

White Dreams of Black Flesh: Representations of Intra-African Violence in *Shooting Dogs*

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Introduction

As James Ferguson writes in his book, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*, “Western societies have found in ‘Africa’ a radical other for their own constructions of civilization, enlightenment, progress, development, [and] modernity [...] ‘Africa’ in this sense has served as a metaphor [...] a ‘dark continent’ against which the lightness and whiteness of ‘Western civilization’ can be pictured” (2). Such is the framework that has often accompanied Western depictions of the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. However, the events of the genocide cannot be understood outside of the context of its colonial history. It was the arrival of Belgium as an imperial entity that helped politicize the Hutu and the Tutsi into racialized identities, constructing the Tutsi in particular, under Belgian law, as a privileged alien minority. The colonial structure thus drew racial lines that would delineate “insiders” and “outsiders.” As this the colonial apparatus mobilized a discourse legitimizing Tutsi privilege and thus entrenching the racialization of both groups, the Hutu came to see themselves as the oppressed native majority.¹ The violent conflicts between the newly racialized groups upon decolonization would set the stage for the genocide to come in 1994. During the events that would transpire, Hutu militant extremists murdered more than 800,000 Tutsi and Hutu sympathizers (Mamdani, “Political Violence” 136-49).

¹ Belgian colonial reorganization of the state in the 1920s hardened the Hutu and the Tutsi as distinct populations by identifying them legally as separate racial identities. Belgian officials issued identity cards for both Hutu and Tutsi, naturalizing their supposed distinction. This was eventually used to legitimate Tutsi privilege, which was legally reinforced as a result of institutionalized practices. For example, among the changes brought about by Belgian rule, chieftainship became a right belonging only to Tutsi. *Petits* Tutsi, as opposed to socioeconomically similar Hutu, became the only identities exempt from forced labour. Eventually, Tutsi privilege became consolidated as ‘tradition,’ which inevitably led to anti-Tutsi hostility (Mamdani, “Political Violence” 143-5).

The gravity of the massacre has indeed elicited a massive affective response from the international community and, in effect, captured Western imagination, spurring numerous European, Canadian and American cinematic representations of the genocide.² Images of African suffering have long evoked the kind of humanitarian affect that could spur those privileged members of the global community to either intervene themselves, or call for intervention from political and military channels.³ Yet this affect, despite its seemingly compassionate surface, cannot be understood outside the racialized myths and discourses upon which such depictions of African suffering are based. Furthermore, the feelings of pity and sympathy mobilized in service of humanitarian intervention do not always consider the Western world's complicity in the very violent conditions that evoke humanitarian sentiment in the first place.⁴ The Rwandan Genocide is another example of the violent fetishization of power and the fragmentation of economy and community that has taken place in the African postcolony in the wake of violent histories of colonialism, imperialism, independence and globalization.⁵

Visual representations of violence inflicted upon African bodies can easily strip away these complex contexts. Writing about representations of violence against African bodies, Heike Härting argues that the resulting pity and fear elicited from privileged Western audiences allows for the dead African body to “function as an exhibited commodity to create a consensus of affect that helps reproduce Africa as an object of humanitarian aid” (66). However, beyond this, the visceral shock experienced by the audience upon watching these atrocities (with Africans, of course, as the targets) may also function as a bizarre form of re-affirming pleasure, transforming this violent objectification of Africans into a kind of war porn.

² See, for example, *Hotel Rwanda* (California: MGM, 2004), *Sometimes in April* (California: Warner Home Video, 2005), *A Sunday in Kigali* (Montreal: Equinoxe Films, 2006), *Shake Hands with the Devil* (Montreal: Seville Pictures, 2007).

³ Laura Briggs for example, traces the humanitarian use of images of human suffering to a post-World War I history of humanitarian organization. The image of a suffering mother and child served as an “iconography of rescue” (182), which has been used by organizations like UNICEF to solicit donations. David Jefferess has also noted the importance of images of racialized children suffering in sponsorship ads (12), while Alexander de Waal has argued that the explosion of global affect towards Ethiopia during the famine crisis was largely due to the international media coverage of the event, which, through their selective and decontextualizing filming methods, only served to depoliticize the sociopolitical and international conditions that led to the famine (82).

⁴ This article's use of the term Western (following the use of the term in the article's selected theoretical quotations), corresponds to its common association geographically with Western Europe and the two Americas, though particularly the United States and Canada. The very conception of “the West” has been shaped by the European Enlightenment philosophical tradition and consolidated through European colonialism and imperialism. Its historical associations with modernity and civilization have been constructed, as some theorists have argued (Said 1978; Mudimbe 1988) against areas such as Africa or ‘the Orient,’ which have been deemed ‘inferior’ by European frameworks. Thus, “the West” remains an imaginary through which to theorize and challenge an epistemological locus arising out of the workings of European modernity.

