Race in Film

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**Introduction**

*You don't fight racism with racism; the best way to fight racism is with solidarity* (Bobby Seale).Racism is a well-known but vague terminology that we hear or read almost daily. A general perception about *racism* is that it is an old belief among the people who used to consider them superior/inferior because of their particular ethnicity and one group was marginalized by the members of the other community. They also believe that racism no more exists in this *modern* rather *post-modern* world. E. Bonilla Silva claims that the phenomenon still penetrates society but with different names. Matthew Desmond and Mustafa Emirbayer claim that *racism* is not determined merely by someone's complexion rather many other parameters are used to examine it. The race is based upon *phenotype* or *ancestry* according to the structure of society. Being a popular terminology, *racism* appears in the film also, a Hollywood film *Hotel Rwanda (2004)* portrays racism differently than mostly it is perceived as in the United States of America.

**Body**

Having a short overview of the film *Hotel Rwanda (2004)* is useful before starting the arguments. The film was released in 2004 and it mirrored a massacre that took place a decade in 1994 before the release of this film. A regional tribe Hutu massacred approximately a million people of another tribe Tutsi in 1994. The film is not a documentary about that horrible genocide but it presents a heroic character Paul Rusesabagina who was a hotel manager at Rwanda and he saved the lives of more than a thousand Tutsis albeit he was a Hut(Waldorf, L. 2009). He was a shrewd manager and he used all his skills to save as many people as he could. For example, he bribed the commanders of Hutu to keep them away from the people hiding in his hotel. He offered them gifts and apart from that he used his mind to blackmail them: he said to the Hutu commander that he should keep it in mind that the world would soon react harshly because of this genocide and only Paul is the man who can satisfy the international observers and investigators. This blackmailing worked and the Hutu commander did not consider killing Paul who was involved in some skeptic conspiracies according to the Hutus. The film also portrays the indifferent attitude of the western world during this terrible genocide although they were the actual cause behind this massacre. Belgians forced the two enemy tribes in one region and allowed the Tutsis to kill Hutus, but when they left the country suddenly without considering this issue of gravity, that genocide appeared as an obvious consequence. The movie gives glimpses of that large scale massacre but the story revolves around the reaction of a hotel manager who behaves calm but thoughtful when copes with this kind of circumstances.

Matthew Desmond and Mustafa Emirbayer have disbanded the myth that the age of *racism* has ended and there is no noticeable racism in contemporary society. They claim in their article “*What is Racial Domination*?” that racism exists but the sense to identify it does not. They define racism as a social terminology being perceived differently in different societies. According to this article, the race is based upon two phenomena: phenotype and ancestry. *Phenotype* refers to the physical appearance of some creature. All the Blacks have a phenotype similarity if a White observes, the same is the case with Whites. Almost every region of the earth has its distinct phenotype identification. The other parameter to determine someone's *race* is his/her *ancestry*. Peripheries are drawn among people considering their ancestry origin. All the killers and victims of the Rwanda genocide were having identical complexion, physique, language, culture, and almost everything. What was the cause behind this massacre then? It was a difference of ancestry: both the tribes were the lineages of two different chiefs. Interestingly, those two chiefs were the lineage of one ancestor who passed centuries ago, but this sense was too subtle to be perceived by those tribes with rough mentality.

Bonilla Silva writes in his article “*Racism without Racists”* that the Whites’ attitude towards *racism* is the same today as it was in the past. They claim that they are not *racists* but this claim becomes invalid when they reiterate that they are just concerned about the future of their children that is why they do not allow interracial marriages. Such marriages, they claim, can create complexities in the lives of couples and their children (Bonilla-Silva, E. 2006). One other argument of Silva is that the Whites’ *racism* appears when they blame the Blacks for using minority-card at every social platform instead of working hard to earn both money and respect in the society. Their concerns are undermined as being baseless and unreal. This attitude of the Whites has also been portrayed in *Rwanda Hotel (2004).* Paul (the protagonist) appeals to the head of the UN Mission in Rwanda Colonel Oliver to ask the UN to intervene with force and stop this terrible slaughter of the Tutsis. Col. Oliver understands the gravity of the issue and calls the UN authorities to send forces but his request is not given any importance. Had it any White country under such painful circumstances, the UN would have used all its powers to stop it immediately.

Mehrsa Baradaran’s article “*The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap*” discuses an important aspect of *racism*. Black communities were having less than 1% of the total US wealth in 1863. Baradaran uses this gap to develop his argument that the root cause of all the US racial conflicts. He says that all the claims of condemning or curbing *racism* are useless if this issue is not addressed. He quotes Martin Luther King Jr. who stressed upon this issue saying that no peace can descend upon our land until the dawn of justice appears. Martin Luther King asked the authorities to see the Black unemployment with the same lens that they use to see White unemployment. Baradaran notes that president Nixon is credited with starting the trend of empowering the Black community through capitalizing the Black wealth, but the Blacks are still lagging notwithstanding every president after Nixon adopted the policy of enriching the Blacks. Baradaran notes that the reason behind this disappointing situation is cosmetic changes in the traditional American policy of keeping the Blacks less powerful by seizing their wealth.

The three primary concepts of Aguirre and Turner model of *Unified Theory of Ethnic Relations* that connect with the film *Rwanda Hotel (2004)* are discrimination,  identifiability, and distinctiveness (Aguirre, B. E., Saenz, R., & Hwang, S. 1989). These aspects claim that the conflicts occur in the communities when they identify themselves to a particular group and struggle to protect their distinctiveness. This feeling becomes the cause of peripheries among the communities. They alienate the other communities and discrimination occurs. Tutsis discriminated against the Hutus when they were powerful and the film portrays the counteraction of that discrimination that itself is discrimination albeit it ends in large scale bloodshed.

The film fails to engage with the notion of “White Privilege” or “The Ethnic Stratification” as it portrays only the rivalry among two Black tribes and it does not unveil the actual cause of that rivalry. It was the White Belgians who forced two rival tribes to settle in one area and make one group to oppress the other. Later on, they left the country with all its virtual wealth and the tribes came face-to-face which resulted in these atrocities. The viewer notices that no White person has any threat from any community in Rwanda but both the communities have threats from one another. The White people are portrayed as the well-wishers of the Blacks who are doing as much as possible to stop this genocide. Had the director considered filming a scene from the UN where the request of armed forces was being rejected, the viewer would have perceived the Whites differently. They entered Rwanda, looted its money and went away with no responsibility for what happened after their departure.

**Conclusion**

Racism is a phenomenon that is condemned and practiced at the same time in our country. The people have started condemning it and practicing it with a new variety of styles. I have discussed three articles by different scholars that prove that Racism is still in practice as it was in the past, but it has got some subtle and delicate forms. This phenomenon is so well-known and dominant that it has significant representation in the *post-modern* literature. *Rwanda Hotel* is a 2004 Hollywood movie that is dedicated to a hotel manager who acted heroically during the Rwanda genocide of the members of the Tutsis tribe at the hands of the members of the Hutu tribe from Eastern Africa. The consequences of promoting *racism* are apparent in this film, but it has missed a significant factor “The Ethnic Stratification” by the Whites as its main focused remained a black hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina.

**References**

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