IN RWANDA WE SAY...
The family that does not speak dies

A FILM BY ANNE AGHION

Color. 54 mins.
In Kinyarwanda with English subtitles

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MUSIC

“Umugezi” - Ben Ngabo - Production D’Clicq ©
“Inkotanyi Cyane” - Viateur Kabalira - Fonti Musicali ©
“Nyaruguru” - Jean Paul Sampitu ©
“Indamukanyo” - Cécile Kayerebwa - Etna Records ©
SYNOPSIS

Around the world, preparations are now underway to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. Since 1999, award-winning filmmaker Anne Aghion has traveled to rural Rwanda, to chart the impact of that country's efforts at ethnic reconciliation. "In Rwanda we say... The family that does not speak dies", her second film on the subject, continues Aghion's quest to learn how the human spirit survives a trauma as unfathomable as the attempt, in 1994, to wipe out the Tutsi minority, with 800,000 lives claimed in 100 days. "In Rwanda we say..." is the next chapter in a fascinating and intimate look at how, and whether, people can overcome fear, hatred and deep emotional scars, to forge a common future after genocide.

Aghion's influential 2002 film, "Gacaca, Living Together Again in Rwanda?" captured the feelings of both survivors and alleged killers in the remote community of Ntongwe, just as the government was announcing the Gacaca (ga-CHA-cha), a new system of citizen-based justice intended to handle over 100,000 genocide suspects languishing in detention. "In Rwanda we say..." returns two years later as close to 16,000 of these suspects, still untried, are released across the country: having confessed to their crimes, and served the maximum sentence the Gacaca will eventually impose, suspects of appalling crimes are sent home to plow fields and fetch water alongside the people they are accused of victimizing.

"In Rwanda we say..." focuses on the release of one suspect, and the effect of his return on this tiny hillside hamlet. While the government's message of a "united Rwandan family" infiltrates the language of the community, reactions to this imposed co-existence reel from numb acceptance to repressed rage. Violence seems to lurk just below the surface. What unfolds, however, is an astonishing testament to the liberating power of speech: little by little, people begin to talk in a profound and articulate way – first to the camera, and then to each other -- as these neighbors negotiate the emotional task of accepting life side by side.
INTRODUCTION

Try to imagine this: Your family and friends were massacred, hacked to pieces by lifelong neighbors. Ten years later, the killers are released from jail. They move back, just down the road. You have to work near them, cross paths every day. And every time you see them, you remember. Now, imagine that the government is not just asking you to live near them in peace, not just to forego your natural desire for revenge, but they’re asking you to forgive. Could you do it?

This is exactly the challenge people across Rwanda are facing today. In 2003, the government released some 16,000 confessed participants in the 1994 genocide, and sent them home. With “In Rwanda we say…The family that does not speak dies,” award-winning documentarian Anne Aghion goes to Gafumba, a tiny hillside community in rural Rwanda, to see how people are coping with this.

With stops at the local school and bars—called cabarets—the film focuses on the return of a freed prisoner, Abraham Rwamfizi, and the impact of his homecoming on neighbors, survivors and even in-laws who blame him for the murder of their families. After months of taping people’s conflicting fears, accusations and counter-accusations, and strained acceptance of reintegration, one of Aghion’s interview subjects—Jean Paul, the sole surviving child in his family—suggested to Aghion that she call a meeting with everyone she’d been talking to. “Next time you come, why don’t you bring them along…And we’ll have a talk with our killers,” he challenged.

This was a potentially explosive proposition, and the filmmaker spent weeks deliberating the possible consequences. “I went over and over the tapes with my editor and my producer, and we all found that the people of Gafumba looked lost. I decided Jean Paul was right.”

Everyone Aghion had been following on the hill agreed to participate. As the camera rolled, mortal enemies sat in a room together for the first time in ten years. “You can see it in the film. As they entered the cabaret where we held the meeting, the body language between them told the whole story,” says the director. Over the course of four hours, in this emotionally charged place, they began to negotiate how they would talk about the past and the future.