⁵ Heike Härting notes that the categories of ruler and ruled are not so neatly drawn between the West and its former colonies. As she argues, the “violent and pornographic rhetoric[s] of power” derived from colonial rule are “shared by the commandment and the ruled” (69). In referencing the acts of sadistic pleasure and corporeal defilement normalized during the Rwandan genocide, particularly as it was inflicted upon (but not limited to) female bodies, she adds that “[w]hile ‘intimate tyranny’ stresses the complicity of the citizen with the rituals and practices of ‘authoritarian’ rule and with the daily reenactment of and investment in the ‘political economy of the [African] body,’ it tends to eroticize and blur the violent and military structures necessary for maintaining the rule of tyranny” (69). The complex contours of intra-African violence in Rwanda thus cannot be understood outside of its larger, violent histories.

This transformation of African body is furthermore facilitated through their ideological othering. The intense focus placed on the imagery of African violence and death in cultural narratives paradoxically contributes to the implicit devaluing of actual black African lives. As Härting argues it is this fetishization of black death that may in turn explain “the decreasing international commitment to putting a stop to genocidal violence in Africa,” the curious lack of concern for the surviving victims of such violence, and thus the lack of real attempts to create lasting, substantial peace in war-torn African areas (62).

In this essay, I offer a close reading of the BBC film, *Shooting Dogs* (2005), for how it may speak to the ways in which Western narratives of African history transform the African body into a sign of abjecthood that in turn reaffirms Eurocentric epistemological frameworks of humanity. Directed by Michael Caton-Jones for the BBC, *Shooting Dogs* (U.S. title: *Beyond the Gates*) is just one of the cinematic presentations of the genocide released “[e]ven years after the end of the Rwandan genocide...for popular audiences, greatly increasing widespread realization of the horror that had taken the lives of more than half a million Tutsi” (Des Forges 41).⁶ Although *Shooting Dogs* was released over ten years ago, it is important to consider the sociopolitical contexts in which this film was released. Films like Terry George’s critically acclaimed *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) brought the Rwandan genocide back into popular media discourse. At the same time, a new humanitarian movement arose out of the United States and Europe (particularly France and the United Kingdom) in response to the Sudanese government’s brutal counterinsurgency against rebel forces beginning in 2003 (Lanz 670-1). The 2004 Save Darfur movement “claim[ed] to have learned from Rwanda,” taking its cue, perhaps, from the U.S. Congress, which mislabelled the Sudanese counterinsurgency as genocide that year (Mamdani 3-4). However, according to Mahmood Mamdani, the humanitarian sentiment behind Save Darfur only reflects a larger colonial tradition of narrativizing African contexts, stripping them of their complexity in order to fit them into European representational frameworks. The simplistic story of ‘light-skinned Arabs’ perpetrating violence upon ‘black Africans’ spurred calls for U.S. intervention at a time when the War on Terror was destroying more lives in Iraq than those lost in Darfur (5). The brutalization of black bodies produced for European and American consumers of the violence a “feel-good [humanitarian] imperative” that, as Mamdani argues, turned Save Darfur “into the humanitarian face of the War on Terror” (6). Many of the popular films depicting the Rwandan Genocide only fertilized this cultural milieu, adding to the prevailing public discourse surrounding Darfur yet more images of what African genocide ‘looks like.’ As I will problematize in this article, reductive depictions of African genocide could work to help shape understandings of *who* feels the consequences of such genocidal horror, which in turn would suggest why these consequences should matter to audiences. Michael Caton-Jones filmed *Shooting Dogs* with the intent of separating it from the Hollywood studio system style of filming that produced *Hotel Rwanda*. The studio system, he argued, could only create an inauthentic portrayal of the genocide by forcing directors to “jazz things up and make [the film] exciting” (British Film Institute n.pag). His claims of authenticity, however, only betray the larger cultural fantasies that shaped his depictions of African death, drawing his film nevertheless into an ideological terrain of humanitarianism ghosted by racist logic.

⁶ See, for example, *Hotel Rwanda* (California: MGM, 2004), *Sometimes in April* (California: Warner Home Video, 2005), *A Sunday in Kigali* (Montreal: Equinoxe Films, 2006), *Shake Hands with the Devil* (Montreal: Seville Pictures, 2007).

Through analyzing this film, then, I hope to show how “the written and visual narrativization of racialized violence” (Härting 61) and the viewing of African bodies through the lens of colonial fantasy reinforces a larger, cultural inability to understand the complexity of Africa’s social, economic and political realities. That these frameworks have persisted today only reveals the power of such fantasies.⁷ Humanitarian fetishizing of African deaths de-links the dead African body not only from today’s increasingly neoliberal global structure, but also from colonial histories of racial terror. This simplification in turn reinforces the believed necessity of humanitarianism while validating the “restructuring of global security measures and military spending, frequently articulated in the UN’s new and controversial politics of global responsibility and humanitarian intervention” (Härting 62). Indeed, not only does the discursive divorcing of humanitarianism from politics help sustain the unequal economic and political relations that produce the conditions of genocide, but the increased emphasis on military intervention may lead to more violence inflicted upon African bodies, thus underscoring “the meaning of Black bodies both here and there, historically and in the present” (Razack 4).

