

*Reflections on a night at the movies in Nimule, southern Sudan, by NCP Solidarity Worker Emily Young*

Last night I had a very sobering experience, which I feel compelled to write about for some reason. It isn't anything too different from what most of us feel when we walk out of the movie theatre after seeing *Hotel Rwanda* or after reading Anne Franks journal... that passionate, emotional state of feeling so guilty and so frustrated all at the same time...and for a day two wanting to "make a difference". Last night I watched a film entitled *Shooting Dogs* about the genocide in Rwanda where over 800,000 Tutsi's were butchered by Hutu's in 1996. I have seen films like it before...with plenty of gore and horror piled on. A different chord was struck within me during this film though...something I know for certain I have never felt before.

These weren't actors playing roles...this wasn't some far off land I've never seen... I recognized faces, I heard languages I understood, I laughed at jokes I wouldn't have understood a year ago... it was personal. I was angry in a way I haven't felt before...I was so deeply ashamed. It was like watching a movie about a massacre in Harrisonburg, VA..... Maybe that sounds stupid.... In fact I'm sure perhaps it does.... But it was one of the most profound senses of sorrow I have ever experienced.

Perhaps the most sterile part of all of this is that I was watching it in a room full of people who have experienced actual genocide first hand. This was not just a film to them...people were weeping, mourning, remembering, fearing. I was sitting next of Fr. Andrew (a catholic father) a man about my fathers age during a part in the movie where a catholic father (in the movie) loads children into the back of a truck and covers them with a tarp in order to sneak them to safety...Fr. Andrew leaned over and then proceeded to tell me his story of how he had done the same thing for over 30 girls during the war when they were being captured and raped by SPLA forces. He spoke of how he had been stopped and interrogated, beaten, and then had finally made it to the Ugandan border and brought the girls secretly to safety.

Perhaps one of the most uncomfortable parts of the film for me was at the beginning. When the genocide first began in Rwanda (and in Sudan for that matter) the first people to be evacuated are the whites. No matter your nationality having white skin = a plane ticket out of harms way. Rarely does someone with white skin ever stick around when the sounds you fall asleep to at night are of machine guns firing, and gangs chanting threats of violence. I asked if this is what happened here in Sudan and the reply was obvious.... "The whites were so eager to get out they had no problem driving over the dead bodies that lay beneath the truck" said somebody in the room... They explained to me how the process was that first the white volunteers leave, then the news reporters, then the UN peace keepers...and when the UN packs up you know you had better get out of where you are. I have never felt more aware of my whiteness and ashamed at the same time...I felt like I had personally let them down, abandoned them....done something horribly wrong. To say I was squirming in my chair would be an understatement.

The most heartbreaking part of the whole night was that everyone in that room didn't walk out, throw their popcorn in the trash, and hop in their \$40,000 dollar SUV and drive back to a safe home... No, they all left acutely aware of the loved ones they lost in the same brutal ways, they all left acutely aware that in 2011 this will most likely be their future yet again, they all left acutely aware that unless the world opens it's eyes, yet again their lives will not be as valuable as mine b/c they don't have white skin.

In the film, a woman who plays a white reporter covering the massacre says "ya know... it's so hard to get personal, because as terrible as it is to say no matter how many times it happens, it's just a bunch of dead Africans fighting each other...sure we can feel bad for a few days, tell our friends to go see the movie, and talk about how horrific it is over the morning paper, but really it all comes down to just being a bunch of selfish human beings...nothing is ever going to change until things get personal..."

That quote rang especially true to me... truth be told had I not gotten involved I too would most likely have watched this movie on a 40 inch plasma and would have then flipped on MTV to find out what Britney Spears was up to before going to bed and getting a fairly peaceful night's sleep. Until I made it personal I couldn't really understand what the film was all about. Now there are plenty of ways to get passionate about something and to truly make a difference without traveling across the world...I don't mean to say everyone needs to go out and watch this movie and come to Africa...not at all...God gave us all our different talents and passions for different things. I just hope that maybe by sending out this e-mail I can try to make it a little more personal for each of you reading this, so that we can strive together to do more than to just talk about how terrible it is before flipping to the next channel.

Love,

Emily

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