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‘Coexist’ filmmaker seeks to share hard-earned lessons of Rwandan Genocide

MWCC campuses host screenings of documentary

BY SAM BONACCI
NEWS STAFF WRITER

GARDNER — Screenings of the documentary “Coexist” were held at Mount Wachusett Community College campuses this week seeks to shine a light on the efforts toward reconciliation following the Rwandan Genocide and the lessons that can be applied to the lives of students here in the United States.

“We hope that it is a pathway to preventing bullying and violence in Massachusetts and beyond,” said Adam Mazo, who produced the documentary.

The documentary features interviews

with survivors and perpetrators of the 1994 genocide, in which hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives when Hutu tribe members attacked Tutsis. While hopeful, the film also outlines the difficulty of true reconciliation.

“The genocide in Rwanda is particularly powerful, because ... the people that perpetrated it and those who are the victims not just lived together, but intermingled, and they still do,” said Mr. Mazo.

Perpetrators and victims live in their communities much in the manner they did prior to the genocide. It is nearly impossible for many victims to avoid

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— Adam Mazo

interacting — in some instances, on a daily basis — with people who killed their loved ones.

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News staff photo by SAM BONACCI

Adam Mazo, left, and Jean Paul Turayishimye address those gathered at Mount Wachusett Community College to watch the documentary “Coexist,” which focuses on reconciliation following the Rwandan Genocide.

MWCC students get glimpse into post-genocide Rwandan reconciliation through documentary ‘Coexist’

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Mr. Mazo said even for those who have been fortunate enough not to have experienced such extreme circumstances, the lessons of life in Rwanda after the genocide are valuable.

“The message is that violence leads to an escalation of violence, and if you can stop that at an early phase a lot of serious problems can be stopped,” he said. “You can stop bullying and suicides when it’s small and easier to deal with.”

The documentary also challenges viewers to rethink their conception of what it means to be a victim — or a vic-

timizer.

“Something we often don’t want to recognize is that each of us can be a perpetrator,” said Mr. Mazo. “It doesn’t mean we can be killers, but we can tease, we can push, we can shove, we can bully.”

Recent Mount Wachusett graduate Jean Paul Turayishimye, a former official with the Rwandan Patriotic Army, spoke on the ongoing need for true reconciliation.

Mr. Turayishimye was a part of the army, and fled his home after it was reclaimed in fear for his life. He saw “Coexist” when a friend was reviewing translation work done on the film, and

became part of the effort to have it screened on the college’s campuses.

“Having him here makes it more real for people,” said Mr. Mazo of Mr. Turayishimye’s presence at the screenings. “I think that makes it all the more powerful, and a great opportunity to learn from someone who did go through it.”

Mr. Turayishimye hopes the film will draw more attention to the efforts to find reconciliation in Rwanda. The country’s story has been lauded in the international community as one of success, he said, with few retaliations against the Hutu as they have returned to live alongside those they rose up against.

“Some of them have true reconciliation, but the majority, we don’t know. We don’t know if it is being done right,” said Mr. Turayishimye, noting his appreciation for the documentary’s ability to relate people’s true feelings — which are often different from the government’s official stance. “In front of a government officer, they are not going to speak against reconciliation.”

The story on the ground is much different and very politically driven, said Mr. Turayishimye. Even as Tutsi are coexisting with their Hutu neighbors, significant issues remain. The Hutu make up the vast majority of the country — roughly 85 percent of Rwanda’s 11

million people — and he said without a role for them in the government there can be no true reconciliation.

Mr. Turayishimye pointed to recent unrest in Egypt and Libya as examples of what could happen if this majority group is not truly integrated into the currently Tutsi-run government.

“The current reconciliation is like a house with a foundation built on sand,” he said. “The Hutu will not put up with it forever. Eventually they will say enough is enough.”

More information on the film is available online at www.coexistdocumentary.org.

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