

Cahiers de Sciences politiques de l'ULg

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Roméo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil, The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, New York, Carrol & Graf Publishers, 2003, 562 p.

Researching the “genocide-relationships-triangle”, one side is usually left in the shadows, that is the side of the bystanders. Although some scholars as Martha Minowi advocate an enlarged focus on the entirety of the “genocide-relationships-triangle”, the literature concentrates mainly on the relationship(s) between the perpetrators and the victims. In April 1994, Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire, the United Nations Organization (U.N.O.) Canadian Force Commander, eye witnessed the murder of 800,000 Rwandans and thus entered the “genocide-relationships-triangle”. In *Shake Hands with the Devil*, we experience a genocide through the glasses of a ‘privileged’ – “*a privilege that quickly became a curse*”¹ – bystander burdened with a sentiment of guilt, suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

In *Shake Hands with the Devil*, Roméo Dallaire depicts with clear insight and meticulous detail the process and underlying forces which led to the genocide of 800,000 Rwandans, both Tutsis and Hutus, in less than 100 days. Above all he brings into the debate two central themes: the bystanders’ responsibility – the international community’s, in general, and his own, in particular – is the first key issue; the interrogations of how human we are and how human nature transforms when shaking hands with the devil constitute the second main theme.

Arriving in Kigali, on August 19, 1993, Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire is “*full of hopes for a mission that would secure lasting peace for a country that once had been a tiny paradise on earth.*”² A year later, Roméo Dallaire leaves Rwanda suffering from a sentiment of guilt and responsibility for neither has he prevented nor contained the killing of 800,000 Rwandans by Rwandans although he had received the mission to help bringing their country toward a peaceful future. Dallaire’s *Shake Hands with the Devil* gives the author’s personal account of the genocide. From his notes and memories, he depicts day by day the horrifying chain of events, his actions and inactions to derail the atrocities, his many meetings with the leaders from both groups and neighboring countries, his powerlessness. He is able to portray his own failure, the failure of humanity.

Lt. Gen. Dallaire takes full responsibility for the fact what he, as the leader of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), “*was unable to persuade the international community that this tiny, poor, overpopulated country and its people were worth saving from the horror of genocide.*”³ One could reproach Dallaire his naiveté, however loyalty and honesty seem more appropriate. Regarding loyalty, as a good soldier, he was compelled to follow the orders; as a good officer, he was compelled to follow the orders even though inappropriate. In January 1994 he was given the refusal to seize arms caches though he suspected the preparation of a genocide. He had also to accept the rule of engagement that “*UNAMIR was not to fire unless fired upon*”⁴ although the *Interahamwe* and other extremist groups were perpetrating systematic killings. Secondly regarding honesty, Roméo Dallaire provides the reader with an as-fair-as-possible account of his own behavior, giving insight to his wrong operational decisions and misinterpretations. Because of his loyalty and honesty, the Canadian general could figure as the tragic hero, the one who did the most – managing to rescue thousands of Rwandans – to prevent and end the genocide. He could be perceived as one more victim of the genocide and its aftermaths; a victim of the failure of the humanity.

The failure of the humanity filters through *Shake Hands with the Devil*. Alike many authors, Dallaire hold accountable the international community, especially the first world nations and the U.N., for not preventing the genocide to spark out, for not intervening while the killings were occurring and finally for being unable to deal with the massive flows of refugees. In Dallaire’s book, the continued indifference of the international community for the Rwanda crisis becomes increasingly more blatant. The coded cables’ content between

the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and UNAMIR embodies the ever-growing international disregard, especially the reports of the Security Council's (un)decisions. Furthermore, world powers' indifference finds its roots in their self-interests for which in Rwanda "*the risks are high and all that is here are humans*"⁵ or for which "*the deaths of 85,000 Rwandans would not justify the risking of the life of one American soldiers.*"⁶ This indifference was well understood and used by the planners of the genocide. They calculatingly believed that killing ten Belgian soldiers would suffice to push Belgium to withdraw from UNAMIR and as a consequence provoke the collapse of the mission itself. *Realpolitik* was played by both the *génocidaires* and the western countries. The (un)use of the 'g word' was revealing the will of the international community not to get involved in the Rwanda crisis, which was not to be called genocide before the killings had been going on for two months.⁷

In addition, Michael Barnett, a U.N. staffer in Rwanda,^{iv} explains chiefly the failure of the U.N. by its bureaucratic culture which "*had convinced itself that to intervene in Rwanda would have been ethically unsound because it could have led to demise of the United Nations itself.*"^v This conviction was the result of the Somali fiasco and the recognition that the U.N. could not hold its peacemaking missions, thus fearing that the permanent members would lose patience with repeated failures. In *After Rwandavi*, Lt. Gen. Dallaire acknowledges the knock-on effects of the Somali failure in Rwanda and Bosnia. Above all, Dallaire and Barnett believe the 1994 events were probably preventable, and in any case, containable; however, "*let there be no doubt: the Rwandan genocide was the ultimate responsibility of those Rwandans who planned, ordered, supervised and eventually conducted it.*"⁸

Under the light of *Shake Hands with the Devil*, larger reflections can be drawn and provoke discussion of justice and reparation after crimes against humanity^{vii}.