Markets of Black Death: Contextualizing the ‘Logic’ of Black Flesh as Commodity

I will contextualize the production and consumption of *Shooting Dogs* through the rubrics of the consumption of black bodies particularly because of how the film’s narrative, casting and directorial choices align with Eurocentric logics that already presuppose the animalization of black flesh as common sense. In preparation for my analysis of the film, I explore here a central question: in what ways do cinematic practices of representing black bodies run parallel to (and indeed draw from) a European discursive apparatus that already reduces black life to black flesh?

As Manthia Diawara explains, despite the diverse demographics that can participate as movie consumers, most mainstream American and European films operate under the assumption that the audience is white (236). Thus, these films use narrative tropes and filmic techniques, including *mise-en-scene*, cinematography, and even lighting to highlight and privilege whiteness (89-103). As such, “Blacks [in such films] exist primarily for White spectators whose comfort and understanding the films must seek” (236). The African Adventure film genre, which was prevalent during the early to mid-twentieth century, provides an example of this logic at work. That African Adventure films could even become a genre points to their success, since the “development of a specific genre or ‘film cycle’ requires a consistently positive audience response to its style and content, its associated stars, directors, plots, props and settings” (Mercer and Shingler 5). But despite their African settings, these films positioned African characters as “background ‘props’ who [were] little more than geographic markers to remind the spectator that the film is set in Africa” (Ukadike 32). At the same time, these films prioritized their white protagonists who ventured into Africa, bravely contending with the continent’s ‘dark threats.’ In some cases, the white protagonists, such as

⁷ One is reminded of the Stop Kony movement of 2012, in response to a short film produced by humanitarian organization Invisible Children, which called for the indictment of cult and military leader Joseph Kony for his atrocities in Uganda. More recently, the Bring Back Our Girls Movement of 2014 began after the kidnappings of Nigerian school girls by terrorist organization Boko Haram. While both humanitarian movements began as a response to violence against Africans (perpetrated by other Africans), both failed to hold a sustained response or to yield complex solutions to the violence.

those in *Sanders of the River* (1935), were framed as protectors of “‘good’ (loyal), childlike Africans,” protecting them “from other ‘bad’ (disloyal) Africans” (Thackway 33). In these films, the white figures were given the full spectrum of human emotion and depth. The African characters, however, oscillated between the poles of good and bad, savage and docile, and yet regardless of where they stood on this reductive scale, they were always framed as primitive. The sub-humanity of the African characters further reinforced the humanity and civility of the white protagonists (Diawara 236).

Contemporary films on the subject of African genocide lend themselves to this schema. *Hotel Rwanda* has been cited by Härting in this regard, particularly because of the way its narrative and technical construction speaks to a particular hegemonic sensibility of whiteness that in turn reinforces this sensibility (63-5). However, *Shooting Dogs* differs from *Hotel Rwanda* in an interesting way: in *Shooting Dogs*, the main protagonists are white. What does it mean, then, for the target audience to be invited to read the film from this epistemological positioning? In both *Hotel Rwanda* and *Shooting Dogs*, the spectacle of black death is a key visual component, just as it has been in many mainstream depictions of the Rwandan Genocide. South African media lecturer Tendai Chari noted American media’s consistent use of nightmarish imagery in their reports of the genocide as he analyzed one hundred and seventy *New York Times* articles obtained from April 1st, 1994 (five days before the onset of the Rwandan massacre) to December 31st, 1994. The headlines he provides as evidence in his research – “Anarchy rules Rwanda’s capital and drunken soldiers roam city,” “The nightmare in Central Africa,” and “The massacres in Rwanda: hope is also a victim” – easily invoke the Conradian trope of the dark and senseless African continent, a place in which even hope can be a victim (Chari 341-2).

I argue that such framing of Africans is only part of a larger legacy of the consumption of black bodies. As the journal headlines strip away the subjectivity of the Rwandans and erase the historical, sociopolitical context behind the genocide, they reduces the lives and contexts of black Africans to an easily consumable form. It is a kind of objectification that over-determines the African body with meaning while simultaneously stripping it down to a sign, the use-value of which becomes part of a Western political economy of whiteness. As Mamdani writes, “the peculiar characteristic” of the journalistic writing recounting the genocide:

is to write a pornography of violence. As in pornography, the nakedness is of others, not us. The exposure of the other goes alongside the unstated claim that we are not like them. It is a pornography where senseless violence is a feature of other people’s cultures: where they are violent, but we are pacific, and where a focus on their debasedness easily turns into another way of celebrating and confirming out exalted status. (“Political Violence” 142)

The reduction of the black body to use value in this sense is an important lens through which to consider American and European mainstream filmic depictions of the Rwandan Genocide. As the audience watches a spectacle of black violence on screen, they consume messages about black animality and white civility. However, the black body must be reduced to flesh in order for this process to occur and profit to be made. Important to the analysis of such films, thus, is the very notion of the black body’s trade value within American symbolic

and money economies. Theories of race and biopolitics take seriously the ways in which discursive classifications of bodies have shaped dominant Western perceptions of what and who has value within the framework of European modernity (Giroux 2006; Goldberg 2008). Thus they can complicate one's understanding of practices of consumption and commodification.