Perhaps the most important revelation in the film is the power of dialogue to clear the path for co-existence. “This is a movie about talking,” asserts Aghion. “It took nearly a year for the group conversations in this film to take place. But eventually, people who couldn’t bear to look at each other, confessed killers and people who’d lost their whole families went into the same room, shared a drink from the same bottle, and started a real conversation about how to live together.”
It is surely too early to know the impact of this extraordinary meeting, it is a revealing and meaningful look at how people might learn to cope with such unfathomable tragedy.

“There is no worse situation in the world today than what happened in Rwanda,” says Aghion. “There is something profound and illuminating to be learned here, which surely can apply to people anywhere – whether in Iraq, the Balkans, Cambodia, or Israel and Palestine.”

GIVING VOICE TO THE PEOPLE ON THE HILLSIDES

“In Rwanda we say…” is Aghion’s second film about the aftermath of the 1994 genocide in that torn country. For the award-winning 2002 “Gacaca, Living Together Again in Rwanda?”, she first went to the rural district of Ntongwe (n-HONG-way), as the government was announcing a controversial new judicial program. She spent months, recording reactions to the new laws, in the prisons and among survivors.

Journalists and authors from around the world have covered this same story, but Aghion’s work remains unique in the voice she gives to a population far from the center of power, and in her emphasis on the real human side of reconciliation efforts. As author and world-renowned expert Alison Des Forges told The New York Times in April 2003, “What I find extraordinary about Anne's film is that she stayed around and listened long enough. The kind of attention that Rwanda has received after the genocide has been dominated by people who came from the outside, who formed quick judgments about good guys and bad guys.”

“Gacaca…” has proved to be an influential film. Winner of UNESCO’s Fellini Prize, it has been seen and praised by leading Rwanda experts, screened at foundations and conferences, and at institutions from The Kennedy School at Harvard University to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.. The film continues to be used by specialists in fields ranging from human rights law and transitional justice, to genocide and trauma studies. But perhaps most significantly, the British Department for International Development (the equivalent of US AID), funded distribution of the film across Rwanda for local government leaders and workers at aid organizations.

The nuanced insight offered by “Gacaca…” prompted the Swiss and Austrian development offices to contribute funds for “In Rwanda we say…” . And, when the President of Rwanda announced that prisoners would be released on short notice, the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs fast-tracked emergency funds through the Cabinet, so Aghion’s crew could return in time for the event.

Indeed, it was the funding from these governments that allowed this film to be made in time for the 10th anniversary commemorations of the genocide.
Now, as 10th anniversary commemorations of the genocide are being prepared around the world, “In Rwanda we say...The family that does not speak dies” sheds light on the emotional turbulence of living in the aftermath.

**RWANDA TODAY**

In 1994, the Hutu-led government of Rwanda orchestrated what they hoped would look like a grass-roots uprising to wipe out the country’s Tutsi minority, along with politically moderate Hutus. Peasants out on the hillsides were exhorted to use machetes and other everyday farm tools to butcher their Tutsi neighbors. It was a stunningly effective campaign: in just 100 days, between April and June 1994, some 800,000 lives were taken.

In 2003, the government—now led by the Tutsi president Paul Kagame—ordered the release of close to 16,000 prisoners who stood accused of genocidal crimes. They were suspects, among a total of well over 100,000, who had been in detention, awaiting trial for nearly a decade.

The released suspects meet two criteria mandated by a new system of citizen-based justice called the Gacaca (ga-CHA-cha); they have confessed to crimes, and they have already served the prison term the Gacaca would impose. Their freedom is provisional; trials still loom in the future for these suspects. But in the meantime, after attending over eight weeks of reconciliation training at “solidarity camps,” they have returned home to live side-by-side with the very families they were accused of victimizing.

The state that once sanctioned genocide now, under different leadership, has embarked on a reconciliation campaign to prevent future ethnic violence. A key component is the Gacaca, which was designed to handle the trials of all but the masterminds of the genocide. Adapted from a traditional Rwandan method of conflict resolution, the Gacaca trials will be held in the open-air, presided over by panels of locally elected citizen-judges, with the participation and testimony of the citizens in each and every community across the country.

The goals of the Gacaca are, first, to mete out justice to the massive number of suspects awaiting trial. The country has neither the infrastructure to try 100,000 suspects, nor the resources to keep them incarcerated indefinitely. The idea then, is that prisoners will trade confessions for shorter prison terms combined with community service. The second goal is to promote reconciliation by publicly airing the truth about what happened during the genocide. In this context, confessions also serve as a public plea for forgiveness.