Beside the responsibility of the bystanders, Roméo Dallaire writes that "*the men who organized and perpetrated these crimes knew they were crimes and not acts justified by war, and that they could be held accountable for them. [...] The faceless bureaucrats who fed the names to the militia and destroyed the records also played a part.*"⁹ Similarly, as shown by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela^{viii}, the apartheid leaders knew that their crimes were not merely acts of police but crimes, too, which explained their will to hide their dreadful activities. Moreover, Dallaire's book brings us into the question of the (in)humanity of the perpetrators: "*I rejected the picture of the génocidaires as ordinary human beings who had performed evil acts. To my mind, their crimes had made them inhuman.*"¹⁰ In *A Human Being Died Tonight*, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, in contrast, sees in Eugene Decock a perpetrator who tries to regain his humanness. In *Machete Season* we encounter 'ordinary killers' who went "*beyond human imagination*", according to their own terms^{ix}. The different attitudes and sentiments towards perpetrators and their (in)humanness are not to be judged. It belongs to any victim but one should urge to foster reconciliation, which demands efforts and time.

One reason for which Roméo Dallaire did eventually write this book was to make sure children and grandchildren would know about "*our role in and our passage through the Rwandan catastrophe*"¹¹; this detailed attention paid to the historical records, and especially their correctness, is shared by, amongst others, Roy Brooks^x and Elezar Barkanxi. Furthermore, putting his story on paper can bring healing to the author, in the same way that the public hearings of the South African truth and reconciliation have helped victims to release their pains. This is a very long process and one that cannot be hastened. It is only after nearly ten years, and after a failed attempt in 1994, that Roméo Dallaire was able to write down his own story. Even so he will never end his mourning "*for all these Rwandans who placed their faith in us.*"¹²

Shake Hands with the Devil is the story of Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire, Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda, who was not only a 'privileged' bystander of the genocide, but also a victim as well as, in some extent, a 'perpetrator': one human person embodying the three sides of the "genocide-relationships-triangle".

October 2005

Notes de base de page numériques:

1 Power S, foreword to Dallaire R, *Shake Hands with the Devil, The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, New York, Carrol & Graf Publishers, 2003, p. xiii.

2 Dallaire R, *op. cit.*, p. 509.

3 *Ibid*, p. 515.

4 Dallaire R,, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 6 and p. 499.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 499.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 374.

8 Dallaire R,, *op. cit.*, p. 515.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 281.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 456-457.

11 *Ibid.*, p. xix.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Notes de fin littérales:

i Minow M, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History After Genocide and Mass Violence*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1998.

ii As suggests by Gil Courtemanche in The Guardian (The Nightmare Diaries, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/politicsphilosophyandsociety/0,6121,1466666,00.html>, visited on 15 October, 2005).

iii The idea of the tragic hero is present in Philip Gourevitch (Gourevitch P, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998) and Alison Des Forges (Des Forges A, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*, New York, Human Rights Watch, 1999).

iv Barnett M, *Eyewitness to a Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda*, Ithaca, London, Cornell University Press, 2002.

v Toope S, "Review of Eyewitness to a Genocide", in *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 97, No. 2, 2003, p. 461.

vi Dallaire R, "The Changing Role of Human Keeping Forces: The Relationship Between UN Peacekeepers and NGOs in Rwanda" in Whitman J, Pocock D, *After Rwanda: The Coordination of United Nations Humanitarian Assistance*, London, New York, MacMillan Press, St. Martin's Press, 1996.

vii In this short book review, we cannot attempt to define precisely this concept; the genocide falls into the larger notion of crimes against humanity.

viii Gobodo-Madikizela P, *A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2003.

ix Hatzfeld J, *Machete Season*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.

x Brooks R, *Atonement and Forgiveness: A New Model for Black Reparations*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004.

xi Barkan E, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*, Baltimore, John Hopkins, 2000.

Pour citer cet article

Min Reuchamps. «Roméo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil, The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, New York, Carrol & Graf Publishers, 2003, 562 p.». *Cahiers de Sciences politiques de l'ULg*,

<http://popups.ulg.ac.be/csp/document.php?id=99>

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