The very concepts of consumption, commodification and modes of profit-making derive from a Western philosophical tradition, which presupposed that advancement is made possible through the domination of other peoples. As V.Y Mudimbe states, it is during the Enlightenment period that the economic project of imperialism, as well as the anthropological work of social scientists "took shape, allowing the reification of the 'primitive'" (17). Against the backdrop of Darwinian notions of evolution, contest and destiny emerged theories of capitalism that "comment[ed] on two main and complementary paradigms. These are the inherent superiority of the white race, and, as already made explicit in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, the necessity for European economies and structures to expand to 'virgin areas' of the world" (17). This idea became the basis of colonial expansion, in which colonized lands were seen as valuable insofar as they provided resources to be extracted. As Mudimbe makes clear, racial classifications and racialized biopolitical power always belied the very economic system Karl Marx critiqued, imagining African bodies as part of the resources to be extracted and exchanged along with their labour. As Mbembe writes, "it was through the slave trade and colonialism that Africans came face to face with the *opaque and murky domain of power*" (Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* 14, emphasis original). This domain, Mbembe continues, is "inhabited by obscure drives that everywhere and always makes [sic] animality and bestiality its essential components, plunging human beings into a never-ending process of brutalization" (14). Black bodies were rounded up, chained and forced onto slave ships to endure the Middle Passage, the journey from the West Coast of Africa to the shores of the Americas, though many did not survive (hooks 187). Black bodies were subsequently reduced to labouring machinery, forced to "serve the interests of a system that ha[d] no intention of fostering and promoting the social and political growth of black people" (84).

Mbembe, in his article "Necropolitics," discusses the social reality of the slave. As he writes, the "very structure of the plantation system and its aftermath manifests the emblematic and paradoxical figure of the state of exception" (22). As stated earlier, not only is the slave's labour power a commodity. The slave also comes with a price, bought and sold on the market via the process of monetary exchange. However, whereas Marx's proletariat worker exchanges his labour for wages, the slave, being excluded from civil rights, human ethnics and the very definition of humanity, can afford no such privilege. As Mbembe writes, this constitutes the slave's social death, which he describes as the "expulsion from humanity altogether" (22). The slave thus becomes a liminal figure, for although slaves are outside of society, their exclusion still forms the bedrock of society itself.

Discursive strategies both legitimized and were in turn informed by the reduction of the black body to machinery that could be bought and sold. As bell hooks asserts, black slaves had to hide their own subjectivities in order to escape punishment from their white slave masters who actively denied their humanity. "[B]lack people," she writes, "learned to appear before whites as though they were zombies, cultivating the habit of casting the gaze downward so as not to appear uppity. To look directly was an assertion of subjectivity,

equality. Safety resided in the pretense of invisibility” (168). Not only were these black individuals stripped of their subjectivity, but during the period of colonialism and slavery, attempting to display their subjectivity and thus humanity could have led to severe brutalization and even death.

This in turn reinforced their objectification in discursive paradigms. Black bodies came to be desired for their labouring capabilities, and thus their colonial representations as ‘strong,’ ‘primitive’ and ‘animalistic’ became reified and reinforced in representations of blackness in popular culture (34). Although, as bell hooks argues, this subjected black bodies to a white erotic gaze, it also contributed to their characterization as violent and threatening (89). Such representations only continued to justify the violence enacted upon them.

Upon analyzing Western films that depict intra-African violence and black suffering, it is important to consider that experiences of intra-African violence, and the black body itself, are offered up as sellable properties for consumption by white viewers. Through watching the film, viewers become ‘witnesses’ of sorts, but only to a fantasy of the violence that took place during the Rwandan Genocide. The Western target consumer can consequently feel the pity and perhaps guilt that comes from being comparatively privileged. However, as Sontag reminds us, “moral indignation, like compassion, cannot dictate a course of action” (102). Feeling sympathy for the victims of the violence, as well as feeling outrage over their victimization, does not guarantee a humanitarian response directed towards helping them. Especially when one considers the reductive ways in which intra-African strife is often staged, one can certainly see how the emotional response such narratives generate can act as a kind of predictable pathos that becomes an end to itself. As I will show through an analysis of Michael Caton-Jones’ *Shooting Dogs*, the suffering black body becomes a commodity that constructs white subjectivity via fantasy. The fetishization of violence and death experienced by the black characters on screen thus becomes useful to the European episteme by reaffirming the trauma and thus humanity of the *white* characters. This reaffirmation of white humanity then works to entrench for the target viewer the civility of whiteness.