The Gacaca have been widely supported by the international community as a bold and innovative experiment, and were presented to the Rwandan populace as the best and only path to reconciliation. Unfortunately, the timeline for implementation is now a big question mark.
Some steps have been taken; pre-Gacaca presentations (which Aghion filmed) were initiated in some parts of the country in 2001; over 250,000 citizen-judges were elected to sit on 11,000 local tribunals; and a pilot Gacaca program was launched with great fanfare in June of 2002. To date, however, no trials have been held.

The government is now saying they will take the Gacaca nationwide in the spring of 2004, but some observers counter that 2006 is a more realistic timeframe for the trials to start. Rwandans are becoming disillusioned. As one Ntongwe woman told Aghion, “This Gacaca... I don’t know if it’s going to happen in twenty years or not. They’ll tell us the day before, and we’ll just have to go.”

In the meantime, the state is pressing the message that the country must unite as one Rwandan family. Tutsi survivors are being urged to accept that perpetrators of genocidal crimes were coerced into action by the state and should be forgiven once they confess. The Hutu are being asked to abandon the ethnic divisiveness that was systematized by Belgian colonists after World War I. Though the country became independent in the early 1960s, up until the genocide, the legacy of ethnic hatred had periodically exploded into brutality.

As Aghion sees it, the need for the Gacaca to begin is palpable, and she feels “In Rwanda we say...” makes that case. “After drumming the ideas of Gacaca and reconciliation into people’s heads, the government is now leaving them to their own devices to figure it all out. The people seem to feel abandoned. They’re clinging to the Gacaca as the miracle solution but in the meantime not much is happening.”

RWAMFIZI COMES HOME

“In Rwanda we say...” is the story of Abraham Rwamfizi’s homecoming to Gafumba (ga-FOOM-ba), a “cell” in the Rubona sector of the district of Ntongwe (n-HONG-way), and an area in Southern Central Rwanda inhabited primarily by poor peasant farmers.

A farmer in his late fifties, and the father of more than 12 children, Rwamfizi is from a prominent family on the hill, and was, before the genocide, a leader in the cell. Aghion followed him from the day of his release.

“He’s a charming, charismatic guy,” says the filmmaker. But there are numerous accusations that Rwamfizi led, or at least participated in, a patrol responsible for multiple killings.

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* The Republic of Rwanda is made up of twelve prefectures, which are divided into districts encompassing roughly 20 sectors each. Communities within sectors are called cells, with populations of approximately 500-800 residents (Gafumba, where the film takes place, is unusually large at about 1,000 people). Rwanda is known as the “Land of the Thousand Hills,” and the term “on the hill” is often used interchangeably with cell.

* Rwandans are reluctant to reveal how many children they have.
Aghion first learned of Rwamfizi while filming the 2001 pre-Gacaca (first shown in “Gacaca, Living Together Again in Rwanda?” and recapped in the current film). A prosecutor presented the then-prisoner to the citizens of Rubona for clarification of the charges against him. A Hutu widow, Faïsa (FIE-sah), accused him of killing her Tutsi husband and of stealing two of her cows. A young man, Jean Paul, accused him of participating in a notorious killing spree.

Two additional Hutu widows, Félicité and the outspoken Euphrasie (Jean Paul’s mother), blamed him for the murder of their husbands and children. Rwamfizi’s own brother-in-law, Mutemberezi, leveled further charges. Elderly and prominent in the community, Mutemberezi is one of the few surviving Tutsi men in Gafumba, having managed to hide out of town during the killings. He has pointed the finger at many other local participants in the genocide.

In prison, Rwamfizi confessed to some crimes, but he denies the accusations made against him by Mutemberezi and the widows. In fact, what he actually did may never be known. Says Aghion, “He’s clearly responsible for something, but I’ve spent four years going back to Ntongwe, and I still don’t know what.”

