



# *Munyurangabo*

Directed by Lee Isaac Chung



Rwanda / US | 2007 | Kinyarwanda with English Subtitles |  
97 min.

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## **SYNOPSIS**

After stealing a machete from a market in Kigali, Munyurangabo and his friend, Sangwa, leave the city on a journey tied to their pasts. Munyurangabo wants justice for his parents who were killed in the genocide, and Sangwa wants to visit the home he deserted years ago. Though they plan to visit Sangwa's home for just a few hours, the boys stay for several days. From two separate ethnic groups, their friendship is tested when Sangwa's wary parents disapprove of Munyurangabo, warning that "Hutus and Tutsis are supposed to be enemies."

## **AWARDS and FESTIVALS**

WINNER – Grand Jury Prize, **AFI Fest**

WINNER – Best First Film, **Mexico City Int'l Contemporary FF**

WINNER – Best Narrative Feature, **Sarasota FF**

WINNER – Peace and Cultural Understanding Award, **Wine Country FF**

WINNER – SIGNAS Award, **Amiens Int'l FF**

Nominated – Breakthrough Director, **Gotham Awards**

Nominated – Someone to Watch, **Independent Spirit Awards**

Official Selection

**Cannes FF (Un Certain Regards)**

**Berlin Int'l FF**

**Toronto Int'l FF**

**New Directors / New Films**

**Pusan Int'l FF**

**Rotterdam Int'l FF**

**Sao Paulo Int'l FF**

**London Int'l FF**

**Sarajevo Int'l FF**

**Flanders Int'l FF**

**Thessaloniki Int'l FF**

**Buenos Aires Int'l FF**

**Durban Int'l FF**

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

### **Origin of the Project**

In the summer of 2006, Samuel Anderson, Jenny Lund, and I taught a summer course in filmmaking and photography at a Christian relief base, YWAM, in Rwanda. Partnering with the organization's existing work with local street kids and at-risk youths, we produced MUNYRANGABO as a project for a class of fifteen Rwandan students, allowing genocide orphans, returned refugees, the undereducated, and those barely making a living to become the cast and crew of MUNYURANGABO.

### **A Manifestation of our Encounters**

Samuel Anderson wrote most of the script back home, with the understanding that the story would evolve to the truths we would eventually discover in Rwanda. After arriving in the country, our script became a nine-page outline, a manifestation of our encounters—from personal stories and concerns to passing conversations and reflections. The minimal outline allowed us to improvise scenes and all of the dialogue.

### **Improvisation**

With directing, I am a strong believer in improvisation; I know the general form of the film I want to make, but I'm not sure how I will get from the beginning to the end. This requires a greater level of listening—to surroundings, actors, crew, and inspiration. I don't think that this immediacy would be available to me if I relied heavily on the writing process. Instead of shaping the reality of the circumstances to that script, improvisation demands the opposite. Working in Rwanda reinforced this approach to filmmaking, since the exotic nature of the location left us with no other choice. As a result, I've learned through this film that filmmaking should be a little like jazz, in that one should work with how the materials, circumstances, problems, and epiphanies come; it's a dynamic process that leaves no room for regret.

### **Recreating Memories**

Our cast of non-professional actors inspired many elements of the script, and directing was often a work of recreating their lives. Naturally, this is a film that focuses on memory, a collective one, and it was a quest to discover spiritual elements within memory.

### **Rural Locations**

Rwanda has seen a fair number of Western filmmakers who throw large sums of cash around; we simply didn't have those resources, but the assumption for many city officials was that we had lots of money. We considered filming many of our scenes in the streets of Kigali, but because of bureaucracy (difficulty in getting permits, for example), we focused our story on rural locations.

### **Shot in Eleven Days**

Our village location was also quite genuine. We found a location we liked, spoke with the owners of the little house, and even auditioned them for roles. They were remarkable actors, so we decided to give them a large part in the film as the parents of Sangwa. We filmed over the course of eleven days, with the cast and crew all living together and working passionately for this project. It is fair to say that through the experience we became a family—I adopted them, but more accurately, they adopted me.

