

Rwanda, “Shake Hands with the Devil”. General Dallaire’s film fails “Reality Check”

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During elections, the media like to do “fact checks” or “reality checks”. The exercise should be applied to all historical films. Especially when the people concerned proclaim it “the film of record”.

That is how Canadian Liberal Party Senator Romeo Dallaire appointed for life described his recent film *Shake Hands with the Devil* based on his book with the same title. His film sorely fails any serious fact check.

Let’s begin with the end. If you waited until all the credits scroll by, you will see it is copyrighted ©Dallaireproductions. It means two things: 1) Senator Dallaire incorporated a film company so as to get a cut of the profits; 2) he approved every single comma in the script.

That means that he also approved another line in credits. As with other historical films, *Shake Hands with the Devil* has a “everybody lived happily ever after” in the credits. In Dallaire’s film, you read: “Since July 1994, the Rwandan Patriotic Front has governed Rwanda in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation.”

Nothing could be further from the truth! And everybody knows it.

When Rwandan prisons have been overflowing with some 80,000 prisoners for more than a decade without trial and without clear charges, you cannot talk about “forgiveness and reconciliation”. You cannot talk of “forgiveness and reconciliation” when you know about the murderous war that the Kagame regime inflicted and continues to inflict on the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo since 1996. Nor when you think of the many massacres and selected assassinations carried out by the Rwandan army and its agents in Rwanda, in other African countries and elsewhere in the world. Nor can you talk about “forgiveness and reconciliation” when you think of the cold-blooded assassination of Quebec priests Claude Simard and Guy Pinard by RPF agents. Fathers Simard and Pinard were eliminated respectively in October 1994 and February 1997 – Pinard while he was celebrating mass just as Archbishop was assassinate – because they dared to denounce crimes committed by Paul Kagame and the Rwandan army.

That sentence in the credits shows the current bias of Senator Dallaire in favour of the Kigali regime. In that he is acting coherently with his behaviour during his stay in Rwanda in 1993 and 1994. *Shake Hands with the Devil* is thus a film of propaganda in favour of a regime that is highly contested in central Africa and elsewhere in the world. Now to the film.

It abounds with factual errors. Dallaire offers three cases that supposedly prove that there

was a planned genocide in Rwanda: 1) killings to the south of the demilitarized zone that are carefully attributed to militias close to the former government; 2) the famous Jean-Pierre who is supposed to have been the source of the fax Philip Gourevitch of the New Yorker dubbed the “genocide fax” (January 11, 1994); 3) a sentence put in the mouth of Belgian Colonel Luc Marchal who says that Theoneste Bagosora, deputy Defence Minister, had declared that all the Tutsis had to be eliminated.

Three stories about real events, and three stories that are completely false.

1. Killings to the south of the demilitarized zone. In the film Dallaire and his assistant and villagers are seen investigating bodies found in November 1993. It is let on that the people were killed by agents of pro-government parties and not by the RPF. In fact, Senator Dallaire and his assistant Beardsley are the only people who defend this point. It has never been brought or defended in court anywhere in the world. What’s more, Abdul Ruzibiza, a former comrade in arms of Paul Kagame and lieutenant in the Rwandan Patriotic Army who defected, contradicts Dallaire on this point. In his book published in French in 2005, he explains that the RPF committed these massacres, he names the people who did it and why the RPF did it. On page 208 of his book *Rwanda L’histoire secrete* he explains that these incursions by the Rwandan Patriotic Front were aimed at getting people excited, destabilizing the country to show how weak the government was, and to give the RPF justification to take power by force.
2. The film devotes a good 15 minutes to “Jean-Pierre” whose real name is Abubakar Turatzinze. The scene shows a man telling a UN official of lists to eliminate people and the arms hidden that would make it possible to eliminate them in no time. This story has been around the world but it as proven to be totally false. This has come out clearly through sworn testimony and evidence produced at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha. The man operated like a double agent, having contacts with RPF intelligence services and with government and pro-government people. The story became important because of Philip Gourevitch of the New Yorker, who in turn was being fed by his brother-in-law, Jamie Rubin, Secretary of State Albright’s main mover and shaker. The people who know what happened then, the people who actually met Abubakar Turatzinze (Jean-Pierre), say that there was no truth behind it. Despite these proven facts, Dallaire persists in repeating the story.
3. The third so-called proof of planning is a statement given to Luc Marchal. Colonel Luc Marchal reported to Dallaire and headed the Belgian troops in Kigali in 1994. Whereas the film has that Luc Marchal telling Dallaire him that Bagosora claimed that the only solution was to eliminate all the Tutsis. Marchal has never witnessed to this effect, neither in Arusha, nor in Belgium, nor in the book he published in 2000. On this point, Mr. Marchal says the event took place, but that Bagosora had said to both Marchal and Dallaire, who was also there, that Rwandans would not be able to get along as long as the RPF and its army continued to exist. That is completely different from what Dallaire tells us in the film. What is more, Luc Marchal has publicly asked Dallaire since 2004 to join him in demanding an international neutral inquiry into the April 6 shooting down the plane that was bringing former President Habyarimana back to Kigali. Dallaire never answered that call.

