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THE GENERAL INSPECTOR

By MINISTER FAUST

Peter Raymont honours the troubled heroism of Roméo Dallaire in *Shake Hands With the Devil*



Internationally celebrated documentary filmmaker Peter Raymont doesn't hide his feelings about so-called reality TV: he hates it.

"The producers of that stuff like to call it 'documentaries,'" he says over the phone from his office in Toronto. "I think that 'reality television' is disgraceful stuff. It panders to the lowest reflex emotions that we have, and uses people in an often horrible way."

Instead, Raymont prefers to place actual realities in front of his lens—realities like the Bhopal disaster, as he did in Bhopal: Search for Justice, or the potentially catastrophic misuse of antibiotics, which he investigated in Killer Cure. And most recently, with *Shake Hands With the Devil*, Raymont journeys with Canadian General Roméo Dallaire from Canada back to the murderlands of Rwanda. Dallaire was one of the only internationals to stand against the butchery of 800,000 people in the 1994 Rwandan civil war, a holocaust which France and the Rwandan Catholic Church had helped engineer, over which the UN fiddled impotently, against which the U.S. blocked a Security Council "genocide" declaration to prevent American engagement. CBC is set to replay his searing thanatography next week on Monday and again on Newsworld on Wednesday, and has chosen to air *Devil* without commercial interruption. It's a move Raymont praises as brave for the cash-strapped Mothercorp.

"This film deals with racism, injustice, the role and responsibility of the media, our own role and responsibility to each other: are we our brother's keeper?" he says. "One doesn't get the opportunity to make a film like this very often in one's life, so I'm truly indebted to General Dallaire for giving me this trust to document this journey he went through." Also impressive to Raymont is Dallaire's willingness to address his own psychological disintegration following the world's refusal to heed Dallaire's relentless Cassandra-like warnings. Before the general left Rwanda, he'd become erratic; by the time he'd returned to Canada, he was abusing alcohol, sleeping in parks and driving around, hoping someone would kill him. Given that the military culture is based on a contract of silence regarding suffering and vulnerability,

Dallaire's willingness to address the difficult subject of his own post-traumatic stress disorder is particularly brave.

Telling the story of one of Canada's greatest heroes is also no easy task, especially when the heroism is born from a cauldron of blood. Dallaire emerges as a humble, human hero, wise to the international racism that permitted the genocide to happen and mystical about its local bigotry, and a model against which to judge all leaders, and all people. "He is a very humble man, despite the notoriety that he's achieved," says Raymont. "He's a working-class boy from Montreal, you know, who was thrust into the middle of one of the most horrific events, and has come out of it a real hero. I think he decided that this film was part of his overall campaign to tell the world about the genocide, to keep [awareness of] the genocide alive so it's not forgotten."

One aspect about Dallaire himself and Raymont's film is the refusal to avoid the issue of white supremacy, the political principle that originally drew Belgium to conquer Rwanda, France to create the Hutu Interahamwe terror force that conducted the slaughter, and the U.S. to block efforts to stop the genocide. "Dallaire's retired from the military now," says Raymont. "He can speak his mind freely. I mean, that's what he saw—he sees no other real explanation for understanding how the Western world turned its back on 800,000 deaths. Everyone knew what was happening. Dallaire was making daily faxes and phone calls to the UN. But people chose to do nothing. What other explanation do you have for it other than..." His voice trails off before he concludes. "Ultimately, we have to come to the realization that the value of a human life in Edmonton is the value of a human life in Rwanda."

Even while acknowledging the invisible hand behind the slaughter and which blocked intervention, neither Dallaire nor Raymont excuses the monstrosity of the perpetrators themselves, nor their leaders who organized mass murder as craftily as did the Belgians in Congo or the Nazis in Europe. Throughout *Devil*, Dallaire goes so far as to name the ultimate source of such criminality: evil. "He's a spiritual man, a religious man," says the director. "One would think that [the civil war] would shake one's faith to the core, watching this evil, this debasement of humankind. It's unbelievable to think that people could pick up machetes and go next door and kill their neighbours or, in some cases, their parents. It's just incomprehensible for us, I think, the nature of evil that exists in the human condition. Somehow he's kept his religiosity, his spirituality, his belief in God. I found that remarkable."

As to whether Dallaire should have been named "the greatest Canadian" on the CBC series of the same name, Raymont is dismissive of the entire concept as well as the CBC program itself. "I think it's trivializing," he says. "There have been many great Canadians, past and present, so naming one is a bit silly. I think Dallaire was in the top 20, which seemed appropriate. I think there are great Canadians whom no one's ever heard of, who are just wonderful people at a community or family level. But maybe it helped

people appreciate their history a little more.” V

Shake Hands With the Devil airs Mon, Jan 31 at 9pm on CBC-TV and Wed, Feb 2 at 10pm ET/PT on CBC Newsworld.