Markets for White Dreams: Reading *Shooting Dogs*

Director Michael Caton-Jones’ narrative and directional choices for *Shooting Dogs* can be construed as attempts to reinforce the viewer’s impression of the film’s historical veracity. The first frame of the film claims: “This film is based on real events and was made at the locations depicted.” Following this, he constructs the narrative in such a way that it links up as much as possible to actual historical events. For example, he provides a timeframe throughout the film (April 6th, April 7th, etc.) to associate his narrative, despite its fictional elements, with real events. He also makes use of exposition to support this implication. An example of this is when the French UN soldier Captained Charles Delon (Dominique Horwitz) enters the school where many of the local Rwandans are beginning to gather while Christopher (John Hurt), a priest, sets up for mass. At that time, Charles informs Christopher of the recent coup by Hutu extremist. Then, in the following scene, he tells a group of Europeans that he and his troops are in full contact with their embassies and that evacuation protocols, including the deployment of French reinforcements, have begun. Meanwhile, a Tutsi schoolgirl, Marie (Clare-Hope Ashitey), discusses the implications of this with the teacher

Joe (Hugh Dancy), who assures her that everything will be okay. In these scenes, historical events are blended with the fictional element of character interaction.

Despite the fact that *Shooting Dogs* is a BBC-produced film with actors, characters and a script, the film positions itself as having a certain level of documentary-like authenticity right up to the final sequence, in which Joe and Marie sit together outside a church in Europe. The following words, included at the bottom of the screen in this sequence, serve to remind the audience of the film's connection to history: "On April 11th 1994 over 2500 Rwandans abandoned by the UN at the École Technique Officielle were murdered by extremist militias." At the end of the credits, the film makes sure the audience knows that actual survivors of the Genocide were involved in the making of the film as extras or as part of the production crew.

The film's overtures to authenticity are strategic. They work to naturalize the directional decisions and representational politics that went into the production of the narrative, encouraging audiences to see the film screen as merely a window through which to witness the 'reality' of the Genocide. The film's depiction of violence, however, further supports supposed 'authenticity' of the film by reinforcing dominant racialized discourses already circulating about Africa.

One example of how the film depicts the violence is a scene in which Joe, standing outside the school at night, is approached by a Tutsi woman who tries to ask him for some kind of help. Because these two characters cannot communicate on account of not being able to understand each other's language, Joe tells her to talk to Francois (David Gyasi), his Hutu friend. She suddenly falls silent. When Francois explains that she does not trust him because of their different ethnic identities, Joe expresses bewilderment. Francois tells Joe, "you don't understand" and Joe responds by demanding, "Well make me understand." Afterwards, when Francois elaborates upon these ethnic tensions, Joe responds with further disbelief and replies that the whole notion of their ethnic strife is "shit."

None of this context makes any sense to Joe. The film thus suggests that the problem is simply one of silly tribal conflicts, which chimes with how this conflict was presented in Western media (Chari 341-2). In line with Enlightenment conceptions of whiteness, Joe is presented as being more rational and civilized than his Rwandan counterparts on account of not seeing 'what the big deal is.'⁸ Because he is supposedly a true advocate of social equality (and implicitly a representative of European civility, compassion and sense), Joe cannot understand the explanations he is offered; indeed, his 'rational' mind constantly questions the history presented to him, and he is ultimately unsatisfied with the supposedly irrational answers he is given. By reducing the reasons for the genocidal violence to ethnic hatred and African irrationality, the film presents a dehistoricized, primordialist narrative of the Rwandan Genocide, one that denies the links that must be made to colonial violence and the "the

⁸ This is echoed by Christopher in a scene in which he speaks with Charles Delon. When the French soldier makes mention of the Tutsi, Christopher replies, rather self-righteously, "Around here we just call them Rwandans." As such, he paradoxically (though most likely unknowingly) invoking the issue of the Hutu and the Tutsi's forced ethnic division while at the same time (and more prominently) denying the history of this division as well as European involvement in it.

politics of racial purity and extermination” that characterized imperialism (Härting 69).⁹ It denies the fact that, as Härting states, the genocidal violence in Rwanda needs to be recontextualized:

In the historical present of German colonial and genocidal violence, insofar as German colonialism played an important role in the racialization of Rwandan society and, more generally, engineered the first organized genocide of the twentieth century—the physical and political genocide of the Nama and Herero of today’s Namibia. Moreover, it was in the aftermath of this genocide that Eugene Fischer travelled to German South-West Africa (Namibia) and conducted research...to devise his treatise on human hereditary theory and racial hygiene, which helped legitimize and make thinkable the Holocaust” (74).

The film’s portrayal of ‘what happened’ is therefore complicit within a long history of racial fantasies, but its complicity may enable its reading as authentic by those members of the audience who most readily accept these fantasies. The framing of the entire film as being immersed in the real—real events, real locations and real survivors—can obscure the film’s representational politics. This naturalizes both the narrative and its depiction of the Rwandans as lacking subjectivity and humanity, giving the viewer a “sense of mastery over the image of the African other” (Härting 74).