When he got home, Rwamfizi took a day off to celebrate his freedom, and returned to his fields the following day. He’d actually been back many times over the previous year. During his prison term, he was held in the Ntongwe cachot (ka-SHO), the local lock-up, a place so desperately overcrowded, and so meagerly funded that once detainees confess, they are let out every morning to find work, so they can feed themselves on their own. Mostly, the prisoners find odd jobs on farms near the cachot, but sometimes they manage trips home to keep an eye on their own properties.

Over the course of filming him, director Aghion found out she was very lucky in her choice of subjects: “Rwamfizi is one of the few who seem to want to reintegrate,” she notes, referring to the many released prisoners who keep to themselves after their return home, whether out of fear, out of shame for their actions, or because they still maintain the hatred that drove the genocide. “I don’t know whether or not he has some other agenda, but because Rwamfizi has status, and because he’s not a kid anymore, he’s able to take a chance. He clearly feels comfortable enough to mingle.”

**LIFE ON THE HILL**

As in all of rural Rwanda, there is no electricity in Gafumba, and there is nothing by way of distraction. When people are not working the land, or doing chores around the house, they meet at one or another of the local bars, which came to have a central role in the film. Aghion explains: “It’s where people go to relax and have a drink, and where they listen to the radio. The ‘cabarets’ provide the best opportunity for released prisoners and survivors to meet and talk, and that’s where a good part of the film takes place.”
Probably the strongest impetus to get along comes from the fact that people live in a small, remote place and that they need each other.

While some parts of Ntongwe are close to the “main road,” a dirt track traversed by, perhaps, a dozen cars an hour, trucks drive into Gafumba only a few times a month, to buy cassava or charcoal.

People depend on each other for their very lives. The filmmaker explains, "If you get sick, you need someone to feed you, to bring you water, which may be half an hour away, or to take you to the hospital, which may be a two hour walk. Across Rwanda, every group of ten houses has a stretcher, and if you are injured or fall ill, the men from the other nine households carry you. If you refuse to carry the stretcher for some reason – like the person who's sick killed your family – then when you get sick, you’re done for."

Gafumba is small. “It’s not about running into someone once a month in the supermarket or the elevator,” Aghion points out. “First of all, in the hills, sound travels extremely well. You can be a mile away and hear somebody laughing or screaming.

“The field you cultivate is the size of a house, much smaller than an acre, and your neighbor’s field is right next to yours. You also fetch water from the same well every day.”

“YOU’RE MAKING THINGS COMPLICATED BY ASKING US SUCH QUESTIONS…”

Emotions on this hillside—and across Rwanda—are a complex interplay of trauma, guilt, fear, anger and the need to survive, all tempered by a perpetual flow of government propaganda. Capturing on film what people were really feeling took prodding and persistence, though the presence of the film crew, in fact seems to have prompted them to open up.

The director tells of leaving Rwanda for a few months, during which time the government went into high gear on propaganda, promoting the country’s first post-genocide elections (voting took place while Aghion was filming). On her return, she found that her interview subjects kept repeating what they were being told.

The problem, says Aghion is that “When you talk to people, what they say is ‘The state is our parent. Our parent made us kill—or made them kill us—and now the state is telling us to reconcile, so we’re reconciling’” —the government’s message in a nutshell.

By contrast Aghion notes, “What you feel when you talk with them is, ‘If I could, I’d kill them all.’ From the survivors’ side, it’s a desire for revenge. From many prisoners, it’s not so much revenge, as wanting to ‘finish the job.’ I thought it was important for them to say this out loud, and eventually, I was able to cut through the propaganda to get there.”

Compounding the problem is that “Rwandans put on a polite face in conversation. It’s the same thing you find in many countries, but here, on life and death issues, if you ask
directly, they’ll say things like ‘everyone is living together happily.’ Very few people speak as forthrightly as Euphrasie does in the film during the group meeting."

"The fact that that I’d spent so much time in Ntgonwe was a huge advantage," the filmmaker continues. "By now I know people well enough to see when they’re hedging, or hiding something, and I can call them on it."

She recounts that "One of the most exhilarating moments was when we filmed Euphrasie with another old widow, Bellancilla. "We were in Euphrasie’s house. She’d been reluctant to talk that day, but eventually said ‘okay.’ A few minutes later, her friend dropped by to ask for some tobacco leaves. She walked into the frame and the women began their dialogue."