### **First Feature Film in Kinyarwanda**

MUNYUNRANGABO is the first narrative feature film ever made in the Kinyarwanda language. Directing in a foreign country and in a language I do not speak was actually an advantage, forcing me to work as an outsider. This guards against the conveyance of any personal ideas and truths that are relatively minor, allowing, instead, for an exploration of more universal matters that can connect a Korean American with a Rwandan. I hope that this connection would extend to you, the viewer.

### **Return to Kigali**

Our new company, Almond Tree Films, continues to labor for Rwandan cinema, hoping that the next Rwandan film to play at Cannes will be directed by a native filmmaker. On the foundation of MUNYURANGABO, we will return to Kigali this summer to establish a cinema school and production center, working for our hope to become a reality.

## **DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY**

### **Lee Isaac Chung**

A son of Korean immigrants, Chung grew up on a small farm in rural Arkansas, and then attended Yale University to study Biology. At Yale, with exposure to art cinema in his senior year, he dropped his plans for medical school and pursued filmmaking. *MUNYURANGABO* is his first feature film. He resides in New York with his wife Valerie, and manages Almond Tree Films, a production company he founded with his collaborators, Samuel Anderson and Jenny Lund.

## **ACTORS' BIOGRAPHIES**

### **Jeff Rutagengwa (as Munyurangabo)**

Jeff became an orphan of the genocide when his father went missing during the war. At the age of eleven, he traveled to Kigali, where he lived on the streets, supporting himself through petty theft. After several failed attempts to educate himself (the task proved to be financially impossible), Jeff began working as a porter at Kigali's oldest public market in Kimisagara. As a result, he managed to secure housing in one of the neighborhood ghettos. In 2006, he received the good news that his father hadn't died in the genocide and was living as a refugee in Uganda. They reunited that year.

### **Eric Dorunkundiye (as Sangwa)**

After his father died in the genocide, Eric moved from his village to escape the difficult living conditions at home. He works as a porter at a Kimisagara market, lives in the neighborhood's ghettos, and helps support his mother and siblings who remain in the countryside. After working on "*Munyurangabo*", Eric hopes for more opportunities to act in Rwandan films.

### **Edouard B Uwayo (as the Poet)**

Uwayo is a native of Rwanda's Western region, where he lived on a hillside farm. As the only remaining man in his family, he moved to Kigali to find work and support his mothers and sisters. In Kigali, an artist discovered Uwayo's creative talents and mentored him in drama and poetry. Uwayo is now widely recognized in his country for his artistic endeavors, and in 2006 he was appointed by the Rwandan ministry to serve as a poet laureate for Rwanda's Liberation Day official ceremony. "*Munyurangabo*" features the poems that Uwayo delivered for the event.

# CREDITS

## Cast

Munyurangabo  
Sangwa  
Sangwa's mother  
Sangwa's father  
Gwiza

Poet  
Ngabo's father  
Father's killers

Jeff Rutagengwa  
Eric Ndorunkundiye  
Narcicia Nyirabucyeye  
Jean Marie Nkurykiyinka  
Jean Pierre Harerimana  
Mulomda  
Edouard B Uwayo  
Etienne Rugazora  
Pierre Claver Kayitsinga

## Crew

Director  
Producer  
Editor  
Cinematographer  
Executives Producers

Co-Producers

Associate Producers

Writers

Script advisor  
Sound Engineer  
Original Poetry  
Original solo music  
Pianist  
Art Director  
Translator

Lee Isaac Chung  
Lee Isaac Chung  
Lee Isaac Chung  
Lee Isaac Chung  
Hand Gil Chung  
Robert Liang  
Samuel Anderson  
Jenny Lund  
Fidele Kanamugire  
Daddy Youssouf Ruhorahoza  
Samuel Anderson  
Lee Isaac Chung  
Noel Munyurangabo  
Jenny Lund  
Edouard B Uwayo  
Claire Wibabara  
Yu Franz Mo Cheung  
Jean Kwezi  
Emmanuel Ahishakiye