The politics of authenticity at play in the film can also naturalize the white characters’ roles in the story. This subsequently naturalizes the larger myth that posits white figures as the focus of narratives of African strife. The narrative of *Shooting Dogs* certainly reinforces this notion. Despite the director’s desire to authentically tell Rwanda’s stories, right from the beginning of the film, it becomes clear that the film is not about Rwandans at all. It is really the story of Christopher and Joe, the white Catholic Europeans who struggle with the awful burden of the duties that come with being white missionaries. Following peacekeeping narrative traditions, the film “depict[s] a genocide whose victims are first and foremost the peacekeepers who witness it” (Razack 22). It is the story of humanitarians who either fulfill or fail in their ‘obligation’ to protect. Not only Christopher and Joe, but each of the white characters with speaking roles, particularly Charles Delon, can be placed somewhere on the humanitarian scale. The film makes it clear that whether or not these characters have failed in their duties as protectors, their primary foe is ultimately the horror of African violence, which is stripped of history and political context in a way that reconstructs Rwanda as a ‘wilderness of horror.’ Razack describes the consequences of depicting the Rwandan genocide in this way, stating that such cultural narratives prioritize the trauma of the white protagonists: “[i]t is their pain and not the Rwandans’ that we are invited to listen to, and it is injustice directed against them that we must consider” (22).

These representational politics play out from the very beginning of the film. The first scenes of the film delineate for the audience the figures with whom they are supposed to identify. After the opening textual narration set against a black screen begins the film’s opening sequence, which shows the feet of a nameless young girl (later confirmed to be

⁹ This is also evidenced by the film’s use of a simple, stable chronology (as I have mentioned earlier), which does not attempt to fill in the dense historical context underlying these few days.

Marie) running to a nondescript place. This is followed by the shot of a group of Rwandans dancing, singing and cheering in the background while in the foreground, European soldiers arrive in vans. Striking here is the film's reluctance to focus on any unfragmented image of a Rwandan, choosing instead to section Marie and hide her face while, in the next shot, showing numerous Rwandans who all blend together into one undifferentiated mass. Also worth noting is the Rwandans' lack of speech. The first voices heard in the film are the Rwandans in these shots: Marie panting and the Rwandans singing. And yet the first voice given actual speech is Joe's when he, while playing with the school children, acts as a sports commentator narrating the end of Marie's run. Even though the dancing Rwandans presumably are vocalizing words in their song—words that many viewers may not be able to understand—the words are rendered inaudible by the ominous, non-diegetic singing that accompanies them. Long distance shots and a denial of speech are two traditional techniques used to deprive particular characters, especially non-white groups, of individualization (Wiegman 164). These cinematic techniques make it possible for Joe, whose face is the first seen up close and unobscured, to be read as a protagonist, as important, and as fully human.

Because Joe, unlike many of the Rwandans in the film, is an actual character with (some) dimension, he has distinguishable attributes that viewers can discern through his words and actions. By showing him playing with school children, the film tells us that he is very much the ingénue, a 'wide-eyed' idealist. This is periodically reinforced in the film's beginning scenes, particularly one in which he calls his mother on the side of the road and enthusiastically holds up the phone to the street so that she can hear what he calls, "the sounds of a rush hour in Kigali." Portraying him as innocent also sets up Joe's narrative to be similar to the cultural narrative of the white figure who becomes traumatized by the discursively 'meaningless' violence to come.

The scene in which he calls his mother foreshadows this narrative trajectory, for although Joe's short conversation with his mother could be read as light and humorous, it also seems to do the work of conveying to the audience what Kigali 'is'—or rather how they should understand Kigali. First, Joe tells his mother that he sent her a package last week and therefore it should get to her by "next year or something," thus implicitly insulting Rwanda's infrastructure and reinforcing the target audience's sense of the country's inferiority. Then he shoos away a child vendor, telling his mother, slightly embarrassed, "Oh sorry that was just...uh...an intestine seller." One wonders why Joe felt the need to even mention that the child was selling intestines in particular, or why he seemed to pause before mentioning it, as though there were something inherently pathological about it. He also refrains from mentioning what kind of intestines they are; is he selling the intestines of animals that people can purchase, cook and eat, or is he selling human intestines as part of the black market? And if he is selling human intestines, has he been forced into this role by factors beyond his control or is he doing so willingly? It is important not to dismiss these questions as semantics, for a closer look at Joe's choice of words and demeanor reveals that while he revels in the exotic otherness of Kigali, the script and direction seem to suggest that this decontextualized otherness is both strange and slightly 'off.' This moment subtly makes the audience aware, from the onset, of the darkness seemingly inherent in Rwanda—and maybe Africa itself. In doing so, the stage is set for the traumatic events that will eventually unfold in the film.