What ensued was a graphic conversation about the trauma, anger and fear provoked by the return of the prisoners. It is so powerful and revelatory a scene, that Aghion devotes almost four minutes of her film to it.

Says the filmmaker, "Euphrasie complains that we are ‘making things complicated’ with our questions, but then makes clear that there is painful conflict between what the government expects of them, and how they really feel."

THE CAMERA TAKES RESPONSIBILITY

The scene with Euphrasie and Bellancilla is a perfect example of the impact of the filmmaker’s and the camera’s presence in Gafumba: the two women pretended no-one was watching or filming them, but in fact adds the filmmaker, "that conversation would have never taken place had we not been there. The presence of the camera actually prompted people to address very difficult emotions and issues."

Aghion admits that the government’s constant indoctrination may indeed be averting violence for now, but she is convinced that “down the line, propaganda without anything else, can’t be a good thing.”

"Propaganda may be the easy solution for people in the hillside communities, and having us film and challenge their feelings was certainly tough for the people of Gafumba." But in the end, Aghion feels "it eventually made them reflect on their situation in a profound and altering way," which she is sure will have an impact on the small community for years to come.

As a filmmaker, Aghion’s guiding principle is “to let people speak for themselves.” To that end, in her three films to date, she has avoided all but the most necessary, and bare-boned narration. “I go into the field without any theories or prejudices about what I’m going to find. My films are shaped by what I learn from people along the way.”

Aghion had come to Rwanda to observe, but in Gafumba, with her camera, had become a mediator. Then, she took a step further by following Jean Paul’s suggestion and calling a meeting with the people she had talked to individually for months.
Says Aghion, “In some cases, it’s unrealistic to think you can ever appear with a crew and a lot of questions, and have no effect whatsoever, and this time was very different from three years ago when we filmed “Gacaca...”

In a country still reeling from horrific violence, there is an inherent life and death responsibility making a film of this sort. “Every minute of every day that I’ve spent there,” she emphasizes, “I have been aware that our presence and our probing has an impact.”

The nature of that impact is not always immediately clear, especially given the double handicap of operating in a culture she is still learning about, and speaking through an interpreter.

There have been surprises. During the group meeting, for example, Mutemberezi made a speech in which he spoke about Aghion. As usual, she did not understand what Mutemberezi had said until she read the exact translation what was on tape. But the filmmaker learned that when she’d first come to the remote hillside of Gafumba in 1999, the rumor among many in the Hutu population was that she and her crew had been sent to kill them.

There is a difference in the effect she caused making “Gacaca...” and “In Rwanda they say...” In the first film, she remembers, “Our biggest worry was that the cameras might somehow change how people acted during the pre-Gacaca presentations; as it turned out we were barely noticed.”

The second film has brought far more obvious responsibility. When she heard, for instance, that news of the group meeting she had organized had prompted others in Gafumba to want to organize their own gatherings, she felt “good about the impact the crew and I have had.”

She is equally relieved that things did not go wrong. “I was recently told about researchers who spent a few weeks studying reconciliation in another area of the country. They grilled people with all sorts of questions and then left behind them a trail of bad blood that verged on explosive.”

Aghion was not surprised. “In my time working in Rwanda, I’ve tried not to make snap judgments. That’s why it is extremely important for me to work over time, to follow the rhythm of the people we film.”

Keenly aware of the enormous task ahead for the people of Gafumba, she takes the measure of how small a part she plays, and concludes, “I exercise extreme caution, because I couldn’t live with myself if I found out something bad happened because of me.”
ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Anne Aghion
Director, Producer

“In Rwanda we say... The family that does not speak dies” is Anne Aghion’s third film, and her second film on Rwanda.

For “Gacaca, Living Together Again in Rwanda?”, released in 2002, Aghion received the Fellini Prize from UNESCO. The work has received accolades around the world. The film trade Variety, called it “an impressive docu.” Journalist and Rwanda expert Philip Gourevitch, author of “We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families, Stories from Rwanda,” commented that “The film captures quite precisely much of what is most compelling and unsettling about Rwanda’s quest for justice after genocide.” Broadcast of the work on French television yielded “Special Picks” from eight of the country’s top national publications, along with reviews calling it “remarkable,” and “riveting,” and praising Aghion’s “open, human approach.”

