international film festival circuit.

With a total budget of \$1.5 million and no professional distributor to aid them, Hughes does not expect the film to be a blockbuster. But interest in the project has picked up since filming was completed in November, and he does hope the story will resonate enough to keep the memory of the Rwanda genocide alive.

Still, the critics he most values, are the ones whose feedback he will never hear.

"I just really hope that the ghosts out there watching us making this film — (will know) that we have not let them down," he said.

History

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daughter, Juanity, was one of the first blacks to be educated from kindergarten through high school in Las Vegas schools. She later married Larry Barr who was one of the first black City employees.

1925 saw the election of John Fred Hesse as mayor. He promised the town's minorities that the Klu Klux Klan would never again march through Las Vegas. True to his word, the Klan never again burned a cross as they had previously done on the ground that now is the location of the Reed Whipple Cultural Center.

The local branch of the NAACP was organized in 1926 with A.B. Mitchell as president and Henry Wilson, another early pioneer, as a secretary.

The 1928 announcement that work was to begin on the Dam project brought thousands of workers from across the country to town long before there were any jobs available. The influx of the unemployed brought new problems to the community because there were no jobs or housing available. (Continued next week)

Scream

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based on the plot of Scream Two. When the set is disrupted by, what else, murder, Sidney, who had settled in seclusion in the California countryside, has her uneasy peace shattered by this development.

Cotton, as usual, explains the rules. For the conclusion of a trilogy: Rule #1: The killer is superhuman. Rule #2: Anyone can die. Rule #3: The past is not at rest. And Rule #4: All bets are off.

Since the actors in Stab 3 are playing characters already in Scream 3, in effect, we have two Sidneys, two Gale Weathers, even two movies.

This only serves to compound the dizzying tension and the confusion. Will the killer behave in accordance with horror-flick dictates? As we endure a perilous two hours of frazzled nerves, Wes Craven scares us silly while poking fun at the genre, at the actors and even at the audience.

Diallo

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During 1997 and 1998, the undercover unit's officers stopped and frisked 45,084 people. Yet, that action resulted in only 9,546 arrests.

In other words, 35,000 people were stopped on the streets of New York because the officers guessed — wrongly — that they were carrying contraband.

Statistics such as this, the stunning revelations about the pervasive racial profiling practiced by the New Jersey State Police, and a spate of questionable fatal police shooting of African-Americans across the country are the reasons the Reverend

Al Sharpton was able to stage daily demonstrations of great "diversity" at NYPD headquarters.

They are the reasons leaders from nearly a dozen organizations including the National Council of La Raza, the Anti-Defamation League, the National Asian Pacific Legal Consortium, and the National Organization of Black Las Enforcers joined the National Urban League at a February 1999 news conference in Washington urging the federal government to help reform racist police policies.

These practices are what people of color face when

they drive the nation's highways, walk city streets, and, sometimes, just stand in front of their residences. Many people of color realize - that but for time and circumstance - what happened to Amadou Diallo could have happened to them, or their children, or their next-door neighbors.

This is part of the reality of life for the people of color white America forgets at the nation's peril. The four police officers may appear to be the only ones standing under the clock in that courtroom in Albany, NY, but they are not alone. The integrity of America's criminal justice system is on trial too.

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