One such traumatic event is a scene in which Joe witnesses the death of a nameless Tutsi man on the road while he is with a group of BBC reporters. It is also, importantly, the first scene that presents Joe fully as a traumatized figure. As Georges Bataille has stated, “[f]or man [sic] to reveal himself in the end, he has to die, but he will have to do so while alive—by looking at himself ceasing to exist” (Bataille qtd. in Mbembe 38). In his work on necropolitics, Mbembe follows up this notion by stating that “the human subject has to be fully alive at the very moment of dying, to be aware of his or her death, to live with the impression of actually dying. Death itself must become awareness of the self at the very time that it does away with the conscious being” (38). This suggests that as the human subject facing death goes through this process, the process itself reinforces him or her as a subject. The road block scene is the moment of the Tutsi man’s death and yet the film does not seem at all concerned with his subjectivity. Even while the film presents close-up shots of the Tutsi man, these shots are continually undercut with shots of Joe, who is in less danger of being killed by the extremists, so as to imply that the true focus here is the effect the Tutsi man’s death has on the white protagonist. The horror the Tutsi man faces is reflected in Joe’s expression. When the man is eventually taken off the road and killed, the camera remains at a distance, his body obscured by bushes. While this could be seen as a tactic to avoid sensationalizing his death, it is also important to note that while he is being killed, the audience is given close up shots of Joe’s reactions. The filmmaker could have chosen other directional strategies that avoid sensationalism but at the same time reveal the complexities of the emotions, thoughts and memories the Tutsi man could have been experiencing while facing his death. This would have ultimately reinforced his subjectivity and humanity.

It is important to note that at this moment, Joe cannot speak. During traumatic events, victims can experience “speechless terror” (Bloom 6). Simply the act of witnessing the event might be enough to trigger such a response, but as Elaine Scarry has theorized, the relationship between speech and trauma takes on an even greater significance when the victim’s traumatic experience stems from bearing extreme physical violence. “Physical pain,” explains Scarry, “is not only itself resistant to language but also actively destroys language, deconstructing it into the pre-language of cries and groans. To hear those cries is to witness the shattering of language” (172). Torturing prisoners, for example, is a strategic act in which violence is inflicted in order to destroy the subjectivity of the victim.¹⁰ And yet the act of shattering the self through violence can also illuminate the victim’s humanity in a sense—that there is a self to be shattered. Thus, just as with viewing photos of torture, witnessing the victim’s pain might signal to the witness that there is “something called ‘humanity’” at stake (Butler 78). However, the audience, who act as witnesses, are never given the chance to engage with the Tutsi man’s humanity because the film instead focuses on Joe’s “speechless terror.”

There are instances throughout the film in which Joe becomes the focus of the pain and violence experienced by Rwandans. One example comes later in the film in a scene that shows Joe witnessing the death of a Tutsi woman, Edda (Susan Nalwoga), and her newborn child. During the scene, Edda’s precarious situation becomes clear as she carries an infant while hiding in a grassy field while Hutu extremists look for Tutsi to kill. Edda remains silent in the scene and relegated at a distance. The positioning of the camera and the mise-en-scene

¹⁰ For more on effects of torture on the speaking subject, see: Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*.

indicate that she is the object of someone else's gaze—namely, Joe's. The camera privileges Joe's subjectivity, showing his distress as he watches helplessly how she is discovered and murdered. The specific choices made in the writing and direction transfers the violence she and her child experience onto Joe's face, inscribed onto his body and made legible to the audience through his expression of speechless grief and horror.

Even after the violence has occurred, Joe often finds himself speechless as a result, as when he and the BBC news reporters drive away from the roadblock directly following the Tutsi man's death. Trauma victims, as many have theorized, may have trouble speaking to their experiences when faced with the task of remembering (Gilmore 6; Wiesel 23-35). Speechlessness is a nearly universally recognizable attribute of those who have experienced a traumatic event and so the depiction of Joe in the van, silent while the BBC news reporters laugh next to him, clearly signals to the audience that in lieu of the Tutsi man's death, *he* is the trauma victim—and indeed it is implied that the BBC news reporters are implicated only in that they failed to notice how Joe has been affected by the violence, the aftermath of which lingers in his expression.

These violent scenes are thus less about the true victims of the violence than about revealing to the audience the brutality of the Rwandans on one hand, and Joe's resultant trauma and thus humanity on the other. And when Joe eventually decides to leave Rwanda to save himself, despite the extreme guilt he is shown to feel while being confronted by Marie in the final scene (and indeed, when Marie asks him "why did you leave us?" the film suggests that he *should* feel guilty), the audience is invited to understand his decision and sympathize with his plight. Joe's narrative trajectory, after all, follows the Western cultural narrative of a "First World overwhelmed by the evil of the Third World" (Razack 22). In this framework, he is posited as the good white man surrounded by a multitude of threatening dark-skinned Others. Tom Engelhardt refers to this as the encirclement trope, a cinematic technique used in Western films like *Stage Coach* (1939) to force an empathetic, subjective connection between the audience and the white protagonists. This identification is encouraged by placing the white body at the centre of a large group of racialized bodies whose numbers strip them of subjectivity. In Westerns, this framing strategy in turn enables the construction of non-whites as threatening as they 'encircle' the white protagonists (Shohat and Stam 119-20). Likewise, spectators of *Shooting Dogs* are invited to place themselves in the same category of identity as the white protagonists whose subjectivities are privileged.