Her first film, “Se Le Movio El Piso (The Earth Moved Under Him) -- A Portrait Of Managua,” is the winner of the Havana Film Festival’s 1996 Coral Award for Best Non-Latin American Documentary on Latin America. That film explored how slum dwellers in Nicaragua’s capital had survived as series of natural, political and economic disasters.

For most of her life, Aghion has been a dual resident of New York and Paris. She spent the first eight years of her career in the newspaper business, in both editorial and administrative capacities at The New York Times Paris bureau, and at the International Herald Tribune.

Moving into the film/television industry, she worked in a variety of capacities including videographer, production and post-production manager with filmmakers such as Richard Leacock and Valérie Lalonde, and for documentaries aired on major cable networks such as Canal+ and ARTE. In addition, Aghion was the Director of International Production and Development for Pixibox, Europe’s top digital animation house. She holds a degree in Arab Language and Literature from Barnard College at Columbia University in New York, and following her studies, spent two years living in Cairo. Aghion has traveled extensively across the Middle East, Africa, Europe and the Americas.

Laurent Bocahut, Dominant 7
Producer

Multiple award-winning filmmakers Philip Brooks and Laurent Bocahut were the co-founders, with distributor Dominique Welinski, of Dominant 7. Since Philip Brooks’ death in January 2003, Laurent Bocahut has been continuing the work they began together. Since 1996, the company has produced or co-produced some 50 documentary films for prestigious international broadcasters such as Canal+, France 2, France 3 and Planète (France), ARTE
(France/Germany), BBC and Channel Four (UK), ABC and SBS (Australia) and others. Dominant 7 has collected over a dozen awards from across the globe. In recent years, the company’s consistent success has allowed it to expand into feature film production.

Their current slate includes the feature film, “Madame Satã,” co-produced with Videofilmes, the company founded by Walter Salles and João Moreira Salles. The film premiered in the 2002 Cannes Film Festival’s “Un Certain Regard” section. Dominant 7 was also the French production partner on “Steps for the Future” -- 20 hours of programming on HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa, co-produced by 14 major broadcasters around the world.

In addition to producing, in 1998-99, Bocahut co-directed “Woubi Chéri,” with Philip Brooks for ARTE and Channel Four, winning Best Documentary at the New Festival in New York, the Turin Festival in Italy, and the Transgender Film Festival in London.

**Nadia Ben Rachid**

Editor

Since 1997, the Paris-based Nadia Ben Rachid has edited dozens of projects, including features, shorts, and television films. These include “Heremakono – Waiting for Happiness” by Abderrahmane Sissako, and eight works by the renowned French director Yamina Benguigui, including her 2002 feature “Insh’Allah Sunday,” a segment of the acclaimed 1998 documentary “Mémoires d’Immigrés,” and two series of short films against racism in 1999, “Place de la République” and “Pimprenelle.

Also in 1999, Ben Rachid won the Editor’s Award at FESPACO (Ouagadougou Pan African Festival for Film and Television) for Sissako’s previous film, “Life on Earth.” The film premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, and collected numerous awards at festivals around the world, including the Golden Spire at the San Francisco International Film Festival.


CLAIRE BAILLY DU BOIS
Photography

With more than 25 years of experience as a camera person and director of photography, in fiction and documentary, Claire Bailly du Bois has worked with such directors as Agnès Varda, Sandrine Veysset, Amos Gitai, Eyal Sivan and Nurith Aviv.

JAMES KAKWERERE
Photography

James Kakwerere also worked on Aghion’s first film “GACACA, LIVING TOGETHER AGAIN IN RWANDA?” For close to six years, he had been one of the leading cameramen at Orinfor, Rwanda’s national television station.

RICHARD FLEMING
Sound Recordist

Richard Fleming has worked as a sound recordist since 1990. His documentary credits include “Kofi Annan: Center of the Storm,” by David Grubin for PBS. “Miracle Babies,” by Katja Esson and “Les Illuminations de Madame de Nerval,” by Charles Najman, both for ARTE. “Sumo East and West” by Ferne Pearlstein, and “Iron Butterfly: The Story of Imelda Marcos”, by Ramona Diaz, both for ITVS.