Three events supposedly proving that a genocide was planned, and all three are false. It is also useful is good to pit Dallaire's film against his own statements. On September 14, 1994, he took part in an important French-language television program in Montréal. Dallaire was just back from Rwanda. When asked a question about a plan to exterminate Tutsis, here's how he answered.

"The plan was more political. The aim was to eliminate the coalition of moderates..... I think that the excesses that we saw were beyond people's ability to plan and organize. There was a process to destroy the political elements in the moderate camp. There was a breakdown and hysteria absolutely.... But nobody could have foreseen or planned the magnitude of the destruction we saw." (Note: people who understand French can listen to these excerpts on the Montreal CIBL community radio web site <http://cibl1015.com/node/52742>).

That is how Dallaire spoke when he just got back. "Nobody could have planned it all". Who to believe, General Dallaire two weeks after he gets back, or Liberal Senator Dallaire in a Hollywood-style feature film made 13 years later.

During the same program, he explained his understanding of genocide in response to a young Rwandan student who had details and wanted to know if Dallaire believed that there were a lot of Hutus as well as Tutsis who were killed.

Dallaire: "I would say there was a genocide, but a genocide of a national political nature, and it was not purely ethnic in nature, which resulted in the death of many many Hutus and as well as many Tutsis."

So a "genocide" that was political in nature, not only ethnic. Many Hutus and many Tutsis. If you say that today you get accused of revisionism and negationism. But they are Senator Dallaire's own words.

A principle in the study of history maintains that you should always trust sources closest to the events. They are less likely to have been bended, warped and distorted by the pressure of foreign policy and official history. That principle should be respected regarding Dallaire.

In another scene right out of a John Wayne film, Dallaire talks on the phone to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. He decides to hold the line, refusing to leave even though, back in those cushy New York offices, people are calling for withdrawal.

Most likely, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who I interviewed twice, never spoke to Dallaire. The film makes him look as though he is the "International Community" deciding to leave Dallaire the hero to fend for himself. The fact is that Boutros-Ghali made it very clear who that nameless "International Community" really was. In his book and in interviews he made it very clear.

Boutros-Ghali: "The Rwandan genocide is 100% US responsibility.... The United States, with the energetic support of Great Britain, did everything they could to prevent the UN from sending troops to Rwanda to stop the fighting. And they succeeded".

Dallaire uses an old trick. He talks about some vague nameless international committee, blaming everybody, which is the equivalent of blaming nobody. In that, he is lying and deceiving us because according to Boutros-Ghali who had to deal with US and UK representatives in the Security Council, we know who the culprits were.

Dallaire also gives himself the great role in that story. However, in September 1994, he sang a totally different song. In that program, Dallaire boasted about having recommended the withdrawal of the troops. "I took part in the decision to withdraw the troops... I recommended that they leave".

The same goes for his attacks on France who led a UN backed humanitarian intervention in Rwanda called Opération Turquoise, deployed on June 22, 1994. Attacks on France run well in English Canada, in England and in the United States. But here is what Dallaire wrote to his superiors about the French operation Turquoise in a letter dated July 4, 1994.

"I wish to commend the states for the swift action they have taken in response to the Security Council resolution 929 to put in place the operation code name "Operation-Turquoise", designed to achieve the humanitarian objectives of the UN in Rwanda. ... It is beginning to emerge that even at this rather early stage of its deployment, this operation has started to generate a positive impact by responding effectively to the humanitarian needs of civilians at risk inside Rwanda where the operation has deployed and begun to work."

He can shout and scream now about iniquitous France, but at the time he did nothing but commend France. On this point, people should start asking the French what they think happened instead of saying that our appointed Liberal Senator speaks the gospel only. At a recent forum in France, the French General Jean-Claude Lafourcade who headed the Operation Turquoise in Rwanda and Congo in 1994 was asked about his relations with the UN troops and the commander Romeo Dallaire. He answered in a straightforward manner. He said, "Romeo Dallaire was a "général de salon" which could be translated as an operetta general. He added: "I quickly realized how partial he was in favour of the RPF." He later insisted that "Dallaire was incompetent" and that for "efficiency and safety reasons" he would never have put the troops under Dallaire.

Shake Hands with the Devil is a factually inaccurate hagiographic autobiography. A hagiography is the life of a saint. But in this case it is the life of a saint, but written by the saint himself.

It makes Romeo Dallaire into a international hero, but only in Canada. It is time for serious reporters to realize that they have allowed the wool to be pulled over their eyes, and in turn have pulled the wool over our eyes.

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