Though I have focused this argument largely on Joe, other white characters are positioned in a similar manner. Following Western mainstream cinematic traditions, the script and direction give Christopher, Charles and even BBC News Reporter Rachel (Nicola Walker) much more emotional range and depth than their Rwandan counterparts. Rachel is featured in a scene in which she explains to Joe that her cynical disposition toward Rwanda is only because of past suffering and emotional turmoil (caused by the Rwandans themselves). In contrast to the depiction of the deaths of Rwandan characters like Edda, when Hutu extremists eventually murder Christopher, the camera zooms in on his face and lingers there so that the audience can see the full range of emotion displayed in his expression. Even Charles, a UN soldier who the film seems to criticize at times for his (and by extension the UN's) inability to adequately intervene in the turmoil, is given an important scene through which the audience can understand his plight. In a scene that depicts Jones' version of the slaughter that occurred

at Nyanza-Rebero, Marie's father begs Charles to shoot him, because he would rather have a quick death than face a slow and painful one at the end of a Hutu extremist's machete. However, while this scene shows the father in a gut-wrenching, impossible situation, the focus is on Charles' emotional turmoil, as well as his eventual grief and guilt at deciding not to grant Marie's father's request. Positioning the audience to sympathize with the white characters' humanity works to reaffirm *their* humanity. As stated earlier, the ensuing moral catharsis can serve as a satisfying response to the horrifying violence witnessed, in turn discouraging the viewer from seeking thoughtful, political solutions to such political conflicts.

The representational politics and cinematic techniques of the film relegate the Rwandans (whose story the director presumably set out to tell) to what Giorgio Agamben calls 'bare life,' which refers to the life that can be killed with impunity, though not sacrificed (Mbembe, "Necropolitics" 12). This permits their fictional and discursive social death. Recall that one's social death is tantamount to his or her complete exclusion from civil rights, human ethics and humanity all together. Similar to the slave who is excluded from social and political life, Africa's social death requires the reduction of African bodies to 'bare life' whether in fiction or in reality. But just as the African's social death "becomes a 'necessity' for the formation of the rational, compassionate human body"—the compassionate human (white) bodies inside and outside the film— so too is it needed to form the bedrock of humanitarian projects, narratives of white civility and the very structures of global order (Härting 72-3). The bodies of Edda, her child, the Tutsi man and countless other Rwandans in the film become "martyred flesh," which, as Härting states, "presupposes [their] prior symbolic animalization" while also "[repeating] earlier discourses of who counts as a human being" (66-73).¹¹ Along this line of reasoning, the film itself, through the "production of Africa's social and political death," becomes an exercise in biopower (73). Its representational politics normalizes the notion that the Rwandans are disposable. This in turn risks transforming the Rwandans of the film, the actual victims of the genocide, and perhaps by extension other Africans currently endangered by war, into humanitarian commodities that inspire shallow and depoliticized humanitarian responses.

This is what makes the inclusion of Rwandans in the production of the film all the more unsettling. Judging from his interview with the British Film Institute, it seems as though Michael Caton-Jones believed that their inclusion would be politically progressive. As he stated, part of his job as a director was to be a conduit of their stories, which meant "actually going to the place, hiring people and letting them tell you how it was. And whether you liked what they were saying or not, to use that" (*The British Film Institute*, n.pag). He might have even believed that it could potentially allow some kind of catharsis for the Rwandans. At first glance this may seem like a legitimate assumption; according to Patricia Zimmerman, for trauma victims, documentaries can potentially be "'productive, performative acts enabling victims to survive'" (Zimmerman qtd. in Razack 21). *Shooting Dogs*, however, is not a documentary, nor are its documentary-like elements designed to make it possible for these

¹¹ Though Marie seems to be given somewhat of a more individualized character than the other Rwandans, the film seems to suggest that her escape from the genocide is due to her exceptionalism: namely, her diligence in athletic training. As Marie herself later admits, she only ran as far as she did because she heard Joe's voice in her head, "talking and talking like [he] wouldn't shut up," thus allowing Joe, in some way, to fulfill his role as a white humanitarian and savior. Indeed, despite having a small narrative arc, she is not given an emotional one, existing solely as a cipher through which audiences can understand Joe.

Rwandan extras to occupy a position in which they can “move beyond their pain by speaking out and rejecting ‘victimization, isolation, individualism, and silence’”(21). The film instead asks the Rwandan extras to step into roles in which they are objects, to be figuratively and literally dead bodies. And when they appear again at the end of the film, smiling, still and silent in the pictures displayed in the ending credits, their subjectivities are reduced to two-line descriptive captions detailing their names and who they might have lost during the genocide.

It could be that the mainstream cinematic system is simply not well suited to conveying the story of African genocide in a way that does not flatten and spectacularize it; both are too tangled in problematic mythological frameworks. However, these films’ use of the black body in service of the construction and reaffirmation of white representational structures only legitimizes a larger political economy in which black bodies have historically been reduced, objectified, commodified and terrorized. Ethical engagement with the lived realities of vulnerable peoples across the globe requires more than just voyeuristic consumption; it involves a self-reflexive understanding of the historical and contemporary processes that have shaped them, processes viewers and filmmakers alike are inextricably implicated in. To deny the context through which such violence was made possible is to deny the centrality of the white subjectivity to the production and entronement of those fantasies that reduce the black body to usable flesh.

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